

State of the Game

Foreword

Created by the 2025 Football Governance Act, the Independent Football Regulator represents the most significant reform ever to English football governance.



IFR Chair
David Kogan OBE



Chief Executive
Richard Monks

Our mission is to safeguard the long-term sustainability of the English men's game by promoting financially sound clubs in the interests of their fans and the communities they serve.

Since our establishment in the autumn of 2025, the IFR has been laying the foundations for the first regulator in world football - a team of dedicated supervisors whose job it is to forge close relationships with the 116 clubs we oversee.

It is through this regime of club licensing and supervision that we will be able to spot and solve problems before they become a full-blown financial crisis.

But the next few months mark a major gear change for the IFR and the State of the Game Report represents a critical step on the road to building a more sustainable future for a sport which is so fundamental to the social fabric of this country.

This is the most comprehensive financial analysis of the English football industry ever undertaken: a painstaking account of the contradictions which underpin our national game.

It will demonstrate how it is possible for English club football to simultaneously be the richest, best and most deeply competitive in the world while also standing on the edge of financial disaster.

Last season served as another reminder of the extraordinary drama which has driven a 2,100% increase in average club revenues across the top four divisions of English men's football between 1992 and 2025.

Arsenal clinched their first Premier League title for 22 years, Hull City squeezed into the Championship play offs on the last day of the season before going on to win the final and a place in the top flight, while the battle for the top spot in the National League went down to a last day shoot-out between York City and Rochdale.

No other country boasts such depth of competition and passionate engagement right through the pyramid.

It is this engagement that has led to record attendances at all levels of the game and a consistent increase in commercial, matchday and media rights revenues.

Investors from around the world are queuing up to be part of this international success story with 78 transactions worth more than £7 billion in the past five years. It is our job as the regulator to ensure English football continues to grow, attract investment and maintain its leading position in the global market. And yet what this comprehensive report reveals is an underlying fragility: a game loaded with risk that can no longer be ignored. Nearly every chapter of this report provides further evidence of the dangers English football is facing. Growing revenues have not been shared in a proportionate way, creating cliff edges between and within leagues. The highest earning Premier League club now earns 605 times the revenue of the lowest earning National League club. But it is not necessarily the increase in revenues which has created the issues. It is how the money is distributed and spent. The existing system of parachute payments contributes to the incentives for Championship clubs to overspend, driving up wage inflation and placing even greater risks on those teams chasing the dream of a place in the Premier League. Further down, the picture is even more worrying with clubs in League One and League Two spending ever more money to try and keep up. The very competitiveness which has made English football such an economic powerhouse is also the driver of the surge in player-related costs which leaves the vast majority of clubs unprofitable. Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, average player wage costs grew by 33% in the Premier League, 32% in the Championship, 71% in League One and 63% in League Two. But it's not just player-related costs. This report found that 17 clubs across the EFL and National League incurred non-player operational costs exceeding revenues. This means these clubs would be loss-making even if their players played for free. Faced with such cost pressures, 94% of clubs in the top five English leagues made losses in 2025/26.	

This has left nearly all clubs reliant on owner injections or debt to be able to continue trading.

Around two thirds of clubs reported they would not be able to survive for more than 90 days without new injections of owner funding. More than a quarter said they would not be able to see out the month.

60% of EFL and National League clubs have liabilities that exceed the book value of their assets meaning they are technically insolvent.

This is just a snapshot of the analysis and evidence we have compiled for this report. The conclusion is clear: we can't afford to waste any more time failing to address the levels of financial risk which have become embedded in English football.

At the heart of the IFR's remit is a commitment to protect clubs as prized social and cultural assets. When a club is taken to the brink of collapse as Sheffield Wednesday, Derby and Wigan were in recent times, it affects not just the team and their supporters but the whole community and the local economy.

In the last few months, the IFR has worked with the Premier League and EFL as they seek a new way forward to address some of these issues through a new revenue distribution arrangement.

We have always stressed that it would be better if football came to its own agreement which would go some of the way to addressing the issues identified in this report.

If football can't find a solution we will consider our next steps and will not hesitate to use all the powers at our disposal to bring about lasting change.

The evidence in this report is as clear, detailed and objective as possible. It is the start of a long-term process to present the reality of the game that is so important to millions of people in England and around the world.

The IFR looks forward to achieving our statutory objective of making clubs and the whole pyramid more sustainable. By doing so the future will remain bright and football will continue its incredible success for all its stakeholders. We look forward to the discussion that will follow this report.

David Kogan OBE, Chair
Richard Monks, CEO

The Independent Football Regulator

Introduction and structure of the report

The Independent Football Regulator (IFR) was created by the Football Governance Act 2025 (Act) to promote the long-term sustainability of 116 clubs across the top five tiers of the English men's football pyramid (referred to from hereon as 'English football' for brevity), while protecting and promoting the success and appeal of the game.

To support that mission, we are required to produce this ‘State of the Game’ report. The report is intended to provide transparency and an evidence-based, objective assessment of the issues facing the game for the benefit of all stakeholders throughout the pyramid.¹ The analysis in this report is underpinned by:

- Club financial data, club ownership and transaction data and league financial information obtained using our statutory information gathering powers
 - Due to data availability, we have analysed detailed financial information of Premier League and EFL clubs between 2021/22 and 2025/26
 - 2025/26 data is based on a mix of actual and forecast data submitted by clubs to their competition organiser²
 - Detailed information on National League clubs was only available for 2025/26
- Extensive engagement with competition organisers, football clubs, academics and industry experts to build an understanding of the industry and the key trends and challenges
- Fan surveys, engagement with supporter groups and interviews with owners and investors across the pyramid
- Targeted external research into debt and investment in football
- We have also received and taken into account submissions from a range of stakeholders following consultation on the report’s terms of reference

Wherever possible, this report uses data from clubs in all five leagues under the IFR remit. Given availability of data, some analysis is limited to Premier League and EFL clubs. These distinctions are made clear throughout the report.

This is the draft State of the Game Report. **We are consulting on this draft, with comments due to the IFR by 8 December 2026.**

Structure of the report

Throughout this report, we focus on our objectives and requirements under the Act and on key factors that underpin the success of the English game, the main economic drivers of behaviour, risks to the IFR’s statutory objectives and emerging trends.

We first provide **an executive summary** of the report’s key findings. Then, we present clear **future actions** for the IFR.

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In Section 4 of the report, we identify and assess potential systemic risks and structural issues in English football. This includes:

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Annexes

The report is accompanied by eleven annexes (Annexes A-K), which provide supporting evidence and analysis:

- Annex A - Financial information
- Annex B - Sporting competition
- Annex C - Revenue
- Annex D - Players and agents
- Annex E - Player spending and sporting success
- Annex F - Stadia and non-player operating costs
- Annex G - Profitability and external financing
- Annex H - Debt
- Annex I - Financial distress
- Annex J - Assessment of distributions
- Annex K - Simulations analysis

In addition, we have also published the following external research commissioned by the IFR

- Market research of football fans conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the IFR
- Review of academic literature on sporting success and spending prepared by Oxera Consulting on behalf of the IFR

Glossary

English football:

For the purposes of this report, English football refers to the top five tiers of English men's football, which corresponds to the IFR's regulatory remit. This also includes a number of Welsh clubs.

Big six:

The six Premier League clubs that currently earn significantly higher matchday and commercial revenues than other clubs - Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur. These clubs typically qualify regularly for UEFA competitions and therefore earn greater broadcast revenues. Given their size and different business models, we often analyse them separately in this report.

Parachute clubs:

Clubs relegated from the Premier League to the Championship that receive 'parachute payments'. These payments give them substantially higher revenues than most other Championship clubs. We often analyse them separately throughout this report.

Financial cliff-edge:

A significant difference in the revenues earned by clubs within and between leagues.

Revenues:

Unless otherwise stated, revenue figures presented for groups of clubs are averages per club.

Amortisation:

Player registrations are recorded as an intangible asset on a club's balance sheet. Because player registrations are acquired for a specified period, clubs record an annual amortisation expense. This is reflected in both the balance sheet and the income statement. For example, if a club signs a player for £30 million on a three-year contract, the annual amortisation expense would be £10 million (£30 million divided by three years).

EBITDA (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation):

Measures a club's underlying cash-generating performance before non-cash accounting changes, player trading and financing costs.

EBIT (earnings before interest and tax):

Deducts depreciation and amortisation, including player amortisation, from EBITDA, providing a measure of profitability after accounting for changes in long-term assets and player investments.

Profit before Tax

Starts with EBIT and deducts financing costs. It also includes other non-operating items such as profits or losses on player sales, other asset sales and exceptional items.

Liquidity:

Whether clubs can meet their short-term obligations and continue their day-to-day operations

Solvency:

Whether clubs can meet their medium- and long-term obligations.

Transfer payables, transfer receivables and net transfer debt:

Transfer fees are often paid in instalments over several years rather than upfront. Unpaid instalments owed to other clubs are recorded as transfer payables, while amounts due from player sales are recorded as transfer receivables. Net transfer debt is the difference between transfer payables and transfer receivables.

Transfer factoring:

Transfer financing allows clubs to convert future transfer receivables into immediate cash. The most common form is transfer factoring, where future receivables are sold or financed through a third-party lender.

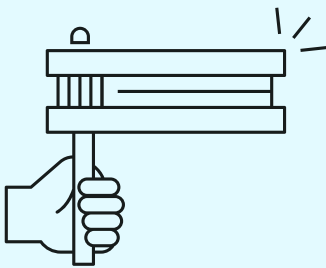
Executive Summary

**In this section,
we summarise
key findings from
the report.**

Section 1:

England’s Football Revolution:

How the game has changed since 1992



The cultural importance of English football

For millions of people, football clubs are more than just sports teams. They are part of the identity, history and social fabric of their communities. Their influence extends far beyond matchdays, with clubs supporting local economies, charitable activity, community wellbeing and the development of football at all levels.

- As a result, when a club ceases to exist, it can have a significant emotional impact on fans and the wider community. The IFR’s fan survey revealed that 31% of all fans and 50% of highly engaged fans, would suffer a high level of distress if their club no longer existed.
- While this report focuses on football finances and potential risks to financial soundness and resilience, it does so to help ensure football clubs can continue to serve the interests of fans and their local communities.

Unprecedented revenue growth

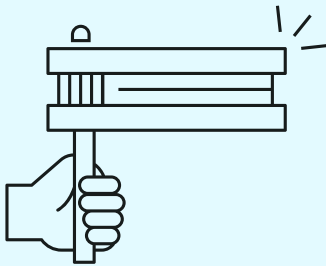
English football has experienced unprecedented revenue growth since 1992, particularly in the Premier League, where average club revenues are now over 30x their 1992 level. By comparison, UK GDP has increased by 3x over the same period.

- Football’s revenue growth has primarily been driven by broadcast revenues increasing by 60x since 1992/93
- In addition, the continued popularity of English football has helped to drive club matchday and commercial revenue over the past four decades.
- Revenues generated from competing in European and FIFA competitions have grown significantly.
 - Three English clubs competed in European competitions in 1992/93³, compared to nine in 2025/26 and 2026/27.⁴
 - In 2024/25, average broadcast Champions League revenue was £80 million, up from £26 million in 2004/05. Average Europa League broadcast revenue was £33 million and average Conference League broadcast revenue was £19 million.
 - Chelsea earned over £84 million from winning the Club World Cup in 2025.

Section 1:

England's Football Revolution:

How the game has changed since 1992



Investment boom

English football has drawn significant investor interest in the last five years, with 78 transactions totalling £7.2 billion. This is in stark contrast to 2000-2005 where only seven completed transactions were identified.

- Around 50% of clubs across the pyramid and 65% of Premier League clubs experienced an ownership transaction between 2020/21 and 2024/25.
- Alongside this, investor profiles have changed, with increased overseas ownership, more complex ownership structures and greater investment at all levels of the pyramid.

Positive impact of growth

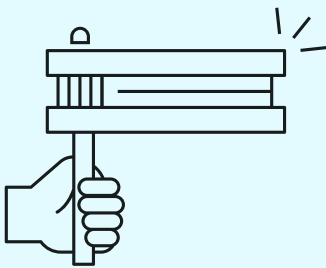
English football has enjoyed a virtuous circle of revenue growth, increased on-pitch investment, improved quality and greater fan engagement, helping the Premier League to become the most popular football league in the world.

- This on-pitch investment and improved quality are reflected in:
 - The total value of Premier League squads is estimated to be €12.5 billion, over twice the total value of the squads of any of the other top five European leagues.
 - Similarly, the Championship's total squad market value is estimated at €2.14 billion, which is almost as valuable as the combined squad market values of La Liga 2, Bundesliga 2, Serie B and Ligue 2 combined (€2.25 billion).

Section 1:

England’s Football Revolution:

How the game has changed since 1992



Winners and losers: diverging revenue growth

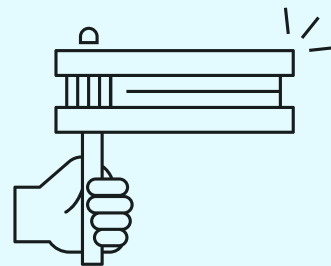
While revenues have grown across the pyramid, Premier League club revenues have grown significantly more than EFL revenues. Between 1992/93 and 2024/25, average club revenues grew by:

- **Premier League:** £330 million, or 33x
 - **Championship:** £35.1 million, or 10x
 - **League One:** £10.4 million, or 6x
 - **League Two:** £5.9 million, or 7x
- **As a result, revenue gaps between leagues have increased significantly:**
 - In 1992/93, the average Premier League club earned 2.7x the average Football League Division One (i.e. Championship) club. By 2024/25 this had increased to 8.7x.
 - In 1992/93, the highest earning Premier League club earned 70x the revenue of the lowest earning Football League Division Three club (i.e. EFL League Two). By 2024/25 this had grown to 173x.
 - Historical data from 1992/93 is not available for the National League, however, in 2025/26, the highest-revenue Premier League club earnt 605 times more than the lowest-revenue National League club.
 - **In addition, the absolute revenue gap between the big six and the rest of the Premier League has widened significantly since 1992/93.**
 - In 1992/93, the six biggest clubs in terms of revenue earned £9.4 million more on average than the other Premier League clubs.
 - By 2024/25, this average revenue gap had grown to £421 million.

Section 1:

England's Football Revolution:

How the game has changed since 1992



Rising costs and worsening profitability

Football clubs have not generally been profit-making. Part of the reason for this is that they are not typically run as profit-making businesses but are instead focused on achieving sporting success. As such, although revenues have increased across the pyramid since 1992/93, player costs have also risen significantly and profitability has worsened significantly, particularly below the Premier League.

- In terms of profitability:⁵
 - Although average Premier League profitability was positive or close to breakeven between 1992/3 and 2016/17, average losses reached 13% of revenues in 2024/25
 - The average Championship club was operating at a loss of 10% of revenue in 1992/93 but by 2024/25 losses represented 42% of revenues.
 - Average League One losses increased from 6% of revenue in 1992/93 to almost 50% of revenue in 2024/25
 - League Two clubs experienced volatile profitability over the period, with average losses standing at almost 40% of revenue in 2024/25.
- Since 1992/93, average wage costs have increased by:
 - almost 50-fold in the Premier League
 - 16-fold in the Championship
 - 9-fold in League One
 - 7-fold in League Two

Growth of women's football

Although it is outside the IFR's remit, our analysis shows that women's football has experienced considerable growth in recent years. However, continued investment is required to grow the game.

- Between 2021/22 and 2024/25, attendances grew by an average of 50% a year and club revenues almost tripled.
- However, continued investment is required to expand the game's reach, attract new fans and strengthen its international competitiveness, while ensuring the financial sustainability of the game.

Section 2:

The current financial state of the game



Revenues

English football generated around £9 billion of revenue in 2025/26, with the Premier League accounting for more than 80% of revenues across the top five tiers of the pyramid. The big six Premier League clubs accounted for 56% of Premier League club revenues.

- **Broadcast revenues:** Sporting success drives broadcast revenues, as clubs in higher leagues and those qualifying for UEFA competitions receive greater centrally distributed revenues. In 2025/26 broadcast revenues accounted for:
 - 51% of total revenue for Premier League clubs
 - 45% for Championship clubs
 - 32% for League One and League Two clubs
 - 12% for National League clubs
- **Matchday revenues:** Clubs higher up in the pyramid earn greater matchday revenues in absolute terms as sporting success allows clubs to charge more for tickets and attract more matchday fans. However, this also requires investment in stadia. Matchday revenues typically account for a higher percentage of revenue further down the pyramid. In 2025/26, matchday revenues accounted for:
 - 14% of total revenue for Premier League clubs
 - 19% for Championship clubs
 - 35% for League One and League Two clubs
 - 29% for National League clubs
- **Commercial revenues:** Although clubs higher up the pyramid generally earn more commercial revenues, the big six earn considerably more than others. This reflects the sustained sporting success, brand and fanbase, which have been built over time. In 2025/26, commercial revenues accounted for:
 - 36% of total revenue for Premier League clubs
 - 35% for Championship clubs
 - 33% for League One and League Two clubs
 - 59% for National League clubs
- Broadcast revenues are heavily dependent on short term sporting performance – i.e. promotion/relegation and European qualification. The financial impact of a downturn in sporting performance is greatest for clubs most reliant on broadcast revenues, such as non-big six Premier League clubs and parachute clubs in the Championship.

Section 2: The current financial state of the game



Players and agents

The relationship between player spend and sporting success has helped create a highly competitive market for players. In turn, this can create pressure on clubs to increase spending. Where one club invests significantly in its playing squad, other clubs may face pressure to increase their own spending to remain competitive.

This dynamic is reflected in clubs' finances as player wages, transfer fees and agent costs have risen significantly over the last four years. Whilst this report does not provide in-depth analysis of the 2026 summer transfer window, publicly available data suggests that these trends are accelerating.

- **Player wages represent a significant proportion of clubs' revenues, particularly below the Premier League.** In 2025/26, wage costs typically represented 30% to 80% of revenue, although some clubs exceeded this range:
 - 20 clubs, primarily in the Championship, League One and National League, spent more than 80% of revenue on player wages
 - 6 clubs spent more than 100% of revenue on wages
- **Player wage costs increased across all leagues between 2021/22 and 2025/26:**
 - **Premier League:** 33%
 - **Championship:** 32%
 - **League One:** 71%
 - **League Two:** 63%
- **Transfer and agent costs have also risen significantly:**
 - Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, amortisation costs across the pyramid doubled from £1.3 billion to £2.6 billion.
 - Total agent fees increased from £317 million to £548 million, representing 17% of English clubs' total transfer costs in 2025/26.

Section 2:

The current financial state of the game



Stadia and non-player operating costs

Average non-player operating costs have increased substantially across all divisions, with these costs making up a higher proportion of club expenditure towards the bottom of the pyramid. In 2025/26, 17 clubs across the EFL and National League had non-playing costs that exceeded their total revenues. These clubs would therefore have been loss-making before accounting for player costs.

- Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, average non-player operating costs have increased across all four divisions:
 - Premier League: 68%
 - Championship: 67%
 - League One: 60%
 - League Two: 58%
- Investing in stadia and matchday infrastructure has enabled the largest clubs to materially increase matchday revenues. Premier League clubs can typically generate more revenue per seat per match than EFL and National League clubs because of higher ticket prices, excess demand and corporate hospitality. This increases the expected return on investment.
- Investment has been substantially higher in the Premier League: between 2021/22 and 2024/25, Premier League clubs invested £2.2 billion in infrastructure, compared with around £400 million across EFL clubs.
- For many clubs, the stadium is a significant financial asset and an important part of their cultural heritage. However, ownership structures vary across the pyramid:
 - 59% are owned by the club or an affiliated entity
 - 41% are owned by local authorities or other third parties

Section 2:

The current financial state of the game



Profitability and external financing

In 2025/26, 94% of clubs across the top five English leagues were loss-making, in terms of profit before tax. Average losses have increased substantially since 2021/22, although trends and the scale of losses relative to revenue vary across divisions:⁶

- **Premier League:** Average losses more than doubled from £20 million in 2021/22 to £44 million in 2025/26 but remained at around 10-20% of revenues.
 - **Championship:** Average losses remained relatively stable between £11-£13 million until 2024/25, before increasing to £22 million in 2025/26, equivalent to around 59% of revenues.
 - **League One:** Average losses more than trebled from £2.4 million in 2021/22 to £7.5 million in 2025/26 and exceeded 65% of revenues.
 - **League Two:** Average losses increased more than fourfold from £0.6 million to £2.7 million over the same period and exceeded 40% of revenues.
- Most clubs therefore rely on external funding, including owner funding, loans and other forms of financing, to support their operations and cover persistent operating losses.
 - On average, for every £1 of revenue, clubs require external financing equivalent to:
 - 33p in the Premier League
 - 57p in the Championship
 - 72p in League One
 - 26p in League Two
 - 55p in the National League
 - Across the top five divisions, at least 30 clubs received external financing equivalent to more than 50% of their revenues.
 - Recent changes to competition organisers' financial rules, including the introduction of squad cost ratio (SCR) rules in the Premier League and Championship, are unlikely to constrain spending or reverse these trends.
 - In the Championship, new SCR rules will significantly loosen constraints and could allow squad expenditure to increase by £460 million.

Section 2:

The current financial state of the game



Debt

Debt levels across English football increased from approximately £2.8 billion in 2020/21 to £4.1 billion in 2024/25 and are forecast to reach £5.1 billion by 2026/27.⁷ Premier League clubs account for around 75% of total debt.

- Debt is used extensively within football to fund infrastructure investment, manage working capital requirements and finance player recruitment. Not all debt is equal, with shareholder loans, transfer debt and increasingly complex third-party debt creating different financial risks for clubs.
- Borrowing costs for interest bearing loans with a repayment date (i.e. excluding non-interest-bearing shareholder loans) have increased significantly since 2020/21.
 - Aggregate interest costs rose from approximately £97 million in 2020/21 to £455 million in 2024/25, an increase of around 370%, compared with a 45% increase in gross debt.
 - The implied overall cost of debt increased from 3.4% to 11.0%, partly reflecting higher market interest rates and clubs' exposure to floating-rate debt.
- Shareholder loans play an important role below the Premier League, where access to traditional third-party debt is more limited and shareholders may accept greater risk and more flexible repayment terms. In 2025/26, shareholder loans accounted for:
 - 3% of Premier League club debt
 - 78% of Championship club debt
 - 90% of League One club debt
 - 67% of League Two club debt
 - 63% of National League club debt
- Relegation covenants are most prevalent among Premier League clubs: 60% have at least one debt facility containing a relegation covenant. These provisions can amplify the financial impact of relegation by increasing repayment obligations or borrowing costs, or imposing additional restrictions, as club revenues fall.
- Clubs have pledged approximately £13.7 billion of assets, revenues and equity interests as security against borrowings. Of this, Premier League clubs accounted for approximately £12.1 billion.
- Transfer fees are often paid in instalments over several years, with amounts due to clubs recorded as transfer receivables. Many clubs use transfer factoring to convert receivables into cash. Transfer factoring has increased significantly, rising from £55 million in 2020/21 to £779 million in 2024/25, with around £1.2 billion of transfer receivables now monetised through transfer factoring. This creates substantial net cash outflows that clubs will need to fund in future.

Section 3:

Assessing club financial soundness



Liquidity

The vast majority of EFL and National League clubs are heavily reliant on external financing, typically from owners, to meet obligations as they fall due. This reliance is increasing. Limited cash reserves mean that many clubs would have little time to secure alternative funding or adjust their business model following a shock. The IFR requested financial information from 112 clubs as part of the evidence gathering for this report. Of these respondents:

- 66% of clubs reported that they could not survive for more than 90 days without new owner funding
- 29% of clubs reported that they could not survive for more than 30 days
- Many clubs rely on owner funding on a just-in-time basis, receiving frequent injections throughout the year. Between March 2025 and March 2026:
 - 67 clubs received six or more funding injections
 - 28 clubs received 12 or more
 - Clubs at the top of the pyramid can sell players during transfer windows to relieve financial distress. This mitigation is less effective further down the pyramid, where clubs have less valuable playing squads.
- Despite this reliance on owner funding, the majority of EFL and National League clubs do not have a contingency plan if their owner becomes unable or unwilling to continue financing operations, leaving them particularly exposed given their limited access to alternative sources of finance. This has been a common feature among clubs that have recently experienced financial distress, including Bury, Derby County, Reading and Sheffield Wednesday.

Section 3: Assessing club financial soundness



Solvency

More than 60% of EFL and National League clubs, and 20% of Premier League clubs, have liabilities exceeding the book value of their assets. On an accounting basis, these clubs have negative equity and are technically insolvent.

- Accounting for estimated squad market values, as opposed to the book value, improves clubs’ solvency positions, although nearly half (46%) of EFL clubs would still have negative equity.
- More than a quarter (27%) of EFL and National League clubs have combined financial and transfer debt exceeding the estimated saleable value of the business
- 97% of football clubs in the EFL and National League generate negative EBITDA, indicating that their underlying operations are loss-making.
- Trend analysis shows that the situation is worsening for clubs across the EFL and National League.
- In respect of both liquidity and solvency, this means that many football clubs would not currently meet the requirement under the Football Governance Act to hold ‘Appropriate Financial Resources’. Clubs are required to meet this standard by May 2030.

Section 3: Assessing club financial soundness

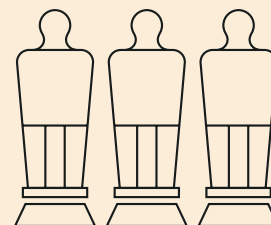


Financial distress

Whilst formal insolvencies in English football have been relatively rare, **at least 20 clubs have faced financial distress since 2018/19.**

- Financial distress can be triggered by a financial shock, such as an owner becoming unable or unwilling to continue funding a club or a significant fall in revenues.
- The impact of financial shocks depends on a club's underlying vulnerabilities. Clubs that are highly reliant on owner funding, have weak governance or engage in financial overreach are less resilient to adverse events and more vulnerable to financial distress.
- Financial metrics can provide useful early warning signs of distress, with low liquidity appearing to be the most reliable indicator of immediate risk. However, wider factors, including governance and owner suitability, also need to be considered.
- Identifying heightened risk of financial distress requires comprehensive and ongoing assessment of individual clubs, drawing on both financial indicators and wider factors such as governance and owner suitability. Reliance on owner funding, poor underlying financial health and inadequate contingency planning leave many clubs vulnerable to financial distress.

Section 4: Systemic resilience and future risks



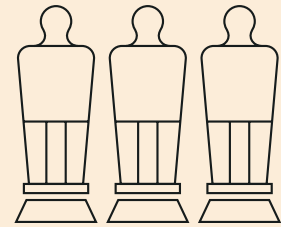
Financial cliff-edges and distributions

There are significant financial cliff-edges across the football pyramid. The growth of Premier League broadcast revenues and current distribution arrangements have contributed to those cliff-edges, particularly across the Premier League and Championship.

- In 2025/26, a Premier League club received 10 to 17 times as much as non-parachute Championship clubs in domestic competition distributions, whereas a year one parachute club received five times as much.
- This creates significant financial risk upon relegation, even with parachute payments in place. For clubs relegated from the Premier League in 2024/25, on average:
 - total revenue fell by £70 million (42%)
 - wage costs fell by £29 million (34%), which did not offset the revenue shortfall
 - EBITDA fell by £32 million (447%) and external financing increased by £11 million (28%)
- This also creates an incentive for non-parachute Championship clubs to overspend to compete with parachute clubs and pursue promotion.
 - On average, non-parachute clubs spent 84% of revenues on player wages compared with 57% for parachute clubs. To break-even, they would need to spend 19%.
 - Promotion to the Premier League in 2023/24 and 2024/25 increased clubs' total revenues by 376% and would have significantly increased enterprise values.
- This can also impact sporting competition across the leagues.
 - The performance of newly promoted clubs in the Premier League has declined over the last ten years, with these clubs performing worse than their international and lower-league counterparts.
 - The evidence on the sporting performance of parachute clubs is mixed. Parachute clubs increasingly outperform non-parachute clubs, taking 17 of 30 promotion spots in the last ten years, but this is broadly in line with European and lower-league counterparts.

- There are also financial cliff-edges between League Two and the National League and within the National League.
 - Although the financial impact of relegation is relatively limited because of parachute payments, clubs that are relegated from League Two can lose their academy status.
 - The financial reward from promotion to League Two, coupled with the gap between parachute and non-parachute clubs, creates some incentive to overspend. Achieving promotion is more difficult as only two teams are promoted each season. However, the gaps are driven more by differences in non-broadcast revenues than by broadcast distributions or parachute payments. Consistent with this, there is less evidence of widespread overspending than in the Championship.

Section 4: Systemic resilience and future risks

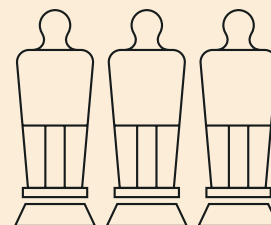


Investor landscape

Across the English football pyramid, operations and player spending, infrastructure investment and the frequency and value of majority and minority takeovers have increased in recent seasons.

- There are a range of motivations for investing in a football club and a range of different types of owners. Those seeking financial returns tend to achieve it by growing the enterprise value of the club, which is typically calculated as a multiple of revenue.
 - The big six's revenue multiples, and therefore their enterprise value, have increased significantly over time.
- Investors themselves identified different financial risks and motivations across the football pyramid:
 - **Premier League:** investors highlighted the significant revenue risks associated with relegation or failure to qualify for European competition.
 - **Championship:** investors highlighted the high-risk, high-reward strategy of overspending in pursuit of promotion to the Premier League.
 - **Below the Championship:** owners were more likely to emphasise community objectives over financial returns, with some having acquired clubs to prevent administration.
- Our indicative analysis of investor returns illustrates the financial risks associated with club ownership.
 - Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, investors in clubs across the top five leagues were estimated to have lost 41% of their original investment. Over the same period, investment in the FTSE 100 stock market index would have generated a return of more than 36%.
 - Estimated financial returns were strongly associated with sporting performance. Promoted clubs generated an estimated average return of 85%, rising to 187% if they reached the Premier League from the Championship.
 - Clubs that remained in the same league or were relegated had estimated average losses of 67% and 75%, respectively.
- Recent trends indicate continued appetite for investment in English football and a willingness to provide ongoing owner funding. However, persistent and increasing losses could make investment in English football less attractive. **This concern is reflected in owner views: 17 of 18 EFL club owners interviewed supported more robust cost controls to reduce reliance on external funding.**

Section 4: Systemic resilience and future risks



Future broadcast landscape

The multi-year nature of broadcast deals means that broadcast revenues are secured to at least 2027/28. However, the value of the next round of deals is uncertain.

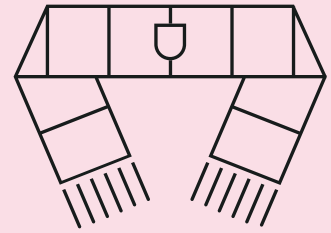
- Competition organisers may face challenges when they next go to market. The domestic market is maturing, with limited scope to increase the number of matches broadcast. Traditional broadcasters are also increasingly focused on profitability, while streaming platforms' demand for live sports remains uncertain.
- Given clubs' reliance on broadcast revenues, any reduction could require them to absorb greater losses, reduce costs or sell assets. Slower growth in broadcast revenues could also reduce the attractiveness of football to potential investors.

Transfer debt and financing

In 2025/26, English clubs reported £4.8 billion of transfer payables and £1.5 billion of transfer receivables, resulting in net transfer debt of approximately £3.4 billion.⁸ Although transfer obligations fall due over several years, high net transfer debt and increasing use of factoring create future financial pressures. Across English football, transfer payables are around 3.3 times transfer receivables, creating substantial future net cash outflows that clubs will need to fund.

- Net transfer debt is highly concentrated in the top two divisions. In 2025/26, Premier League clubs reported approximately £3.1 billion of net transfer debt and Championship clubs £316 million.
- Around £1.2 billion of transfer receivables have been monetised through transfer factoring arrangements. This is concentrated in the top two leagues.
 - Premier League clubs reported approximately £1.25 billion of transfer receivables and £975 million of transfer factoring, equivalent to 78% of remaining receivables.
 - In the Championship, £238 million of transfer receivables have been monetised through factoring, compared with £152 million remaining on clubs' balance sheets. The value already monetised therefore exceeds the value of remaining transfer receivables.
- The transfer factoring market is relatively concentrated: 12 lenders were identified, with the largest five accounting for 93.6% of transfer financing activity since 2020/21. Changes in lenders' risk appetite, lending strategies or exposure limits could reduce the availability of transfer financing and create short-term liquidity pressures for some clubs.
- More broadly, transfer debt, deferred transfer payments and transfer financing create financial links between clubs, owners and lenders, increasing the potential for financial stress to spread across the game if one or more clubs fail to meet their obligations.

Section 5: Non-financial issues

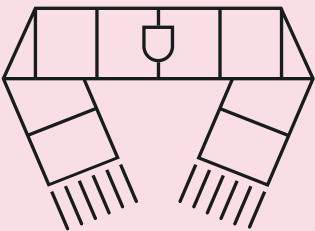


Football governance landscape

The roles of the EFL, Premier League and UEFA have changed since 1992. Their original focus was on growing the commercial value of their competitions on behalf of member clubs, but all three now perform both commercial and regulatory roles. These developments have presented systemic risks for English football.

- This introduction and enforcement of financial rules, combined with diverging incentives between clubs and leagues, has led to inconsistent regulation across divisions. This has been accompanied by an increase in legal challenges from clubs and the PFA, contributing to a more complex and litigious regulatory environment and higher central costs.
 - For example, Premier League administrative expenses have increased from £45 million in 2015/16 to £212 million in 2024/25, an increase of around 370%.
- Tensions between domestic and international competition organisers have increased, including over regulation, revenue distribution and the increasingly congested fixture calendar.
- Key systemic risks arising from these developments include:
 - Challenges in introducing and enforcing financial rules could limit competition organisers' ability to constrain unsustainable spending, increasing risks to clubs' financial soundness.
 - League financial rules could have unintended consequences, such as stadium or asset sales, that reduce financial soundness, or incentivise clubs to sell academy talent
 - Increased enforcement and litigation could raise costs and reduce the attractiveness of investing in English football.
 - Fixture scheduling conflicts could affect broadcast revenues, a significant source of income for clubs across the pyramid. Further expansion of UEFA and FIFA club competitions into the English domestic calendar could also reduce the value of domestic media rights.

Section 5: Non-financial issues

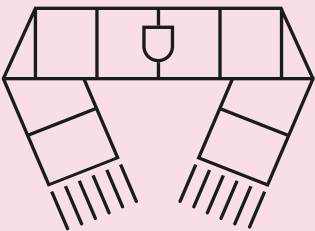


Fan engagement and club heritage

Fans are generally satisfied with opportunities to engage but are less convinced that clubs listen to and act on supporter views. Supporter groups are similarly less positive about their influence: only 39% are satisfied with how fan views are considered in club decision-making and 37% with communication and transparency around those decisions.

- 84% of surveyed clubs state that fan engagement has helped strengthen trust with supporters and improve the quality of decision-making.
- Lower-league clubs are more likely to face staff capacity and resource constraints, while Premier League clubs more commonly cite confidentiality as a challenge. Supporter groups highlight concerns about transparency and uncertainty over whether supporter views influence club decisions.
- Club heritage is highly valued by fans, clubs and supporter groups, with fan engagement seen as an important means of protecting and preserving club identity, traditions and community connections.

Section 5: Non-financial issues



Corporate governance and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Limited survey evidence and publicly available information constrain the IFR’s understanding of corporate governance and board-level approaches to EDI across English football. Greater transparency and better-quality information will therefore be important in supporting the IFR’s objective of raising corporate governance standards.

- More broadly, although competition organisers have introduced rules and principles to strengthen EDI, our analysis of publicly available data indicates that several groups with protected characteristics remain underrepresented across football clubs, particularly in leadership roles.
 - On average, the proportion of football club employees who are white is 3.3 to 8.1 percentage points higher than the proportion of white people in the clubs' local communities.
 - Women are less represented across football clubs compared with the UK population, by an average of 22.2 to 23.5 percentage points.
 - People with a disability are underrepresented across football clubs compared with the UK population, by an average of 10.3 to 11.6 percentage points.

Future actions

Introduction

This report shows that football has enjoyed a virtuous circle of revenue growth, investment and increasing fan interest since 1992. English club football is now the most successful in the world. This success is underpinned by competitive leagues and matches, the attraction of global talent into English football, investment and a deep, competitive football pyramid.

However, the systemic resilience of English football and the financial soundness of individual clubs have deteriorated. Losses, debt and reliance on owner funding are all increasing. Many English clubs are not currently financially sound. They do not hold sufficient financial resources to manage risk and are highly vulnerable to shocks. Widening financial cliff edges between clubs also threaten competitiveness within and between leagues. League financial rules are inconsistent across the pyramid, have created unintended consequences and contributed to increased central costs and litigation, while having limited impact in reducing losses.

Whilst many clubs have improved fan engagement and governance, results are mixed across the pyramid.

These issues are directly relevant to the IFR’s statutory objectives.

Actions This report establishes an urgent case for systemic change to football finances: • There needs to be more effective financial distribution to enable the fluidity of the pyramid to be protected, so a well-run club can aspire to move up the divisions. There needs to be effective financial regulation in place to prevent any changes in distribution from merely inflating costs, ensuring clubs are protected if things go wrong. However, football finances are a complex ecosystem. There is no single, simple solution that will reduce financial risk without undermining the fundamentals that drive the financial success of the English game. Below, we set out a six-point action plan for football. By May 2030, when clubs are required to have been granted full licences by the IFR, this plan is intended to reduce systemic risk, improve club financial soundness, governance and fan engagement, in line with the IFR's statutory objectives. 1. Revenue distribution should be reformed, but changes should focus on financial stability, not encouraging imprudent spending. 2. Leagues, clubs and other stakeholders should take action to reduce financial losses. 3. Action should be taken at National League level to ensure football governance matches the risk within the game. 4. Clubs must improve how they manage financial risk. 5. Clubs must show how they take fans' views into account. 6. Clubs should improve Corporate Governance and make progress on boardroom and senior executive diversity.	

1. Revenue distribution should be reformed, but changes should focus on financial stability, not incentivising reckless spending.

The current distribution arrangements in English football create risk and should be reformed. Distribution arrangements should consider competitive balance, systemic resilience and support club financial soundness. Reform of distribution arrangements should aim to:

- Maintain the Premier League as the leading football league in the world and the Championship as the leading second tier competition
- Maintain vital funding for the wider game
- Mitigate the financial impact of relegation from the Premier League
- Reduce the distortive impact that parachute payments have on financial incentives within the Championship
- Protect clubs by giving clubs the opportunity to rebuild their balance sheets and reduce risk
- Consider short-term support to clubs that face severe financial distress

However, any changes in distribution should not lead to a further surge in costs for clubs, as this would not address the financial risks in the game.

The IFR’s preference remains for competition organisers to agree a new distribution arrangement. However, if this is not possible, a competition organiser may apply to trigger the backstop under Part 6 of the Act. If the IFR determines that the relevant conditions are met:

- The relevant competition organisers will be required to enter mediation, and
- If they fail to agree, the IFR must make an order specifying how relevant revenue should be distributed

If the IFR were to make a backstop order, we would consider the likely impact of any change in distribution on football, including its interaction with league financial rules and the IFR’s licensing regime. This would include consideration of cost controls, merit rakes, lifeboat funds, the quantum of money to be distributed and any other factors relevant to the IFR’s objectives.

2. Leagues, clubs and other stakeholders should agree plans to reduce financial losses	This report raises concerns over: • Increases in operating losses • Increases in agent costs • The viability of financial models towards the bottom of the pyramid Operating losses Club operating losses have increased relative to revenues, with the most severe issues towards the bottom of the pyramid. These losses create systemic risk. New rules in the Premier League and Championship may permit losses to increase further. Attempts by League One to introduce greater restrictions on spending are being challenged by the Professional Footballers' Association. Agents Our analysis has shown that agents represent a significant and increasing cost to football clubs. Although this is an international issue and falls under FIFA's remit, the IFR will work with governing bodies, leagues, clubs and HM Government to consider further steps to address concerns about the financial impact of increasing agents' fees and the regulation of agents. Financial models towards the bottom of the pyramid Many clubs at the bottom of the pyramid would lose money even if players played for free. These clubs have seen limited revenue growth since 1992 and significant increases in both playing and non-playing costs. Faced with this reality, clubs and leagues should explore solutions to improve the economic model and reduce systemic risk towards the bottom of the pyramid. Action must be taken to address these trends. The IFR will look to clubs and competition organisers to take action to reduce losses and will engage with football stakeholders to meet this challenge. If necessary, the IFR will consider using its licensing conditions to drive change. If these trends are not addressed, the IFR will engage with Government on whether additional powers are required to reduce systemic risk in the game.
3. National League governance	23 of 24 clubs in the National League are now professional. National League clubs attract significant investment, run significant losses and are particularly vulnerable if owners withdraw funding. If distress occurs, these clubs have limited opportunity to raise funds by player trading or taking out commercial debt to cover short-term cashflow issues. However, the National League operates on a very small budget. Average central administrative costs per National League club were only £15,000 in 2024/25 compared with £483,000 in the EFL and £10.6 million in the Premier League. The IFR will work with all football stakeholders on solutions to improve governance and oversight of clubs in the National League.

4. Clubs must improve how they manage financial risk

Club reliance on owner funding and debt has left them vulnerable to shocks. Many clubs are not managing financial risks effectively. Many clubs do not have contingency plans in the event that owner funding is withdrawn.

By 2030, the Football Governance Act requires clubs to hold 'Appropriate Financial Resources'. This report indicates that while some clubs are already meeting this condition, the majority of clubs will need to take action to rebuild their balance sheets and reduce exposure to financial risk to meet this requirement. This will likely mean that a number of clubs across the pyramid will need to hold more cash. In addition, some clubs may be required to limit future borrowing or reduce existing debt levels.

The IFR will continue to review the suitability of owners, including whether they have sufficient financial resources to sustain their club's financial model.

The IFR will require all clubs to commit to an action plan setting out how they will meet the 'Appropriate Financial Resources' requirement by 2030. The IFR will agree plans with clubs before the start of the 2027/28 season. In addition, all clubs must produce 3x stress tests with mitigating action plans – for relegation, for reduction in revenue and for loss of owner funding – by May 2028.

5. Clubs must show they take fan views into account

This report finds a range of fan engagement practices across the pyramid that drive positive outcomes, but also identifies room for improvement. In the IFR's Fan Engagement Survey, fans reported positively on how clubs engaged with them but raised concerns about the extent to which their views were taken into account and the transparency of decision-making.

By May 2030, the Football Governance Act requires clubs to meet the 'Fan Engagement Threshold Requirement'. Clubs will be required to consult fans before making decisions that affect them, explain their thinking, listen to feedback and take fan views into account before reaching decisions. The IFR's expectations will be proportionate to a club's fanbase and resources and will take league rules into account.

The IFR will work closely with clubs to help them meet their fan engagement requirements. We will speak directly with fan groups to get their input on the current effectiveness of fan consultation. Where necessary, we will agree action plans with clubs setting out how they will improve fan engagement to meet necessary requirements. Clubs will also be required to produce an annual fan consultation report providing evidence of how they have gathered, considered and responded to fan views.

6. Clubs must improve corporate governance

Our analysis of corporate governance is based on our survey of 43 clubs and publicly available data, in contrast to our financial analysis, which is based on detailed data from all clubs. However, this report finds that there is significant room for improvement in corporate governance standards across the pyramid.

For the IFR, effective corporate governance is important as a key mitigant to financial risk. Effective corporate governance provides other benefits to clubs, helping to attract investment, protect brand identity and maintain ties with fans and communities.

The IFR's Mandatory Licence Conditions will require all licensed clubs to publish a corporate governance statement every two years starting in October 2027, which explains how they are applying the IFR's Football Club Corporate Governance Code ('Club Code'). This will provide the IFR with a detailed understanding of corporate governance standards across the game. Publication of these statements will also provide greater transparency within football and greater visibility for fans, stakeholders, investors and the wider public.

The IFR's focus on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) relates to diversity on boards and among senior executives. Whilst based on limited data, our analysis indicates that some groups with protected characteristics are underrepresented in club board and senior executive roles. Club corporate governance statements must explain the actions clubs are taking to improve EDI. The Club Code recommends that clubs should publicly commit to clear, measurable and time-bound diversity goals for their boards and senior leadership.

The IFR will review clubs' practices against the Club Code and work with clubs to share best practice and improve governance. The IFR will receive corporate governance statements from clubs from October 2027 and publish its first review of these statements and observed practices in 2028. Given the importance of diversity to effective governance, the IFR will establish an EDI Advisory Group to the IFR Board, with a mandate to support the IFR in increasing diversity in club boardrooms.

Outlook

Under the Football Governance Act, the IFR is required to produce a State of the Game Report within five years of publication of the previous report. The latest the IFR can publish its next report is 2032. However, the data within this first report shows how quickly risks can change within football.

The IFR will therefore undertake an annual risk assessment, considering changes in systemic risks, club finances, fan engagement and governance. This will provide an update on key issues identified in the State of the Game and set out the IFR's plans for the year ahead. The first of these risk assessments will be published in Spring 2028.

As part of this risk assessment, we will closely monitor the following issues that may pose systemic risks to the English game. We will work with stakeholders to monitor these issues and consider the use of our powers under the Act if the risks crystallise. If necessary, we will request legislative change from Government to ensure that English football remains resilient in the face of these challenges. Systemic issues include:

- **Domestic and international competition organisers are increasingly competing for fixture slots that maximise audience and commercial value.** This is creating tensions domestically, as illustrated by debates over FA Cup replays, and internationally through the expansion of FIFA and UEFA competitions. Further expansion of UEFA and FIFA club competitions into the domestic season, or domestic broadcast slots, risks reducing the value of competition organisers’ broadcast rights. In turn, this could reduce broadcast revenues received by clubs across the pyramid.
- **Competitiveness within the game, including within the Premier League, may be undermined by increased revenue disparity at club level.** The gap between the wealthiest clubs within leagues and between the top and bottom of the pyramid continues to increase. These growing revenue differentials can lead to a greater difference in player-spend and relative competitiveness within a league. In turn, this can negatively impact sporting competition.
- **Effectiveness of league governance, rising central costs and the impact of litigation on investor and fan interest.** Clubs operate a wide variety of financial models, owners have different incentives and clubs are increasingly litigious. This divergence of views, together with opposition from the PFA, has limited leagues’ ability to pursue their preferred rule changes and to ensure consistency across the pyramid. The introduction, monitoring and enforcement of financial rules by competition organisers has also increased administration costs and litigation across football.

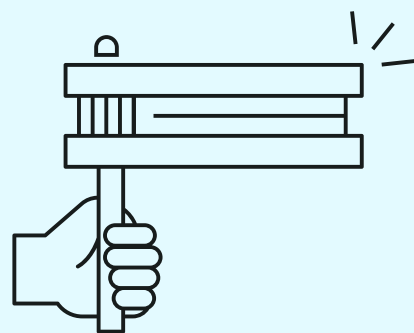
- **The potential for a lower growth outlook with reduced investment.**
The future of the broadcast market is uncertain. Investment interest in English football could decline. This could create a negative spiral of decreasing player values, increasing debt-servicing costs, reduced investment and a reversing of the virtuous circle. The IFR will work with leagues and clubs to support continued growth and investment in English football. In parallel, the IFR will monitor trends closely and, if necessary, help football adjust to a lower-growth, lower-investment environment.

Whilst women's football is outside the remit of the IFR, there are often links between men's and women's teams. Women's football has grown revenues, reached new audiences and attracted significant investment in recent years. However, losses have also increased across WSL clubs and continued investment will be needed to expand the game's reach, attract new fans and strengthen its international competitiveness. **Concerted action across football will be required to support the women's game to grow sustainably in its own right.**

Taken together, these actions are intended to address the risks identified in this report, deliver the IFR's objectives and maintain the appeal to investors and market leading position of English football. The IFR will work with clubs, leagues, Government and other stakeholders to deliver these actions.

England's football revolution: How the game has changed since 1992

01



1.1 Introduction

In the opening section of this report, the IFR looks back at how English men’s football has transformed over the past four decades, reinventing itself from an industry in decline in the 1980s into the most valuable football league in the world in the 2020s. It considers key characteristics and long-term trends in English men’s football, including:

- the unique cultural and social importance of English football
- the unprecedented increase in revenues over the last four decades
- the positive impact this has had on international competitiveness, sporting competition and investment
- diverging revenues across the pyramid
- the change in costs and profitability over time
- alongside these changes in men’s football, we also consider the growth in women’s football

1.2 The cultural importance of English football

Historic and emotional links between fans and clubs

English football has deep roots in the country's heritage and communities. The average Premier League and EFL club is 139 years old.⁹ Football also has significant reach across England and Wales.

- 1. Over half of adults follow English men's football.¹⁰
- More than 15 million people play football regularly.¹¹
- There are 1,100 leagues and 18,000 clubs outside of the professional game.¹²
- More than 900,000 people attend matches in the top five men's divisions each week.¹³

While this report focuses on football finances and potential risks to financial soundness and resilience, its purpose is to help ensure clubs can continue to serve the interests of fans and their local communities.¹⁴

Fans have strong loyalty to their clubs and a deep connection to the game. Football clubs are also an integral part of local communities and national culture: over 80% of fans say football is important to national culture and identity (88%) and to a sense of community in towns and cities (84%) whilst over 60% of fans feel football is important to their personal identity (64%).¹⁵

The loss of a club can therefore have a significant emotional impact on fans and the wider community:

- 31% of fans say they would experience a high level of distress if their club ceased to exist¹⁶, rising to 53% among highly engaged fans.¹⁷
- 31% of fans would continue to follow men's football in England and Wales but would not support another team if their club ceased to exist.¹⁸
- 7% would stop following football altogether.¹⁹

The strength of supporters' attachment to their clubs is reflected in the role that fans and Supporters' Trusts have played when clubs face severe financial difficulties. Survey evidence shows that over half of fans would take some kind of action if their club faced financial difficulties, rising to 70% among highly engaged fans:²⁰

- 25% would raise awareness or support for their club through fan and community events and online posts and groups
- 21% would join the club's Supporter's Trust or Association
- 17% would make monetary donations and make more purchases from the club
- 15% said they would volunteer time to help the club.

In a number of cases, supporters have helped to preserve or re-establish clubs through fan ownership. This includes AFC Wimbledon (fan-owned since 2002),²¹ Exeter City (fan-owned since 2003),²² Bury FC (fan-owned 2002-2013 and again since 2022),²³ Brentford FC (fan-owned 2006-2012),²⁴ Portsmouth FC (fan-owned 2013-2017).²⁵

Football’s contribution to the community

Football clubs make a substantial contribution to local communities and the national economy.

- The Premier League and its clubs are projected to generate £33 billion in added value to the UK economy and contribute £14.8 billion in taxes between 2025 and 2028 and support an estimated 107,600 jobs each year.²⁶
- EFL clubs and their charities supported an estimated 68,600 jobs and contributed £636 million to the UK economy in 2023/24.²⁷

Clubs also deliver programmes that benefit fans and local communities, including education and employability, health and well-being, community engagement and social cohesion. For example:

- The Premier League Charitable Fund provides around £34 million a year to 106 club charities across the pyramid²⁸
- EFL club charities engaged over one million people across England and Wales and generated £165 million in charitable expenditure and £1.24 billion in social value in 2023/24.²⁹

The top division also provides significant support to women’s and grassroots football and the wider game. Premier League total support in the 2024/25 season was £116m. As well as the Premier League Charitable Fund noted above, this included:³⁰

- £21m in grassroots football facilities
- £11m for capital investment in non-league and women’s facilities that delivers more financial and environmental sustainability and improves fan experience
- £7m to support the development of the women’s game
- A £20 million interest-free loan to the WSL.³¹

The Football Foundation, a partnership between the Premier League, the FA and the Government, has invested more than £1.3 billion in grassroots football since 2000.³² This has included more than 75,800 project grants, supporting:

- 1,300 3G grass pitches
- 15,250 grass pitch improvements
- 1,700 changing pavilions.³³

This has attracted an additional £1.5 billion of funding from local partnership organisations, resulting in a combined total of over £2.8 billion invested in grassroots football by the Football Foundation and partner organisations since 2000.³⁴

Meeting the continued growing demand for grassroots football is estimated to require an additional 2,720 3G pitches, 2,560 changing rooms, and ongoing maintenance of 20,000 grass pitches.³⁵ The Football Foundation estimates this will require £3.8 billion of investment,³⁶ highlighting the importance of continued funding from the FA, Premier League, and Government.

1.3 Unprecedented revenue growth

Growth in club revenues

Since 1992, the finances of English football have been transformed. Revenues have grown across all leagues, but growth has been concentrated at the top of the game.

As shown in Chart 1.3.1, between 1992 and 2025:³⁷

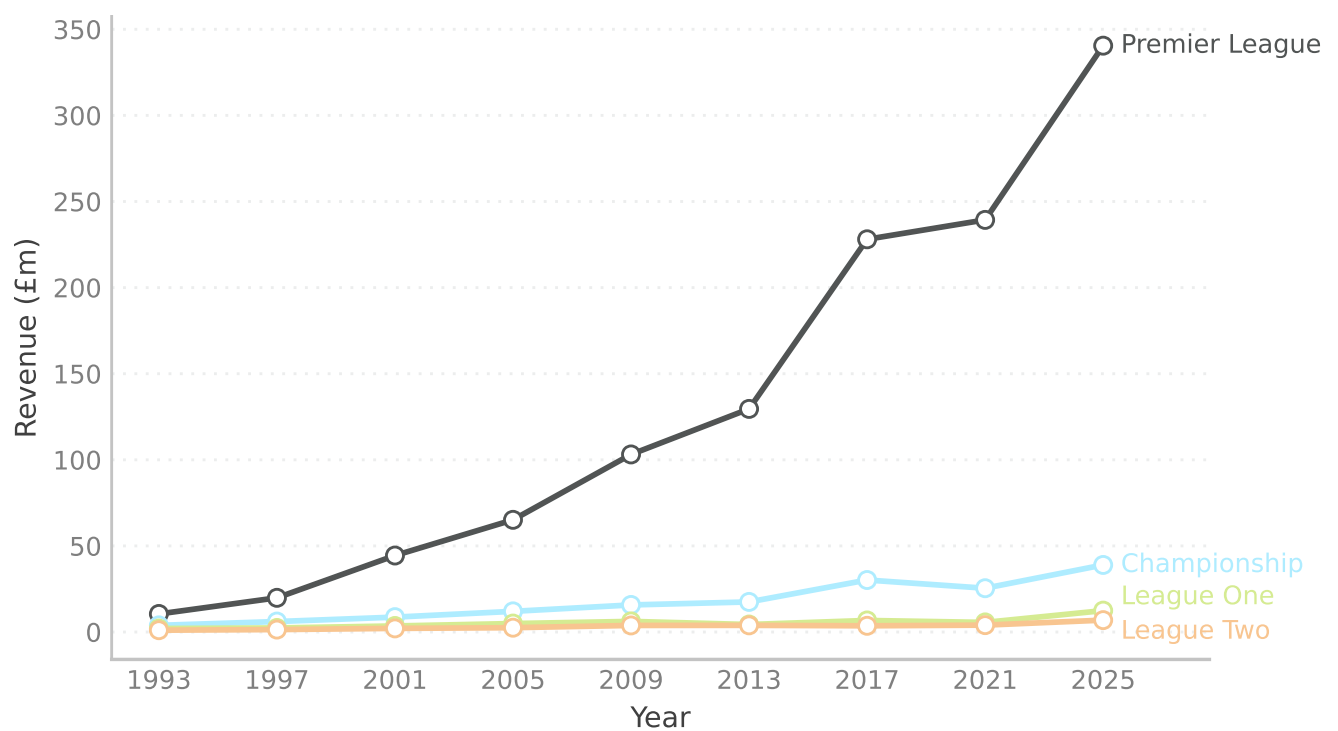
- **Premier League:** average club revenue increased from £10.5 million to £341 million, an increase of over 3,000% and an annual growth rate of 11.4%
- **Championship:** average club revenue increased from £3.9 million to £38.9 million, an increase of 906% and an annual growth rate of 7.5%
- **League One:** average club revenue increased from £2 million to £12.4 million, an increase of 509% and an annual growth rate of 5.8%
- **League Two:** average club revenue increased from £1.1 million to £6.9 million, an increase of 557% and an annual growth rate of 6.1%

Revenue growth in League One and League Two was higher than, but broadly comparable to, UK GDP growth over the same period. UK GDP increased by 315% at an annual growth rate of 4.4%.³⁸ Growth across all leagues and particularly the Championship and Premier League were significantly higher.

Part of the revenue growth for EFL clubs, particularly Championship clubs, is a result of solidarity and parachute payments from the Premier League rather than organic revenue growth. Excluding those payments means that the revenue growth rates were lower over the same period. This effect is most pronounced in the Championship where the percentage increase would drop from 906% to 590%.³⁹

Total revenue has grown across all leagues since 1992/93.

Chart 1.3.1: Average revenue in each division, £m



Source: Publicly available financial accounts obtained from [Companies House](#).

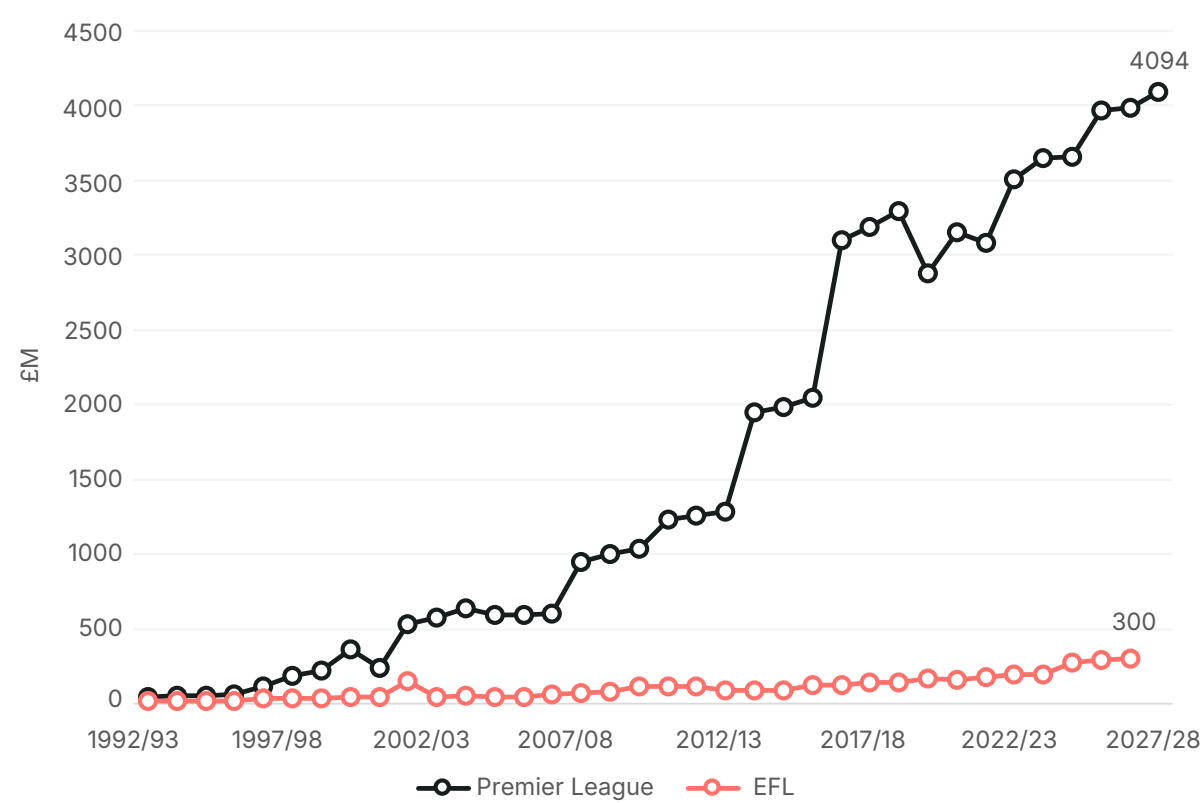
Growth in central broadcast revenues

Between 1992/93 and 2026/27, combined central Premier League and EFL revenues will have grown to more than 60 times their initial value (Chart 1.3.2). These revenues are distributed to member clubs, contributing to the growth in club revenues over this period.

- **Premier League:** domestic broadcast rights grew from £42 million in 1992/93 to £1.8 billion in 2018/19. Growth was driven by pay TV, increased competition between broadcasters following the ‘no single buyer rule’⁴⁰ and more games being broadcast. Domestic rights fell to £1.6 billion in 2019/20 and have remained broadly flat. In contrast, international revenues grew from £30 million in 2001/02 to £2 billion in 2025/26 and now exceed domestic rights revenues.⁴¹
- **EFL:** The EFL signed a domestic broadcast deal with ITV Digital in 2000, however the company collapsed into administration in 2002, owing £178.5 million in unpaid broadcast fees.⁴² Sky acquired the rights and has remained the EFL’s domestic broadcast partner. The value of domestic rights has fluctuated but has increased significantly in recent years. The current five-year Sky Sports deal, running to 2028/29 is worth £935 million - 50% more than the previous deal - with the number of games broadcast increasing four-fold to 1,059 fixtures.⁴³ International viewership accounts for 58% of total viewership, having grown from 212 million in 2020/21 to 278 million in 2024/25⁴⁴ and accounts for approximately 20% of total broadcast revenues.⁴⁵
- **National League:** Unlike the Premier League and EFL, the National League has experienced limited revenue growth, although this is not shown in Chart 1.3.2. Most of its revenue comes from sponsorship, naming rights and other commercial sources. In 2024/25:
 - commercial revenue was £1.8 million, representing 61% of total revenue.
 - broadcast revenue was £1.1 million, representing 39%,⁴⁶ from a seven-year deal with DAZN running to 2030/31.⁴⁷

Both Premier League and EFL central revenues have increased since 1992/93.

Chart 1.3.2: Premier League and EFL central revenues



Source: For the years up to and including 2024/25, publicly available accounts obtained from [Companies House](#). For 2025/26 to 2027/28, IFR analysis of forecasts received from the Premier League on 6 and 13 March and data received from the EFL on 19 February 2026.

Growth in matchday and commercial revenues

In addition to the growth in broadcast revenues, the continued popularity of English football has helped to drive club matchday and commercial revenue over the past four decades. This popularity is a key part of the success story of English football and English leagues tend to be the most attended football leagues in the world.⁴⁸

In 2024/25, approximately 15.4 million fans attended the 380 Premier League games played⁴⁹, 21.2 million fans attended the 1,656 EFL games played⁵⁰, and 1.4 million attended the 557 National League games played.⁵¹

Growth in UEFA revenues

Over the last four decades, UEFA has evolved from primarily a governing body for European football to one of the world’s largest organisers of club competitions, including the Champions League, the Europa League and Conference League. Revenues from these competitions grew from €1.1 billion in 2010/11 to €3.7 billion in 2026/27,⁵² an increase of approximately 240% and an annual growth rate of 8%. This has increased revenues for clubs that qualify through their league position or domestic cup competitions.

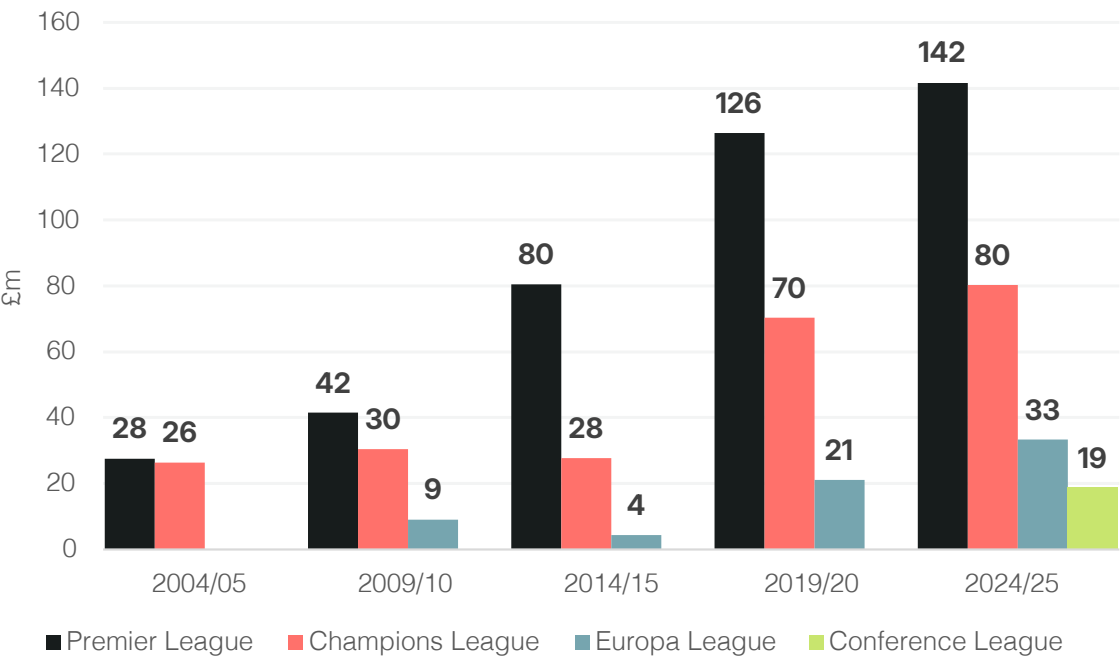
Chart 1.3.3 compares average distributions to English clubs competing in the Premier League and UEFA club competitions over time. Although Premier League clubs receive more revenue from participating in the Premier League, UEFA distributions are significant and have continued to increase. In 2024/25:

- average Champions League revenue was £80 million, up from £26 million in 2004/05
- average Europa League revenue was £33 million
- average Conference League revenue was £19 million

In addition to the increase in broadcast revenues, clubs competing in UEFA competitions also typically earn more in matchday revenues because of the increased number of games.

UEFA revenues from club competitions have increased over time.

Chart 1.3.3: Average revenue earned by clubs competing in UEFA competitions, £m



Source: UEFA, 'Annual & financial reports'. Premier League 'Premier League central payments to clubs 2024/25', 1 July 2025, accessed 1 October 2026.

Note: Europa League data was unavailable for 2004/05 and the Conference League was created in 2021/22.

1.4 Increasing investment into English football

Overall investment into English football

English football's continued revenue growth has attracted significant investor interest in terms of owner transactions. As shown in Chart 1.4.1, owner transactions have increased significantly in recent years.

- **78 transactions were completed between 2021 and 2025, compared with 30 between 2016 and 2020**
- The total value of those transactions increased from **£2.4 billion to £7.2 billion over the same period.**⁵³
- By comparison, only seven completed transactions were identified between 2000 and 2005.⁵⁴

Trends in investment

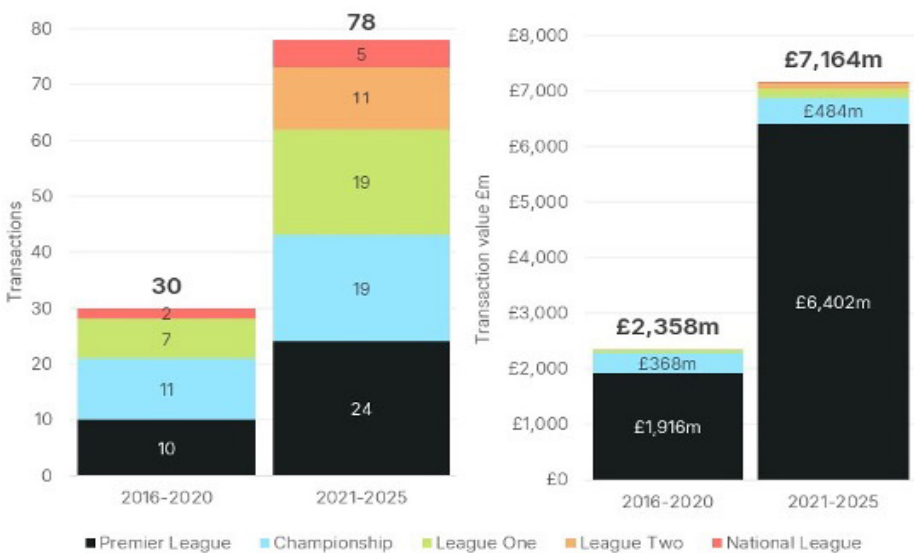
In terms of ownership transactions, a number of trends have emerged over the last 25 years:

- **fewer Premier League and EFL clubs owned by high-net-worth individuals.**⁵⁵ The proportion of Premier League and EFL clubs majority owned by high net worth individuals (HNWIs) has fallen from 76% of club ownership in 2016 to 68% in 2025. **In the Premier League, this has fallen from 70% to 45%.**
- **increased overseas ownership and investment.**⁵⁶ In terms of revenue, non-domestic owners controlled 75% of revenue in the Premier League and 70% of revenues in the Championship in 2025. Overall, North American owners controlled 46% of revenue.
- **increased institutional investment,** particularly in the Premier League.⁵⁷ Prior to 2020, institutional investment in English football was rare. In 2016, institutional investors controlled 3% of revenues across the pyramid. By 2025, this had risen to 11%.
- **more minority shareholders.**⁵⁸ Acquisitions of minority stakes in English clubs have increased sevenfold between 2021 and 2025 compared with 2016-2020, and 57% of Premier League and EFL clubs now have a minority investor.
- **increased multi-club ownership (MCO) and multi-sport ownership (MSO).**⁵⁹ 85% of Premier League clubs are now part of an MCO, MSO or with an owner holding equity in multiple clubs or sports. This figure is 25% in the Championship, 13% in League One, and 4% in League Two.
- **more complex corporate structures.**⁶⁰ In particular, there has been increasing use of multiple parent and holding companies associated with clubs, stadia, training grounds and women's teams. Each may be owned by a different entity, some of which may be based in different jurisdictions.
- **increased investment across the wider football pyramid.**⁶¹ As shown in Chart 1.4.1, there has been an increase in ownership transactions in League One, League Two and National League.

The number and value of transactions for English football clubs has increased since 2016.

Chart 1.4.1: volume and value of transactions involving English football clubs 2016-2025

Source: BCG analysis on behalf of the IFR.



1.5 The positive impact of revenue growth and investment

Virtuous circle

Growth in media revenue in the early 1990s kick-started a virtuous cycle of investment, increased quality, and domestic and international demand for English football.

Increased on-pitch spend: Growth in broadcast revenue, combined with owners' investment, attracts global talent. Of the top 100 global footballers, 44 currently compete in the Premier League, compared with 21 in 2011/12.⁶²

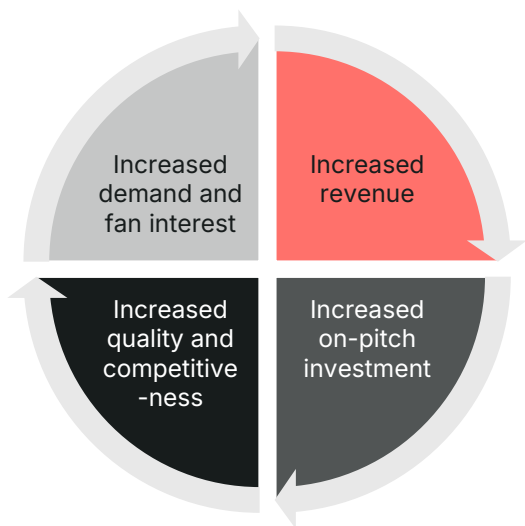
Increased quality and competitiveness: On pitch investment and elite players increase the quality of football played and clubs' international competitiveness. For example, England's average UEFA coefficient improved from an average of 1.8 between 2008/09 and 2016/17 to 1.3 between 2017/18 and 2025/26.⁶³

Increased fan interest: Higher-quality football, star players and the international success of English teams create a more compelling sporting and entertainment product. This strengthens existing fandom and attracts new fans. Of the Premier League's 1.9 billion global following,⁶⁴ 34% became fans between 2020 and 2024.⁶⁵ The EFL's international audience has risen 30% since 2020/21.⁶⁶

Further increases in revenue: Greater fan interest makes the league more attractive to broadcasters by expanding audiences and opportunities to monetise media rights, as well as allowing clubs to earn greater matchday and commercial revenues. This drives further revenue growth and investment.

Early revenue growth led to a virtuous cycle for English football.

Figure 1.5.1: Virtuous cycle of revenue growth



Source: IFR.

International competitiveness

This virtuous cycle has established English football as a premium sports product. The Premier League is the third most valuable sporting league in the world, behind the NFL and NBA, and the most valuable football league, as shown in Chart 1.5.1.

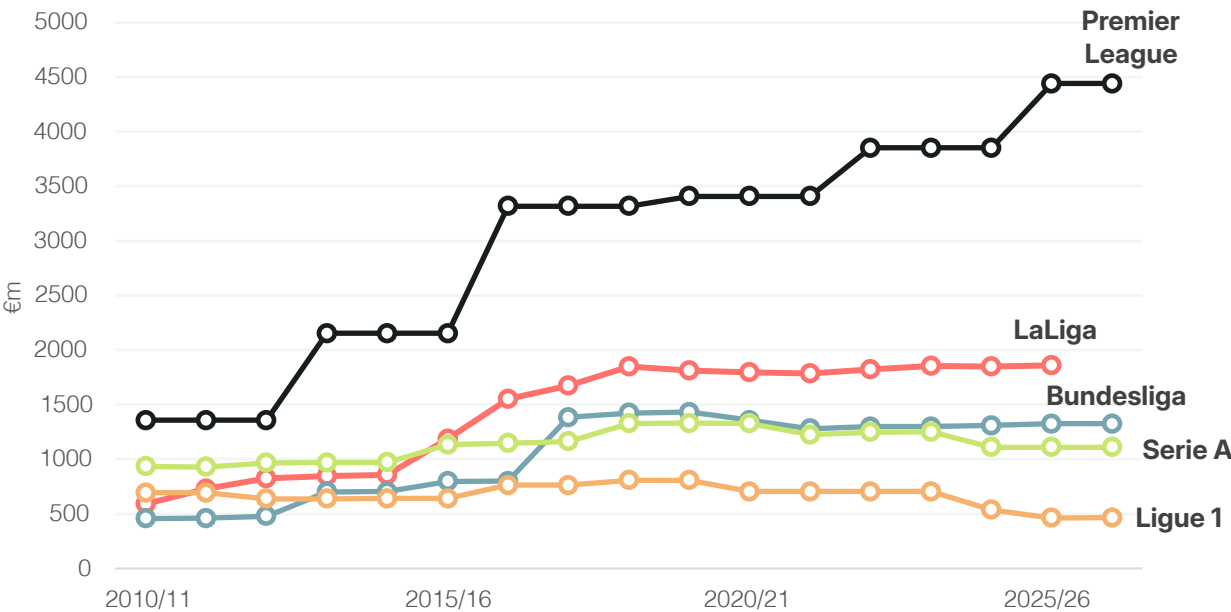
English clubs, particularly those in the Premier League, are among the world's highest earning, with some of the most valuable playing squads and largest global fanbases.

- **Club revenues:** In 2024/25, 15 of the world's 30 highest-revenue football clubs played in the Premier League.⁶⁷ Six Premier League clubs generated more than £400 million in revenue, compared with one Bundesliga club and two La Liga clubs. Ten Premier League clubs generated more than £200 million, compared with five in the Bundesliga and three in La Liga.⁶⁸
- **Squad values:** Premier League clubs have invested significantly in their playing squads. Their total value is estimated at €12.5 billion, more than twice that of any other top-five European league.⁶⁹ The Premier League therefore generates more high-value football fixtures than any other league in the world.⁷⁰
- **Fanbases and attendance:** The Premier League has the world's largest football fanbase, twice the size of La Liga, the second largest.⁷² The Championship is the second most attended football competition globally, behind the Premier League but ahead of the Bundesliga.⁷³ All three EFL divisions featured in the top 20 best-attended leagues across Europe in 2024/25.⁷⁴

The Championship's total squad market value is estimated at €2.14 billion, almost as much as the other major second divisions combined (€2.25 billion): Segunda División (Spain), 2. Bundesliga (Germany), Serie B (Italy) and Ligue 2 (France).⁷¹

The Premier League has grown its share of media rights relative to other European domestic competitions.

Chart 1.5.1: Value of media rights for domestic European competitions, 2010/11 to 2026/27, €m



Source: Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem', prepared by Keystone.

Sporting competition

Despite having significantly higher revenues than other European leagues, English football tends to distribute revenue more evenly within leagues.⁷⁵ The highest-earning Premier League club earns 5.6 times more than the lowest earning club. This compares with 6.3 times in Serie A, 12.4 in the Bundesliga, 17 in La Liga and 18.8 in Ligue 1.⁷⁶ This more even distribution can support competitive balance by helping clubs to compete on more equal terms.

Whilst there is no universally agreed definition of sporting competition, it generally means that there is some level of jeopardy so that the results are not a foregone conclusion. As set out below, this can be broadly measured by:

- **competitive balance**, which considers how evenly sporting performance and success are distributed between clubs
- **intensity of competition**, which considers how closely contested particular sporting outcomes are within a season
- **dynamism of the pyramid**, which considers the extent to which clubs move up and down the pyramid across multiple seasons.

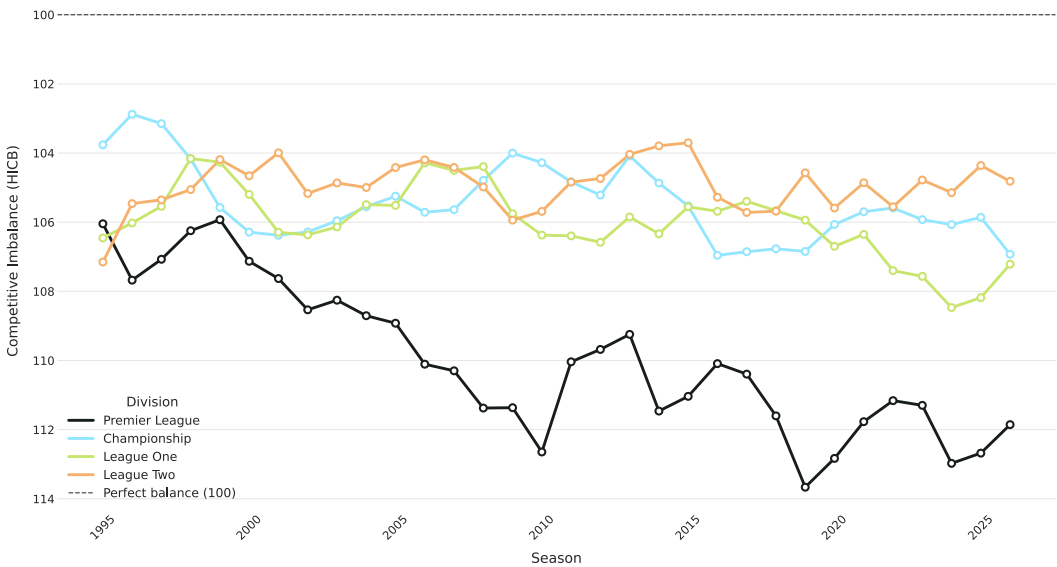
Although there are different measures, English football continues to be competitive, which helps to explain why fans find it exciting. This analysis is discussed in further detail in Annex B – Sporting Competition.

Competitive balance

Chart 1.5.2 shows a measure of competitive balance across each of the leagues since 1994/95. It measures the statistical spread of points, which shows the concentration of points across the league. This shows that the competitive balance in the Premier League has declined since 1994/95. Although competitive balance in the Championship and League Two has remained relatively constant over time, the competitive balance in League One has reduced slightly since 2020.

Competitive balance has declined in the Premier League and, more recently, in League One, while remaining broadly stable in the Championship and League Two.

Chart 1.5.2: Competitive balance in English Football, HICB measure, 3-season rolling average, football seasons 1995/2026



Source: IFR analysis of publicly available league table data published by the [Premier League](#) and the [English Football League \(EFL\)](#).

HICB stands for the Herfindahl Index of Competitive Balance and measures the concentration of points across teams within a league. The axis has been inverted for ease of interpretation, meaning that a downward trend indicates a decline in competitive balance. For more information see Annex B – Sporting Competition.

	Intensity of competition Over the course of a season, there will be competition for several key league places such as the title, UEFA qualification, play-off finals promotion and relegation. • In the Premier League, three of the last 10 title races were decided in the final game week, and a further three decided within two game weeks from the end. When compared to other leagues, only La Liga matched the Premier League for title race finishes, with the three other big five European leagues seeing title races decided earlier in the season.⁷⁷ UEFA qualification and relegation are typically decided on the final day of the season.⁷⁸ • In the Championship, the league title, play-off places and relegation are typically decided on the final day of the season or with one game to spare. Furthermore, across the EFL, the play-off system means that one of the promotion places is always decided at the very end of the season.⁷⁹	Dynamism of the pyramid Part of the continued appeal of the English men's football pyramid is its competitiveness and dynamism, with clubs able to rise or fall through the leagues based on sporting success. Since 1992/93: • 51 different clubs have played in the Premier League • 72 in the Championship • 92 in League One • 81 in League Two • 115 in the National League⁸⁰

1.6 Winners and losers: diverging revenue growth

Diverging revenue growth within the Premier League

Although total revenue has grown for all clubs, growth has been uneven within and between leagues. Between 1992 and 2000, most Premier League clubs had similar revenues, except Manchester United, which historically generated more. From the early 2000s, a small group began to pull away. This initially included Chelsea, Arsenal and Liverpool, with Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City joining them in the late 2000s.

The revenue gap between the big six and the rest of the Premier League has widened significantly since 1992/93. Average revenues were:

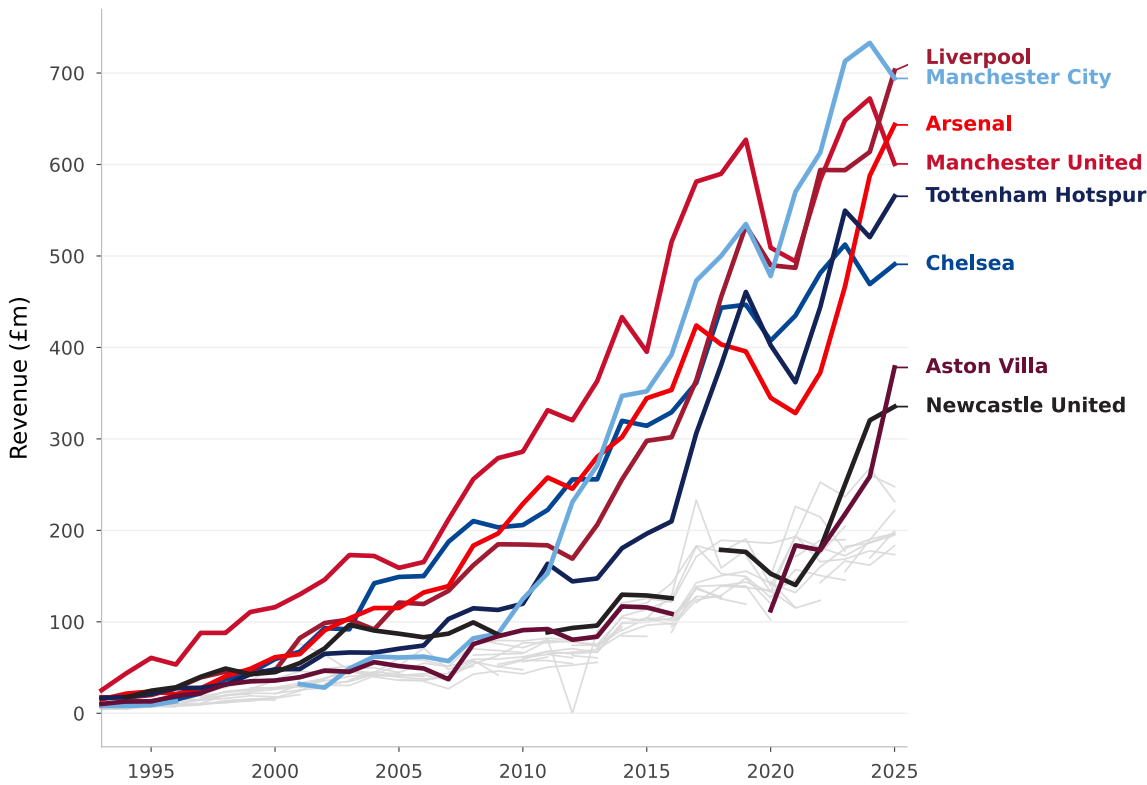
- **1992/93:** £16.4 million for the biggest six clubs in terms of revenue compared with £7 million for the other Premier League clubs.
- **2024/25:** £635 million for the big six, compared with £214 million for the other Premier League clubs – a £421 million difference.⁸¹

However, while the big six have grown relative to their domestic rivals, some European clubs – including Real Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain – continue to generate more revenue.⁸²

The big six is not a static concept. With continued investment and revenue growth, it's possible for other clubs to join them. Equally, it's not guaranteed that clubs currently in the big six will remain there if sporting performance worsens.

The revenue of the big six clubs has diverged from the rest of the Premier League.

Chart 1.6.1: Premier League club revenues, £m.



Source: Publicly available financial accounts obtained from [Companies House](#) and IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: Publicly available data has been used for all labelled clubs.

Diverging revenue growth across the pyramid

Premier League revenues have grown significantly more than EFL revenues. Between 1992/93 and 2024/25, average club revenues grew by:⁸³

- **Premier League:** £330 million, or 33x
- **Championship:** £35.1 million, or 10x
- **League One:** £10.4 million, or 6x
- **League Two:** £5.9 million, or 7x

These different growth rates have significantly widened the gap between clubs, particularly between the Premier League and the Championship.

- **In 1992/93:** the average Premier League club earned £10.5 million, 2.7 times the £3.9 million earned by the average Championship club.
- **2024/25:** the average Premier League club earned £341 million, 8.7 times the £38.9 million earned by the average Championship club.⁸⁴

The revenue gap within the Championship has also grown, partly because of the increase in the size of parachute payments. From 2007/08 to 2025/26, the amount a non-parachute Championship club received in solidarity payments from the Premier League increased from £0.9 million to £5.3 million whereas the amount a year one parachute club received increased from £12.0 million to £48.7 million.⁸⁵

Across the EFL, revenue growth has diverged less. In 2025, the average Championship club earned 3.1 times as much as the average League One club, up from 1.9 times in 1993. The gap between League One and League Two clubs narrowed slightly from 1.9 times in 1993 to 1.8 times in 2025, having fallen as low as 1.1 times in 2013.⁸⁶

Between the very top of the pyramid and the lower leagues, the revenue gap has widened substantially.

- Between 1992/3 and 2024/25 the gap between the highest-revenue Premier League club and lowest-revenue League Two club grew from £25 million to £699 million – an increase of over 2700%.⁸⁷
- This is equivalent to the highest-revenue Premier League club generating around 70 times the revenue of the lowest-revenue League Two club in 1992/93 to around 173 times in 2024/25.
- Historic data from 1992/93 is not available for the National League, however, in 2025/26, the highest-revenue Premier League club earnt 605 times more than the lowest-revenue National League club.⁸⁸

1.7 Rising costs and worsening profitability

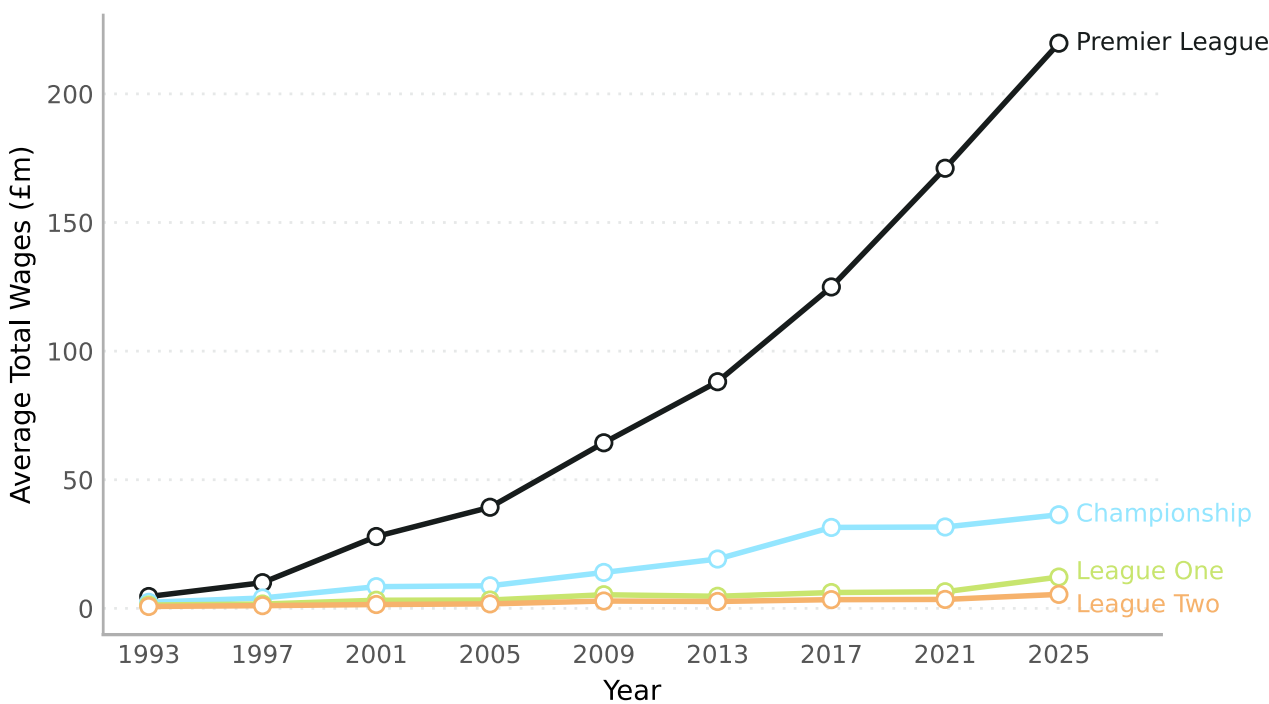
Wage costs have increased across the pyramid

Revenues have increased across the pyramid since 1992/93, but competition for players has also driven up wage costs. Average wages have increased across all leagues, although the scale of growth and the relationship between wages and revenue differ. Between 1993 and 2025:⁸⁹

- **Premier League:** average wage costs increased from £4.6 million to £220 million. Wages increased from 48% to 71% of revenue.
- **Championship:** average wage costs increased from £2.4 million to £36.4 million, an increase of around 1,450%, compared with revenue growth of around 900%. Wages increased from 68% to 101% of revenue.
- **League One:** average wage costs increased from £1.3 million to £12.2 million, around 840%. As in the Championship, wage growth exceeded revenue growth. Wages increased from 64% to 102% of revenue.
- **League Two:** average wage costs increased from £0.74 million to £5.4 million, around 630%. This was the only league where wages remained broadly stable as a proportion of revenue, falling from 85% to 80%.

Average wages have increased across the pyramid, most notably in the Premier League.

Chart 1.7.1: Average wages, £m



Source: Publicly available financial accounts obtained from [Companies House](#).

Worsening profitability

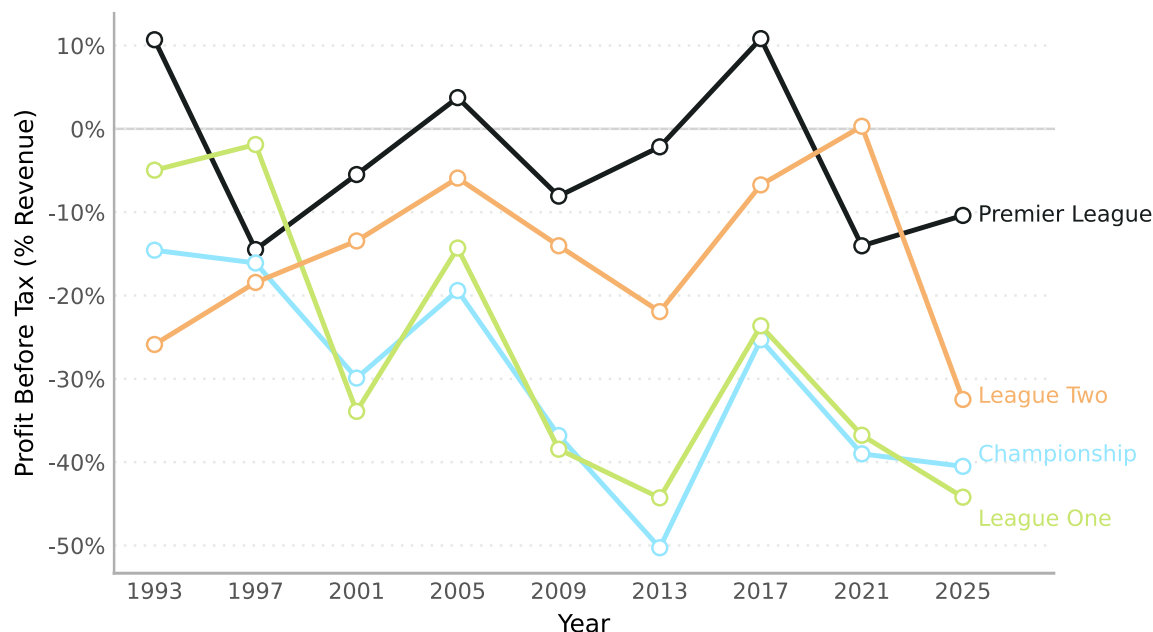
Clubs have not generally been profit-making. Part of the reason for this is that clubs are not typically run as profit-making businesses but are instead focused on achieving sporting success. That said, losses have increased since 1992/93. Chart 1.7.2 shows profit before tax as a percentage of revenue.⁹⁰

Overall, this means that many clubs are increasingly reliant on external financing, particularly owner funding, to cover those losses. We consider this in more detail throughout the remainder of the report.

- **Premier League:** clubs have generally had the strongest profitability. Between 1993 and 2017, average profits were either positive or close to breakeven (with the exception of 1997). By 2025, average losses had fallen to around 13% of revenue.
- **Championship:** clubs have recorded substantial and increasing losses. Average losses grew from 10% of revenue in 1993 to 42% of revenue in 2025. Losses widened significantly between 1997 and 2021, exceeding 60% of revenue in 2013 and 2021. The 2021 figure was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and lost matchday revenues. Despite some improvement since, Championship clubs continue to record the weakest underlying profitability.
- **League One:** clubs recorded average losses throughout the period, worsening from around 6% of revenue in 1993 to almost 50% in 2025. Despite some fluctuation, average losses have tended to exceed 20% of revenue since 2001.
- **League Two:** clubs experienced the greatest volatility in profitability. Profitability historically trended upwards, reaching break-even in 2021. However, by 2025 average losses had fallen sharply to around 40% of revenue.

Average profit as a percentage of revenue has fluctuated since 1992/93 but has trended downwards for all leagues.

Chart 1.7.2: Average profit before tax as a percentage of revenue



Source: Publicly available financial accounts obtained from [Companies House](#).

1.8 Growth of women’s football

History of women’s football

Women’s football has existed in England for over a century but has faced significant challenges. In 1921, the FA banned women from playing on Football League grounds, stating that ‘the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged’.⁹¹ This ban was lifted in 1971. The FA took over the administration of the women’s game in 1994 and the Women’s Super League became a fully professional league in 2018.⁹²

Recent growth of women’s football

Women’s and girl’s football has grown considerably in recent years, supported in part by the Lionesses’ success at the 2022 European Championships. Over 574,000 tickets were sold for the tournament, more than double the previous tournament sales.⁹³ Over the following five years:

- **girls' participation:** the number of girls aged 5 to 15 playing football increased from 1.2 million in 2020/21 to 3.0 million in 2025/26, up 141%
- **women's participation:** increased by 42% to 3.3 million.⁹⁴

This increased interest has translated into significant growth for the WSL.

- **Attendances and audiences:** WSL attendances have grown by an average of 50% a year since 2022. Although growth plateaued in 2025/26, annual attendance remained above one million.⁹⁵ Attendances varied between clubs: average WSL attendance was 6,800 per game, while Arsenal attracted over 33,000 spectators per game.⁹⁶ The WSL’s global fanbase has grown to 29 million and is projected to reach 135 million by 2037.⁹⁷
- **WSL revenues:** As a competition organiser, the WSL’s revenues have grown 300% since it became independent.⁹⁸ In 2024/25, it generated £17.4 million in turnover, including £8.7 million from broadcasting.⁹⁹ Its five-year domestic broadcast deal with Sky Sports and the BBC began in 2025/26, with an additional 75 games televised.¹⁰⁰ It generated £8.5 million in sponsorship and licensing revenues¹⁰¹, including through its latest sponsorship deal with Barclays for the WSL and WSL 2 until 2027.¹⁰²
- **Club revenues:** Total WSL club revenues have almost tripled from £32 million in 2021/22 to £90 million in 2024/25.¹⁰³ Whilst some of this reflects increased WSL revenues, much of the growth has come from commercial revenue, which represents 45% of club revenues. Matchday revenue has also grown considerably and represents 16% of club revenues.¹⁰⁴

- **UEFA revenues:** UEFA women's club competition revenues have grown from €0.4 million in 2017/18 to €19.3 million in 2024/25, an almost 50-fold increase.¹⁰⁵ UEFA has also expanded its women's club competitions from 2025/26 onwards, introducing a Women's Europa Cup and a new Women's Champions League format mirroring the men's competition.¹⁰⁶ UEFA revenues are a significant source of income for participating WSL clubs, with Arsenal receiving €1.5 million, Chelsea €1 million and Manchester City €0.9 million.¹⁰⁷
- **Investment:** Over the last three seasons, there have been ownership transactions worth £45 million across eight clubs.¹⁰⁸ WSL teams have also announced significant infrastructure investments. Brighton & Hove Albion expect to open a purpose-built, 10,000-capacity women's football stadium by the 2030/31 season,¹⁰⁹ while Goodison Park became the permanent home of Everton Women in 2025/26,¹¹⁰ contributing to a reported 231% increase in average attendance.¹¹¹ Many WSL clubs are also investing in training facilities.

More broadly, women's sport is expected to continue growing globally. Nielsen Sports and PepsiCo's 2025 global research forecasts that women's football will become one of the top five global sports by 2030, with more than 800 million fans.¹¹² This presents significant opportunities for the WSL, which plans to build WSL Football into a £1 billion revenue ecosystem by 2037.¹¹³

However, despite this growth, losses and net debt are increasing. Total losses before tax across WSL clubs increased from £10 million in 2020/21 to £42 million in 2024/25, while net debt reached £81 million in 2024/25.¹¹⁴ To address this, the WSL introduced new Financial Sustainability Regulations from the 2025/26 season, limiting the amount clubs can spend on squad salaries.¹¹⁵

Some of these losses are likely to reflect the relatively early stage of the women's game compared with the men's game, with investment required to expand its reach, attract new fans and increase its international competitiveness. However, continued growth will need to translate into a financially sustainable model.

1.9 Conclusion

English football has experienced extraordinary growth since 1992, becoming one of the world's most commercially successful and internationally competitive football markets. This growth has brought substantial benefits to clubs, supporters and communities, and attracted significant investment into the game.

However, the financial benefits of this success have not been shared evenly and greater revenues have not delivered greater financial sustainability. Our analysis finds:

- **English football's commercial success has been exceptional.** Revenue growth, investment and increasing global demand have created a virtuous circle that has strengthened quality, profile and international competitiveness of the English game.
- **Growth has widened financial disparities.** Premier League revenues have grown substantially faster than those elsewhere in the pyramid, while significant differences have also emerged within the Premier League and Championship.
- **Higher revenues have fuelled higher costs.** Strong sporting incentives encourage clubs to invest heavily in playing talent, with wage growth outstripping revenue growth in parts of the pyramid and losses remaining widespread.
- **The result is an increasingly stretched system.** English football generates substantially more revenue than it did three decades ago, but significant financial pressures remain across the pyramid.
- **Women's football presents a significant growth opportunity,** but its development must be financially sustainable. Audiences, revenues and investment are growing rapidly, while losses and debt are also increasing.

English football's remarkable growth and success have not resolved its underlying financial challenges. In some respects, growth has intensified them. The remainder of this report examines those challenges and their implications for the long-term financial sustainability of the game.

The current financial state of the game

02



2.1 Introduction

To frame our assessment of club financial soundness and the systemic resilience of the pyramid, we first analyse clubs' different business models and identify the risks they may create for individual clubs and the wider system. We then consider the key drivers of revenue and costs, assets, profitability and sources of finance.

- **Revenues:** Clubs generate significant revenues, but their ability to do so varies across the pyramid. We examine the drivers and distribution of revenues across the pyramid, including matchday, commercial and broadcast revenues.
- **Player and agent costs:** Players are central to a club's sporting success but also represent its largest cost and one of its most valuable assets. We examine the player market and the relationship between players and sporting success. This includes player wages, agent costs, player assets and amortisation, and the income from player trading.
- **Stadia and non-player costs:** Every club requires a stadium to host matches. For many clubs, it is also a significant financial and cultural asset and a major cost. We examine stadium ownership and value, incentives to invest in infrastructure and wider non-player operating costs.
- **Profitability and external financing:** Clubs are both cultural and financial assets, but owners do not typically operate them as profit-making entities. Most football clubs therefore operate at a loss and require external financing. We assess profitability across the pyramid and clubs' reliance on external financing.
- **Debt:** Debt is an important source of funding for some football clubs and is used for a range of purposes. We examine the growth and changing nature of debt, including its uses, types, and the availability and cost of borrowing for clubs.

2.2 Revenues

This chapter examines how clubs generate revenue, how revenue streams vary across the football pyramid and the factors that influence clubs' ability to grow revenues. It considers matchday, broadcast and commercial revenues, including the role of sporting performance, stadia and clubs' fanbases. Further detail is provided in Annex C – Revenues.¹¹⁶

What drives revenues?

Ultimately, fans drive football revenues through attending matches, generating commercial interest and paying to watch televised football. Several factors influence this:

- **Club choice:** Fans typically choose one club to support, influenced by factors including family and friends, the first club they watched and geographical proximity.¹¹⁷ Clubs in larger, more populous areas with a strong cultural affinity for football may have larger fanbases. The number of other clubs in the area also influences this.
- **Matchday attendance:** Fans' decision to attend matches depend on factors including ticket prices, the matchday experience and atmosphere, the quality and attractiveness of fixtures, ticket availability and ease of travel to the stadium.¹¹⁸
- **Televised viewing:** Demand to watch football on television is driven primarily by quality and competitiveness.¹¹⁹ The depth in the overall quality of football is important, with the number of star players and 'big teams' contributing to this. Competitiveness reflects the degree of jeopardy within matches and seasons, particularly around relegation, promotion, title races and UEFA qualification. It also reflects clubs' ability to rise and fall over time.
- **Commercial and sponsorship:** This is primarily driven by audience reach and engagement, which is impacted by the above.

Overview of revenue

As shown in Chart 2.2.1, clubs across the top five leagues of English football earned over £9 billion in total revenue in 2025/26. Revenue comes from three primary sources: matchday, commercial and broadcast income.

- **Premier League clubs earned £7.5 billion, representing 83% of total revenue across the top five leagues.**

- £3.8 billion broadcast revenue from the Premier League, UEFA and FIFA
- £1 billion of matchday revenue
- £2.7 billion of commercial revenue

- **The big six accounted for a significant proportion of Premier League revenues (56%):**

- £1.6 billion in broadcast revenue
- £700 million in matchday revenue
- £1.9 billion in commercial revenue

- **Championship clubs** earned around £1 billion, representing 11% of total revenue:

- £460 million of broadcast revenue
- £190 million of matchday revenue
- £360 million of commercial revenue

Within broadcast revenues, non-parachute clubs received £11 million each, compared with £55 million for parachute clubs in their first year and £46 million in their second.¹²⁰

- **League One and League Two clubs** earned a combined £460 million, representing 5% of total revenue:

- £145 million of broadcast revenue
- £160 million of matchday revenue
- £150 million of commercial revenue

- **National League clubs** earned around £70 million, representing 1% of total revenue:

- roughly £10 million of broadcast revenue
- £20 million of matchday revenue
- £40 million of commercial revenue

Overall, there is a strong link between sporting success and revenues as clubs higher up the pyramid earn greater revenues. However, the relative importance of these revenue streams varies significantly.

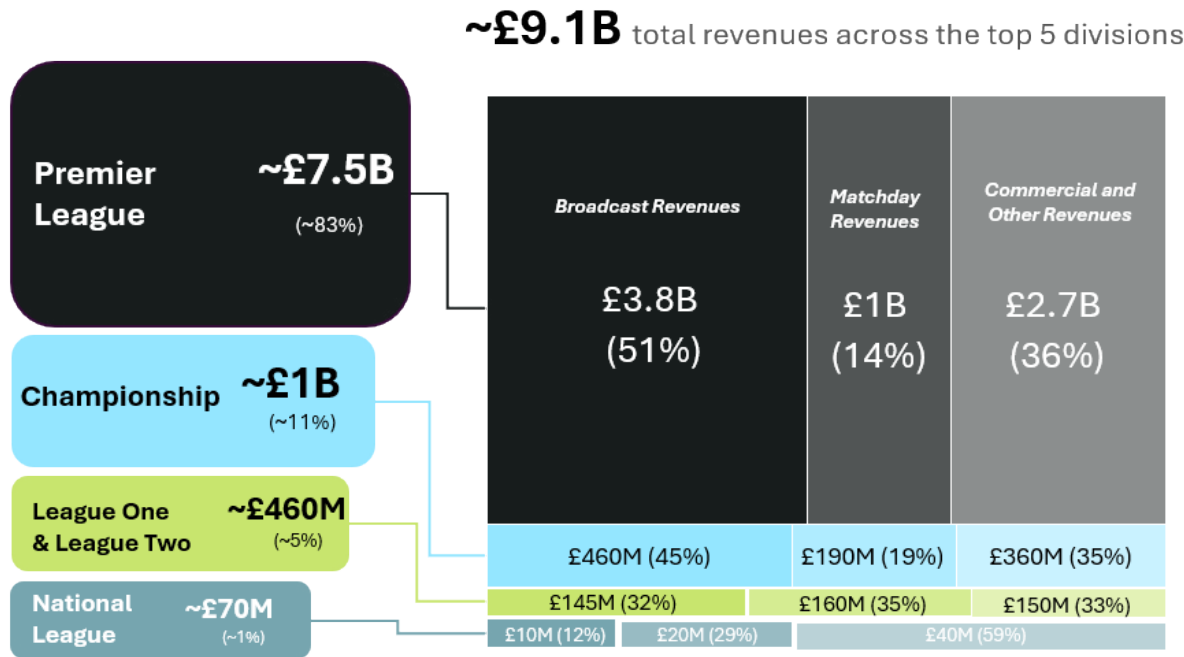
- **Broadcast:** Clubs in higher leagues receive higher centrally-distributed broadcast revenues. Premier League clubs, particularly those qualifying for UEFA competitions, earn significantly more broadcast revenue than clubs elsewhere in the pyramid.¹²¹ As a proportion of revenue, broadcast revenue is highest for non-big-six Premier League clubs (68%) and Championship clubs receiving parachute payments (60%).¹²²

- **Matchday:** Clubs higher up the pyramid earn more matchday revenue in absolute terms. Sporting success allows clubs to charge more for tickets and attract more matchday fans. This also requires investment in stadia. As a proportion of revenue, matchday revenues are typically less important further up the pyramid.¹²³

- **Commercial:** Although clubs higher up the pyramid earn more commercial revenues, the big six earn considerably more commercial revenue than other clubs. This reflects the sustained sporting success, brand and fanbase, which have been built over time. As a proportion of revenue, commercial revenue is similarly important across most of the pyramid.¹²⁴

English football generated over £9 billion in revenue in 2025/26.

Chart 2.2.1: Total revenue by league and source, 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart shows estimated total revenue for the 2025/26 season, split by league and revenue source. Broadcast revenues include central league distributions and other broadcast income from UEFA and cup competitions. Matchday revenue includes all ticket and season-ticket sales. Commercial and other revenue includes all sponsorship and other non-matchday, non-broadcast revenue. National League revenue is based on data for 19 clubs, extrapolated to the full 24-club league. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Figures greater than £1bn are rounded to the nearest £100m. Other figures are rounded to the nearest £5m.

The variation in revenue mix illustrates the different business models that individual clubs employ, with differences both within and across divisions. This means that clubs often have different risk profiles and face different financial pressures.

Broadcast revenues are heavily dependent on short term sporting performance – i.e. promotion/ relegation and European qualification. Whilst matchday and commercial revenues are also impacted by sporting performance, these differentials are smaller and timescales tend to be longer.

The financial impact of a downturn in sporting performance is greatest for clubs most reliant on broadcast revenues, such as non-big six Premier League clubs and parachute clubs in the Championship.

- For Premier League clubs, relegation creates a significant financial risk because it can lead to a steep decline in revenues, even with parachute payments.
- For parachute payment clubs, the risk arises because they receive parachute payments for only two years, or three if they have spent more than one successive year in the Premier League. Once parachute payments end, clubs face a steep reduction in revenues unless they have been promoted back to the Premier League.

2.3 Players and agents

This chapter provides an overview of the player market and the relationship between player spending and sporting success. It also considers the implications for club finances, particularly costs, assets and income streams. For further detail, see Annex D – Players and Agents.

Overview of the player market

The player market is highly competitive and increasingly international, particularly at the higher end of the pyramid. A player’s perceived quality is a key factor influencing their wages and transfer fee. Higher-quality players generally command higher wages and transfer fees. Other factors include the time remaining on a player’s contract, interest from other clubs, their relationship with their club and their age. The market is also shaped by agents, work permit requirements, including post-Brexit Governing Body Endorsements, legal developments and rules set by leagues, including those governing academies and spending.

The relationship between player-spend and sporting success

The quality of a club’s playing squad is a key driver of sporting success. Clubs that spend more on players than their rivals are generally able to recruit and retain higher-quality players, who tend to command higher wages and transfer fees. This means the strength of the association depends on relative player spend, which varies across leagues. However, sporting success also depends on how effectively clubs spend and use their squad. Other factors include the tactical system, squad cohesion, recruitment approach, how well the playing style suits the division and, to some extent, luck.¹²⁵ As a result, some clubs outperform expectations through effective spending while others underperform despite similar or greater spending.¹²⁶

The relationship between player spending and sporting success is well established in academic research and relevant legal cases.¹²⁷

'It is common ground that expenditure confers a sporting advantage – that is the reason that clubs spend money on players'¹²⁸

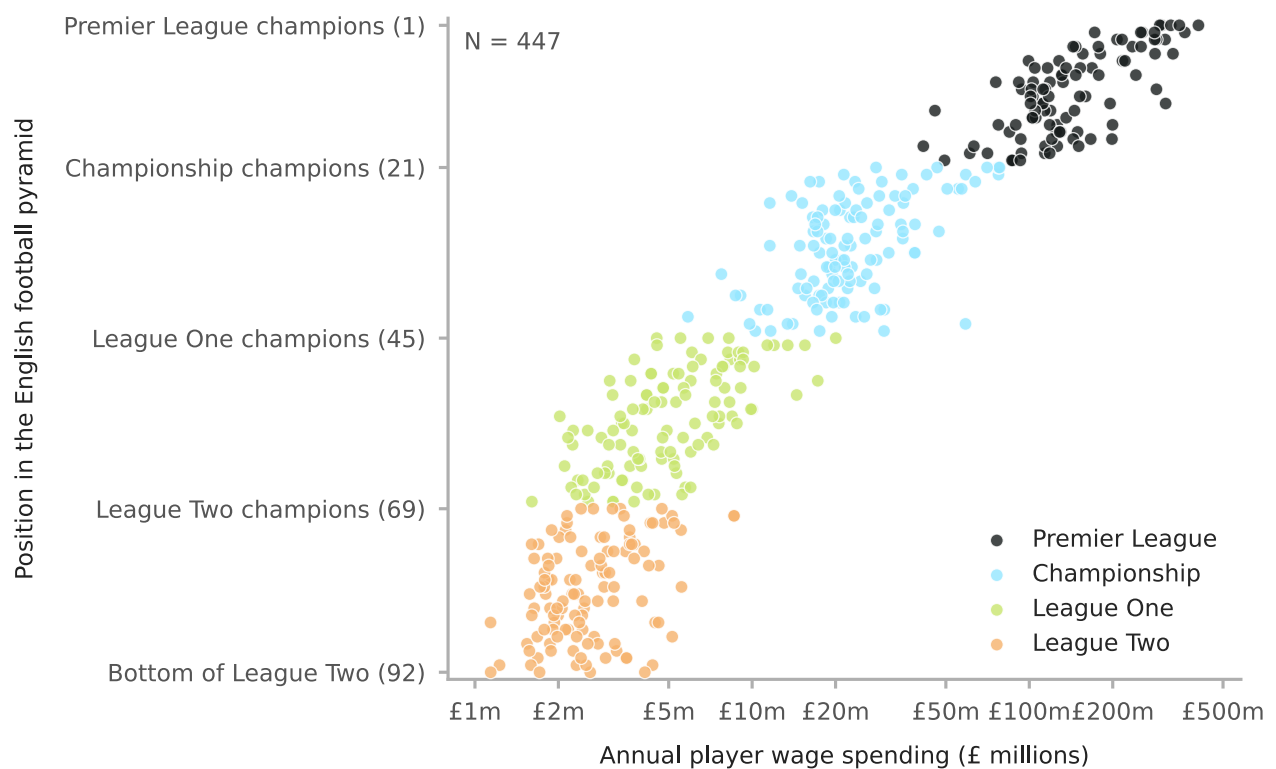
'Higher squad spending by clubs increases the likelihood of sporting success, which in turn is associated with stronger commercial and financial outcomes.'¹²⁹

Chart 2.3.1 similarly shows a strong association between league position and player wage spend across the Premier League and EFL.¹³⁰ It is not possible to formally establish causation in this analysis because clubs that have typically been more successful earn greater revenues and can therefore spend more on players.

However, further statistical analysis presented in Annex E – Player spending and sporting success, shows a positive and statistically significant association. The link appears strongest in the Premier League and slightly weaker in the Championship, League One and League Two, but remains significant.

Clubs that spend more on wages tend to finish higher in their league, but spending does not fully determine sporting success.

Chart 2.3.1: Relationship between player wage spending and league position, 2021/22 to 2025/26



Note: horizontal axis shown on a logarithmic scale

Source: IFR analysis of data received from the [Premier League](#) and the [EFL](#) in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available league table data obtained from the Premier League and the EFL.

Note: Each dot represents a club-season and shows the association between annual player wages and final pyramid position on a logarithmic spending scale. The relationship does not imply causation. Horizontal axis shown on a logarithmic scale.

This relationship has several implications for the industry.

- **Virtuous circle:** Higher player spending may increase the likelihood of sporting success, which can immediately increase revenues through promotion and qualification for UEFA competitions, allowing clubs to invest further in players. Over the medium term, sporting success can also increase matchday and commercial revenues, creating further capacity for player investment. As a result, larger and historically successful clubs may have a greater chance of sustained success and further revenue growth. This can make it difficult for clubs without an established fanbase or significant existing revenue streams to break into this group. Some clubs seek to accelerate the process through external funding. This can support investment in players and improve sporting performance, which can in turn increase revenue.
- **Cost of competing:** This dynamic creates a cost of competing at every level. Clubs competing higher in the pyramid generally need to spend more to assemble a sufficiently competitive squad. As a result, promoted clubs are likely to need to increase player spending while relegated clubs may be able to reduce it while remaining competitive.
- **Arms race:** Competition for players can create pressure on clubs to increase spending. Where one club invests significantly in its playing squad, other clubs may face pressure to increase their own spending to remain competitive. This can contribute to rising player costs across the league.

Rising player and agent costs

These dynamics are reflected in clubs' finances.

- **Clubs higher in the football pyramid tend to have higher player wage costs.** In 2025/26, player wage costs ranged from:
 - £88 million to £364 million in the Premier League
 - £15 million to £59 million in the Championship,
 - £3 million to £17 million in League One,
 - £1.8 million to £8.6 million in League Two and
 - £0.7 million to £4.4 million in the National League.¹³¹
- **Player wages¹³² also represent a significant proportion of clubs' revenues, particularly below the Premier League.** In 2025/26, player wage costs typically ranged from 30% to 80% of revenue across all divisions. However:
 - 20 clubs, primarily in the Championship, League One and National League, spent more than 80% of revenue on player wages
 - Six clubs spent more than 100%

- **Player wage costs have increased across all leagues.** Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, average player wage costs grew by:
 - 33% in the Premier League
 - 32% in the Championship
 - 71% in League One
 - 63% in League Two¹³³
- **Alongside rising player wage costs, transfer and agent costs have increased materially.**
 - Between 2021/22 and 2025/26 amortisation costs across the pyramid doubled from £1.3 billion to £2.6 billion.¹³⁴
 - Total agent fees also increased from £317 million to £548 million over the same period,¹³⁵ representing 17% of English clubs' total transfer costs in 2025/26.¹³⁶

High player costs can pose a risk to financial soundness because they are difficult to reduce quickly. Players are typically signed to multi-year contracts and can usually only move during transfer windows.

A reduction in revenue or funding can therefore make it more difficult for clubs to meet their player wage commitments. More broadly, rising costs across the pyramid poses a systemic risk. As the cost of competing continues to rise, so can losses and reliance on owner funding.

Players as an asset and income stream

Although players represent a significant cost to clubs, player registrations are also valuable assets. Where the club has paid a transfer fee, the book value of player registrations is recorded on a club's balance sheet. However, the squad's market value is typically much higher. Some players have little or no book value because no transfer fee was paid, including academy graduates and free agents. The value of players bought for a fee may also have increased significantly during their time at the club.

Clubs can therefore generate profit through player sales where they sell a player for more than they bought them for. More broadly, player sales can represent a significant income stream and provide funds in adverse scenarios such as relegation or the withdrawal of owner funding. However, relying on player trading income carries risks. Player development can be costly, values are not guaranteed to rise and clubs must replace players they sell.

The extent to which clubs generate income from player trading varies within and across leagues and from year to year depending on their recruitment strategy. In 2025/26, most Premier League clubs were net buyers, although five broadly broke even and two were net sellers.¹³⁷ Championship clubs were broadly evenly split between net buyers and net sellers. The majority of League One clubs and all League Two clubs were net sellers.¹³⁸ More information on aggregate transfer debt across the top five divisions is provided in Chapter 4.5.

2.4 Stadia and non-player operating costs

This chapter considers stadium ownership and investment, followed by non-player operating costs across the pyramid.

Stadium ownership and investment

For many clubs, the stadium is one of their most significant assets, both financially and as part of their cultural heritage. However, ownership structures vary across the pyramid:

- 59% of club stadia are owned by the club or an affiliated entity
- 41% are owned by local authorities or third parties.¹³⁹

Not owning a stadium does not necessarily create a financial soundness risk. However, it can affect a club's balance sheet, complicate a sale and constrain investment in infrastructure and matchday revenue growth.

Clubs face different incentives to invest in stadia. Investment can increase matchday revenues, but its attractiveness depends on whether the expected increase in revenue outweighs the cost. Premier League clubs can typically generate more revenue per seat per match than EFL and National League clubs because of higher ticket prices and excess demand. This increases the expected return on investment.¹⁴⁰ They also generate greater revenues and operating profits and may find it easier to secure infrastructure financing. As a result, infrastructure investment is higher in the Premier League than in the lower leagues. More detail can be found in Annex F – Stadia and non-player operating costs.

- **Between 2021/22 and 2024/25, at least nine Premier League clubs made a significant investment in their stadium or training ground.**
 - one new stadium
 - at least three stadium redevelopments
 - at least five training-ground developments
 - Infrastructure investment totalled £2.2 billion over the period, equivalent to an average of 6% of total cash outflows across the four seasons.¹⁴¹
- **EFL clubs invested significantly less in infrastructure in absolute terms.** Between 2021/22 and 2024/25, EFL clubs reported £417 million of infrastructure investment. This represented 4% of total cash outflows and around one-fifth of the amount reported by Premier League clubs.¹⁴²
 - Championship clubs spent £258 million
 - League One clubs spent £143 million
 - League Two clubs spent £16 million¹⁴³
 - At least three EFL clubs have also announced plans for new stadia, with another two announcing a stadium redevelopment and one planning a training-ground redevelopment.¹⁴⁴

Non-player operating costs

Alongside the costs of operating stadia and training facilities, clubs face significant non-player operating costs. Like other businesses, football clubs have been affected by changes in the labour market, taxation and wider cost pressures, as well as rising costs associated with climate change.

For further detail, see Annex F – Stadia and non-player operating costs.

Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, non-player operating costs increased by:

- **68% in the Premier League**
- **67% in the Championship**
- **60% in League One**
- **58% in League Two¹⁴⁵**

Although non-player operating costs are higher in absolute terms further up the pyramid, they account for a greater proportion of revenue in the lower leagues. For every £1 of revenue earned, on average:¹⁴⁶

- a Premier League club spends £0.39 on non-player operating costs, ranging from £0.29 to £0.53
- a Championship club spends £0.76, ranging from £0.48 to £0.98
- a League One club spends £1.00 while a League Two club spends £0.87, with a range of £0.43 to £2.35 across both leagues
- a National League club spends £0.91, ranging from £0.43 to £1.58

Overall, 17 clubs across the EFL and National League incurred non-player operating costs exceeding total revenue, showing that their core operations would be loss-making even before player wage costs are considered.

Non-player operating costs can create a financial soundness risk for clubs, particularly below the Premier League. These costs are relatively fixed, particularly staffing and utilities. This limits clubs' ability to reduce expenditure quickly if revenues or external financing falls.

More broadly, continued growth in these costs could increase systemic risk as clubs may need additional owner funding or have to reduce on-pitch expenditure or cuts to off-pitch operations.

Further detail is contained in Annex F – Stadia and non-player operating costs.

2.5 Profitability and external financing

This chapter assesses clubs’ profitability and reliance on external financing before considering the relationship with competition organisers’ financial rules. For further detail, see Annex G – Profitability and external financing.¹⁴⁷

Profitability

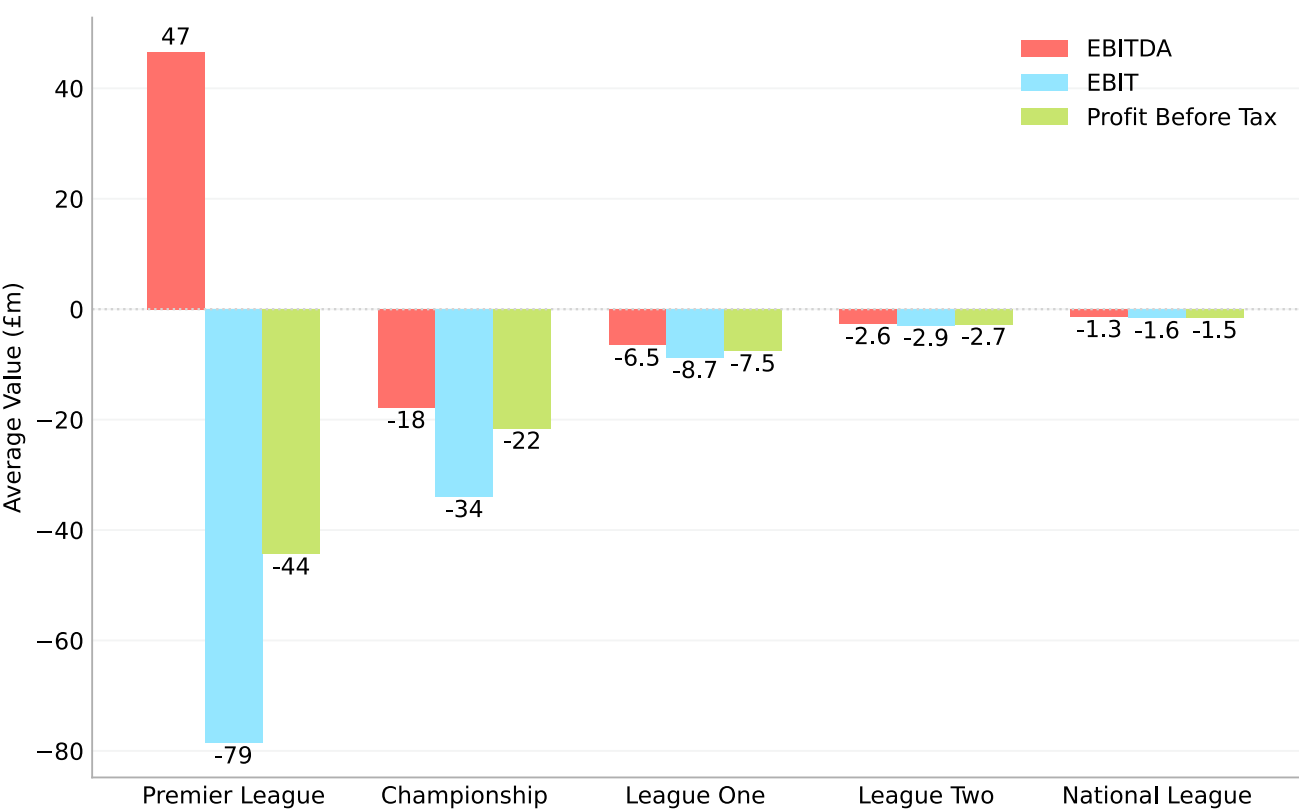
There are several ways to measure football club profitability, each capturing different elements of a club’s profit and loss account. Common measures include:

- **EBITDA (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation):** measures a club’s underlying cash-generating performance before non-cash accounting changes, player trading and financing costs.
- **EBIT (earnings before interest and tax):** deducts depreciation and amortisation, including player amortisation, from EBITDA, providing a measure of profitability after accounting for changes in long-term assets and player investments.¹⁴⁸ It therefore tends to be lower than EBITDA.
- **Profit before Tax:** starts with EBIT and deducts financing costs. It also includes other non-operating items such as profits or losses on player sales, other asset sales and exceptional items. In most cases, profit before tax is higher than EBIT because it includes profits from player and other asset sales, although it can be lower depending on financing and exceptional items.

Chart 2.5.1 shows average EBITDA, EBIT and profit before tax in each division in 2025/26. Average EBIT was lower than average EBITDA in every division but higher than average profit before tax. **Premier League EBITDA was the only positive average measure, at £47 million. All other measures across all divisions reflected losses.** Part of the reason for this is that clubs are not typically run as profit-making businesses but are instead focused on achieving sporting success.

Average profitability is negative across most measures and divisions.

Chart 2.5.1: Average measures of profitability by division (2025/26)



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

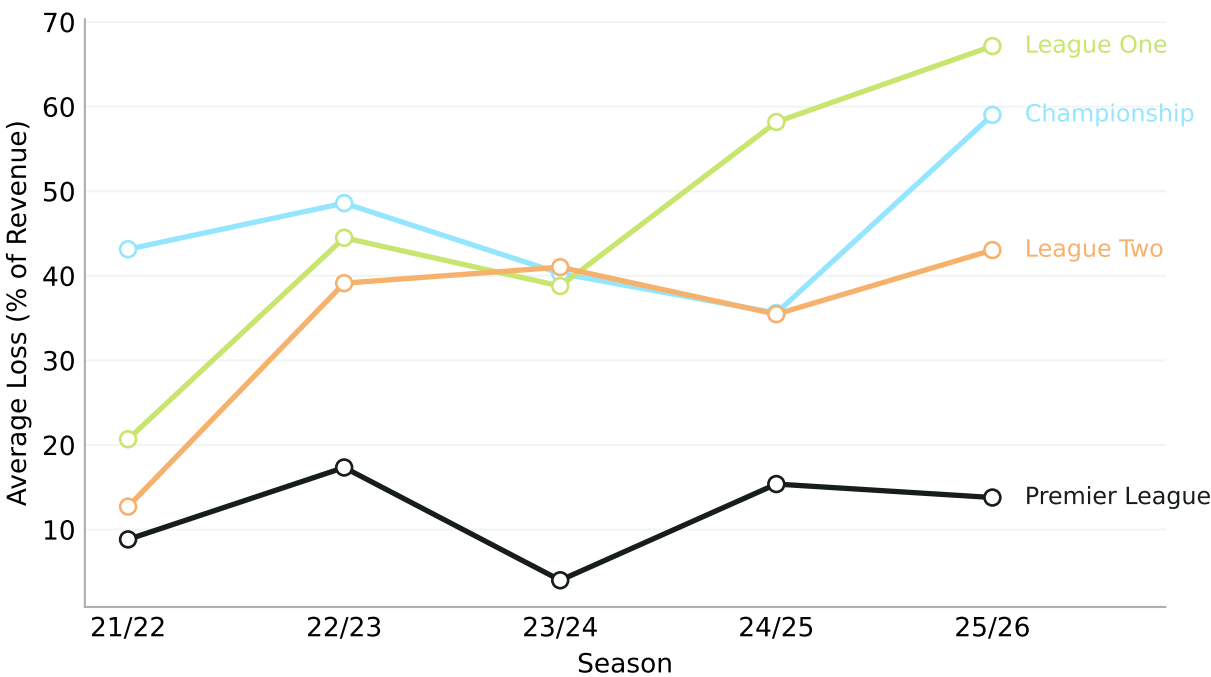
We focus on profit before tax as the primary measure of profitability because it captures both operating performance and the impact of player trading and financing costs. As such, it reflects the full economic consequences of a club's business model and investment decisions.¹⁴⁹

94% of clubs across the top five English leagues were loss-making based on profit before tax in 2025/26. Chart 2.5.2 shows that these persistent losses have also increased over time.¹⁵⁰

- **Premier League:** Average losses more than doubled from £20 million in 2021/22 to £44 million in 2025/26 but remained broadly stable at around 10-20% of revenues.
 - **Championship:** Average losses remained relatively stable between £11-£13 million until 2024/25 before increasing to £22 million in 2025/26, equivalent to around 59% of revenue.
 - **League One:** Average losses more than tripled from £2.4 million in 2021/22 to £7.5 million in 2025/26, reaching 67% of revenue.
 - **League Two:** Average losses increased more than fourfold from £0.6 million in 2021/22 to £2.7 million in 2025/26, reaching over 40% of revenue.
- Rising losses have particularly affected clubs below the Premier League, where losses are greatest relative to revenues. In 2025/26, for every £1 earned of revenue, on average:
- a non-parachute Championship club **lost 64p**
 - a League One club **lost 67p**
 - a League Two club **lost 43p**
 - a National League club **lost 57p**¹⁵¹

Losses as a proportion of revenue have increased across all divisions, particularly in League One and League Two.

Chart 2.5.2: Average losses as a percentage of revenue by division, 2021/22 – 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart shows average losses before tax as a percentage of revenue by division between 2021/22 and 2025/26.

External financing

As losses have grown across the pyramid, clubs are increasingly reliant on owner funding, including shareholder loans and equity injections, as well as commercial debt. Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, **external financing more than doubled in the Premier League and Championship and more than trebled in League One and League Two.**^{152 153} In 2025/26, for every £1 of revenue, on average:¹⁵⁴

- a Premier League club required 33p in external financing
- a Championship club required 57p
- a League One club required 72p
- a League Two club required 26p
- a National League club required 55p

Across the top five divisions, at least 30 clubs received external financing equivalent to more than 50% of their revenues.

Overall, persistent losses and reliance on external financing, usually owner funding, create a financial soundness risk if that financing does not materialise. Increasing losses and reliance on external financing across the pyramid also create a systemic risk. We explore these risks further in Section 3, 'Assessing club financial soundness'.

Impact of competition organiser rules

Competition organisers have introduced financial rules, outlined in Box 2.5.1, partly to constrain spending and losses across the pyramid. While losses may have been greater without these rules, both losses and reliance on external financing have nevertheless increased considerably.

Recent changes to these rules, also outlined in Box 2.5.1, are unlikely to materially constrain spending or reverse these trends and, in the Championship, may exacerbate them:

- **Premier League:** The 85% squad cost ratio limit, introduced in 2026/27, does not directly constrain losses or external financing. Based on 2025/26 squad costs, it would have been binding for only three clubs.¹⁵⁵ No club spent above the theoretical 115% limit permitted under the new rules.¹⁵⁶
- **Championship:** SCR rules introduced in 2026/27 (outlined in Box 2.5.1) may significantly loosen financial constraints. IFR analysis, described further in Section 4.2, shows that if clubs used all available headroom under the new rules:
 - total squad cost expenditure could increase by £460 million, from £1.02 billion to £1.48 billion¹⁵⁷
 - the average non-parachute club could increase its squad cost ratio from 86% to 125%
 - this would allow an additional £15.8 million of spending per club, from £34.7 million to £50.5 million
- **League One:** The SCMP cap has fallen from 60% to 50% of turnover in 2026/27.¹⁵⁸ While this may constrain some clubs' spending, clubs will also be permitted to spend 50% of additional equity injections on wages above the turnover-based cap.¹⁵⁹
- **League Two and National League:** No new rules have been announced or approved, so existing spending constraints will remain unchanged.

Box 2.5.1: League profitability and spending rules

Each set of competition organiser rules use slightly different terminology. See references for specific methodologies and definitions.

UEFA

- UEFA's 'Financial Sustainability Regulations' have three pillars: solvency, relating to clubs' outstanding payables; stability, limiting the losses clubs can incur; and cost control, **limiting squad costs to 70% of revenues** from 2025/26 onwards.¹⁶⁰

Premier League

- **Previous Profitability and Sustainability Rules (PSR) limited adjusted losses to £105 million over a rolling three-year period.**
- In 2026/27, **PSR** has been replaced by the **Squad Cost Ratio (SCR)**.¹⁶¹ This limits spending on player and head coach wages, transfer fee amortisation and agents' fees to 85% of football revenue. Clubs also have a multi-year allowance permitting spending above 85% up to a maximum of 115%, subject to league rules.¹⁶²

Championship

- **The EFL's previous Profitability and Sustainability Rules (EFL P&S) limited adjusted losses to £39 million over a rolling three-year period.**¹⁶³ Certain expenditure was excluded from the loss calculation, including spending on infrastructure, academies and women's football.
- In 2026/27, the Championship moved to an **SCR system**. As in the Premier League, clubs can spend up to 85% of income on player- and manager-related costs, including transfer fees.¹⁶⁴ Clubs also have a permitted top-up allowance of £33 million over three years, capped at £15 million in any one season.

League One and League Two

- League One and League Two clubs must meet the **EFL Salary Cost Management Protocol (SCMP)**. In 2025/26, SCMP capped League One player wages and agents' fees at 60% of turnover (75% for clubs relegated from the Championship) and limited the extent to which equity injections could contribute to wages.¹⁶⁵ For League Two, it capped player wages, agents' fees and manager-related expenditure at 50% of turnover.¹⁶⁶
- In 2026/27, **the League One cap fell to 50% of turnover** (65% for relegated clubs) with manager costs now included. Clubs can also spend 50% of equity injections on wages in addition to spending already permitted as a percentage of turnover.¹⁶⁷ **The League Two SCMP remains unchanged.**¹⁶⁸

National League

- While the **National League does not enforce financial controls such as PSR, SCR or SCMP**, clubs are required to submit financial reports in line with League Two SCMP requirements.¹⁶⁹

2.6 Debt

This chapter considers how football club debt has changed in recent years and the current debt landscape. It covers uses of debt, debt providers, access to debt, costs, covenants and security. The assessment focuses on interest-bearing debt, rather than non-interest-bearing shareholder loans. This is because unlike interest-bearing debt, non-interest-bearing shareholder loans typically have more flexible repayment terms and may therefore operate more like quasi-equity than debt. More detail can be found in Annex H – Debt.

Uses and growth of debt

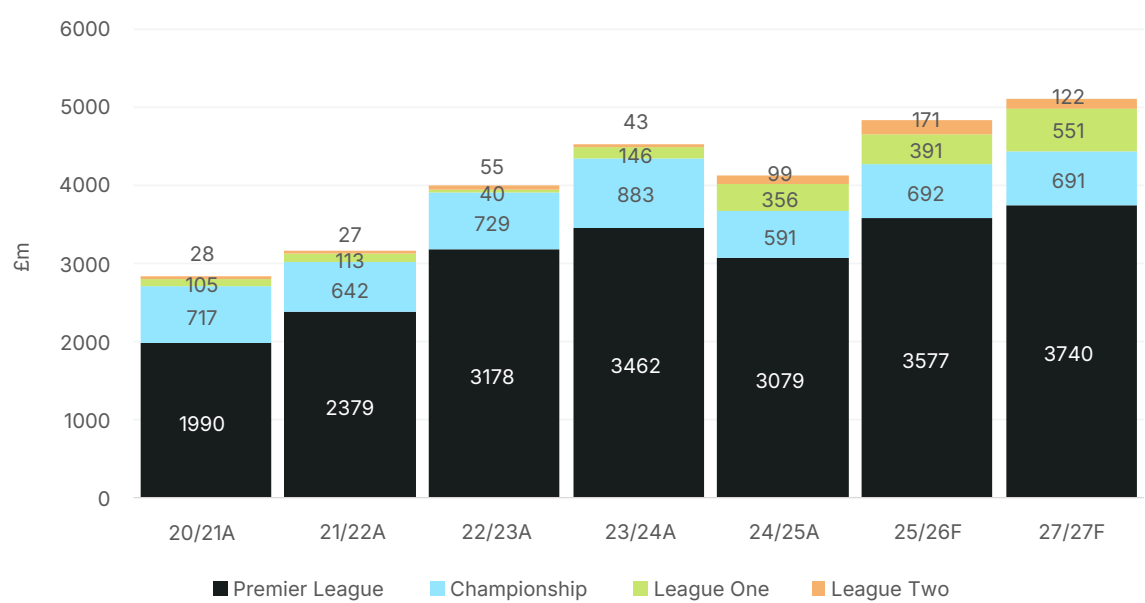
Debt is an important source of funding for football clubs and can be used to fund infrastructure investment, manage working capital and liquidity requirements, and bring forward income by borrowing against future cash flows.

Debt across English football increased significantly from approximately £2.8 billion in 2020/21 to £4.1 billion in 2024/25 and is forecast to reach £5.1 billion by 2026/27.¹⁷⁰ Premier League clubs account for around 75% of total debt, but debt has also increased significantly in League One and League Two.

Across English football, debt growth has broadly kept pace with revenue growth.¹⁷¹ However, in League One and League Two debt has grown significantly faster than revenues.¹⁷²

Gross debt across English football is forecast to reach £5.1 billion by 2026/27.

Chart 2.6.1: Gross debt outstanding, 2020-21 – 2026,27, £m



Source: Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: 'A' denotes actual figures; 'F' denotes forecast figures. Data over time is not available for National League clubs. Non-interest bearing shareholder loans are not included in the assessment of gross debt.

Shareholder Loans

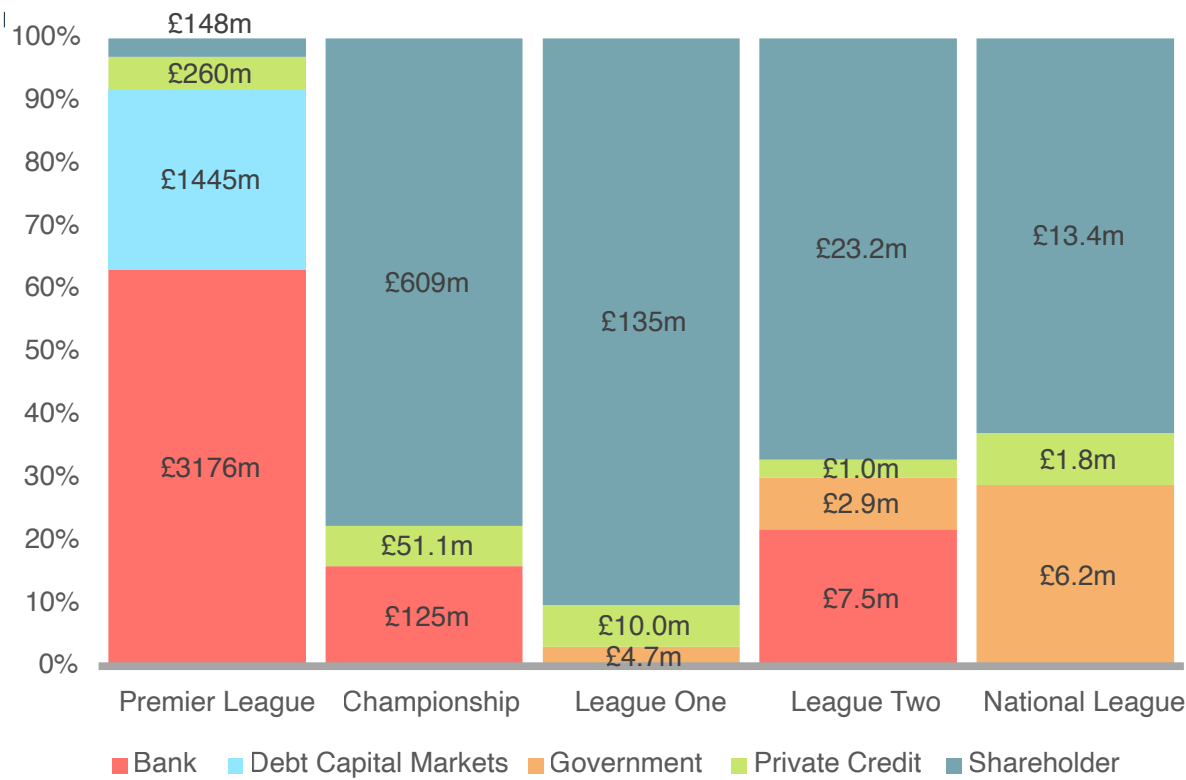
As set out in Chart 2.6.2, shareholder loans play an important role in English football below the Premier League. In 2025/26, shareholder loans only accounted for 3% of Premier League clubs’ debt. However, they accounted for:

- 78% of Championship club debt
- 90% of League One club debt
- 67% of League Two club debt
- 63% of National League club debt

Shareholder loans often carry lower or no interest and more flexible repayment terms than external debt. Shareholders may accept greater risk and longer repayment periods, meaning these loans can perform a quasi-equity function. They can also provide equity injections or convert debt to equity. This provides funding that does not appear as a liability on the club’s balance sheet.

Premier League clubs access a wider range of external debt, while clubs in the lower divisions are typically more reliant on shareholder loans.

Chart 2.6.2: Debt products used by clubs, 2025/26



Source: Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR based on data received from clubs in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: Non-interest-bearing shareholder loans are not included in the assessment of debt.

Third Party Debt

The widespread use of shareholder debt is partly because access to third-party debt varies considerably across the football pyramid. Lenders assess factors including:

- the scale and predictability of revenues
- the ability to generate sufficient cash flow to meet interest and principal repayments (debt-service capacity)
- the value of assets or contracted revenues that can be offered as security (financeable assets)
- the ability to meet financial obligations without ongoing owner support (liquidity resilience)
- the availability of refinancing options

Together, these factors determine a club's credit quality – its ability to repay debt in full and on time.

- **Premier League clubs generally have greater credit quality** and can therefore access a wider range of debt providers and products. **Premier League clubs had over £3 billion of bank debt and almost £1.5 billion of debt from debt capital markets.**

- **Access varies significantly among Championship clubs**, reflecting the range from recently relegated Premier League clubs, which have access to a wider range of debt products, to recently promoted League One clubs, which have more limited access.
- **Access to traditional third-party debt is more limited below the Championship.** These clubs therefore rely more heavily on shareholder funding and government-backed lending (primarily COVID loans).

In addition to debt, many clubs will use transfer financing. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.5.

Box 2.6.1: Providers and types of debt in English football

Banks:

- offer a range of banking products to support with working capital and liquidity, including (but not limited to) committed debt facilities (term loans, revolving credit facilities), uncommitted debt facilities (overdrafts) and transfer financing facilities.

Debt capital markets:

- can offer US Private Placements (USPPs), where privately issued debt is placed with institutional investors, and public bonds, which are issued to a wider group of investors. Both are typically used to raise long-term funding, often at fixed interest rates with the full amount repaid or refinanced at maturity.

Private credit providers:

- typically non-bank lenders, including specialist sports lenders, which have become increasingly active in recent years. Their facilities can resemble traditional loans but may be tailored to specific financing requirements. Private Credit lenders typically have higher risk tolerance and greater flexibility on terms, in return for higher pricing and less collaboration/relationship focus in distress/default scenarios.

Government financing:

- generally provided for specific policy purposes. For example, government-backed loans were made available during the COVID-19 pandemic to support clubs facing lost matchday revenues.

Costs, covenants and security

Differences in types and scale of debt across the pyramid are also reflected in borrowing costs, financial covenants and security required.

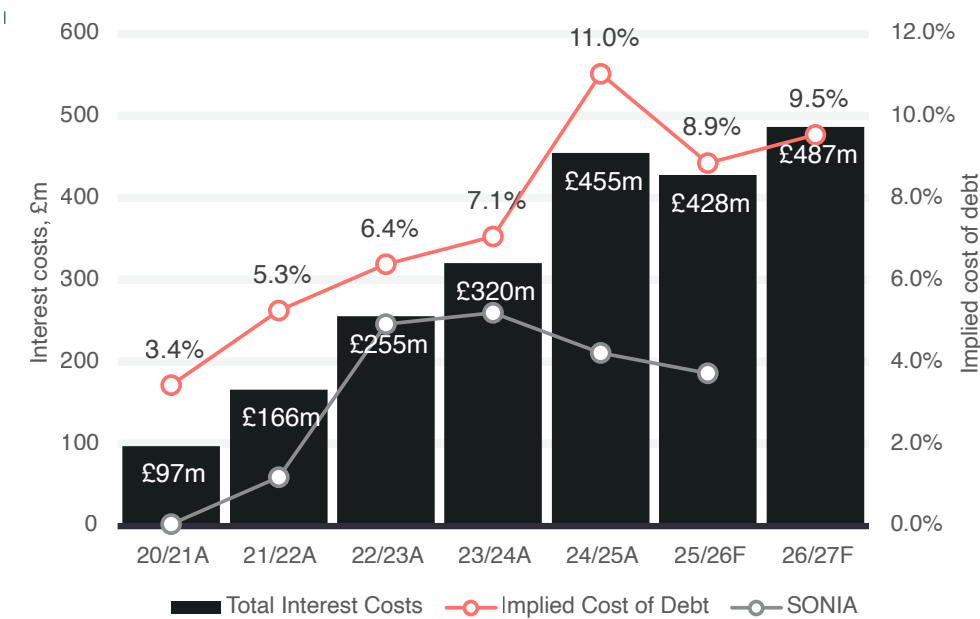
Costs of debt

Interest is the primary cost of debt, alongside other fees, and borrowing costs vary across the pyramid and over time.

- **Premier League clubs have the lowest borrowing costs**, with a mean interest margin of 2.8%, while Championship clubs have the highest, at 6.7%.¹⁷³ However, there is considerable variation within leagues and across leagues. Some clubs rely on more costly external financing, while lower-league clubs often use shareholder loans and government-backed facilities on more favourable terms than commercial debt.
- **Borrowing costs have increased significantly since 2020/21.**
 - **Aggregate interest costs rose from approximately £97 million in 2020/21 to £455 million in 2024/25,¹⁷⁴ equivalent to a 370% increase, compared with a 45% increase in gross debt.¹⁷⁵**
 - The overall implied cost of debt has increased from 3.4% to 11.0%,¹⁷⁶ partly reflecting higher market interest rates and clubs' exposure to floating-rate debt. 79% of Premier League clubs have at least one floating-rate debt facility,¹⁷⁷ while reference rates such as the Bank of England Base Rate and SONIA rose from close to 0% to more than 5%, between 2020 and 2024, increasing borrowing costs.¹⁷⁸

Total interest costs and the implied cost of debt have increased.

Chart 2.6.3: Interest costs, £m and implied cost of debt, %



Source: Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League, and clubs in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: 'A' denotes actual figures and 'F' denotes forecast figures. Non-interest-bearing shareholder loans are not included in the assessment of interest costs and the implied cost of debt.

Financial covenants

Financial covenants are used by lenders to monitor a club’s financial performance and credit quality over the life of a debt facility, and may require clubs to maintain specified financial thresholds or ratios. A breach may require corrective action or a waiver from the lender and, in some cases, if not remedied, result in an Event of Default.¹⁷⁹

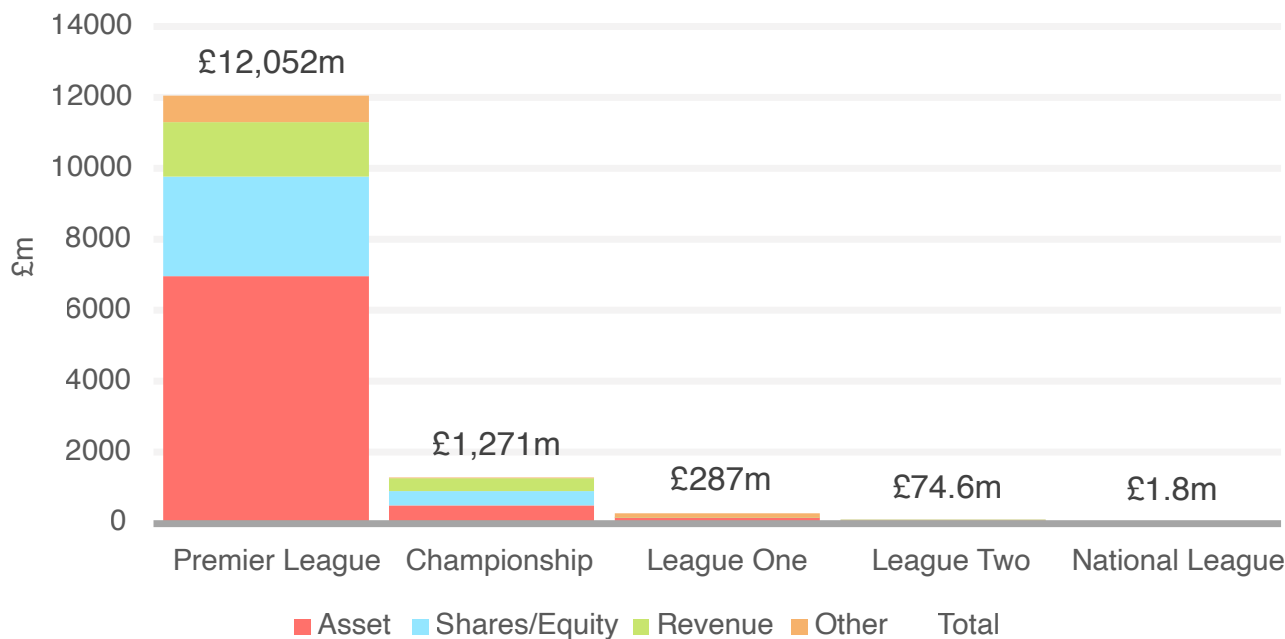
Covenants relating to relegation are a unique feature of football debt. They typically provide lenders with additional protections if a club is relegated, such as accelerated repayment, higher interest margins, restrictions on additional borrowing or securing over future revenues. These reflect the significant impact relegation can have on a club’s revenues and credit quality.

Relegation covenants are most prevalent among Premier League clubs, with 60% of clubs having at least one debt facility containing one.¹⁸⁰ Approximately 35% of Premier League debt facilities contain full or partial repayment clauses on relegation, 21% use broadcasting, sponsorship or commercial receivables as security and 15% provide for higher interest margins following relegation.¹⁸¹

Three clubs borrow under facilities which include parachute payments as a source of either repayment or security.¹⁸² Lenders may also impose tighter covenant requirements, cash sweeps, additional monitoring or restrictions on future borrowing following relegation. **These arrangements can amplify the financial impact of relegation by increasing repayment obligations, borrowing costs or restrictions as club revenues fall sharply.**

Approximately £13.7 billion of security is pledged against club debt, with around 90% concentrated in the Premier League.

Chart 2.6.4: Value pledged as security for debt financing, 2025/26, £m



Source: Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR data received from clubs in response to IFR requests for information.

Security

Security gives a creditor rights over specified assets, revenues or shareholdings if a borrower is unable to meet its obligations¹⁸³

By reducing risk to lenders, security can improve a club's access to debt and reduce borrowing costs. However, it also gives lenders a degree of control over key assets and cash flows during periods of financial stress.

As shown in Chart 2.6.4, clubs had approximately £13.7 billion of assets, revenues and equity pledged as security against borrowings, the vast majority of which was concentrated in the Premier League.

Premier League clubs accounted for approximately £12.1 billion, compared with £1.3 billion in the Championship, £287 million in League One, £75 million in League Two and £1.8 million in the National League. Fixed assets are the most commonly used form of security, followed by shares/equity and revenues.

2.7 Conclusion

Our analysis of clubs' different business models, including their revenues, costs, assets, profitability and sources of finance, highlights five key findings:

- **Revenue:** Although all clubs generate revenue from matchday, commercial and broadcast sources, the scale and relative importance of these revenue streams varies across the pyramid, giving clubs different risk profiles. In particular, the **variance in broadcast revenue season-to-season depending on sporting performance (i.e. promotion/relegation/UEFA qualification):** (i) creates an incentive to overspend to achieve sporting success; and (ii) produces significant financial stresses if relegation occurs.
- **Player costs:** Given the link between player spending and sporting success, clubs have strong incentives to spend a significant proportion of revenue on players. Although player registrations can be significant financial assets and player trading an important source of cashflow, player wages are a significant and growing cost that can be difficult to reduce quickly. **Rising player costs can therefore increase both individual club financial soundness risks, and, more broadly, drive losses and reliance on owner funding across the pyramid.**
- **Stadia and other operating costs:** Alongside players, stadia are important financial and cultural assets, although only 60% of clubs own their stadium. Whilst clubs at the top of the pyramid have the opportunity to invest in infrastructure and grow revenues, the incentive to invest is reduced further down the pyramid. **Stadium and other non-player costs place a proportionately greater burden on lower-league clubs** and are often relatively fixed, limiting clubs' ability to reduce expenditure when revenues or external financing fall. At the bottom end of the pyramid, the financial model of football clubs faces the most intense strain.
- **Profitability and financing:** Clubs have not typically operated as profitable entities, and growth in player and non-player operating costs has increased losses, particularly below the Premier League, resulting in greater reliance on external financing. **Persistent loss-making and reliance on external financing creates financial soundness risk for individual clubs if expected financing does not materialise.** At a system-wide level, football is not self-sufficient and is systemically vulnerable if economic circumstances worsen or investor appetite slows.
- **Debt:** Debt is an important source of funding across English football. Debt levels have increased significantly, with debt to revenue ratios growing significantly in League One and League Two. Borrowing costs have increased significantly. Transfer debt has increased significantly. **Clubs lower down the pyramid have limited access to debt products so would struggle to use debt to manage a short-term cash crisis.** Larger clubs have access to debt markets, though prices are increasing. **Debt structures linked to relegation increase financial pressures for clubs relegated, especially from the Premier League.**

Assessing club financial soundness

03



3.1 Introduction

The IFR has a statutory objective to protect and promote the financial soundness of clubs. The explanatory notes to the Football Governance Act define 'financial soundness' as a club's expected ability to continue meeting its liabilities and debts in the future, including when circumstances change or the club faces financial shocks.¹⁸⁴

We consider three areas, taking into account the football-specific context:

- **Liquidity:** whether clubs can meet their short-term obligations and continue their day-to-day operations. We consider this through:
 - the extent to which clubs generate cash from their core operations
 - whether clubs have sufficient liquid assets to meet short-term obligations, recognising that player registrations can represent a liquid asset during transfer windows
 - given clubs' reliance on external financing, how long they could operate without it and whether they have contingency plans in place
- **Solvency:** whether clubs can meet their medium- and long-term obligations. We consider this through:
 - whether clubs' total assets exceed their total liabilities, recognising that the market value of player registrations may not be captured on the balance sheet
 - the extent to which clubs can generate income to repay their debts
 - whether clubs' net debts exceed their estimated value, recognising that their assets may not capture the full value of the club
- **Financial distress:** the likelihood of financial distress in practice and the potential warning signs. To understand financial distress in football, we consider historical evidence and common pathways to distress before assessing the most useful indicators of emerging financial distress.

Why football is different

- Unlike other traditional industries, football club owners are not purely motivated by financial returns.
- Football clubs are typically loss-making and reliant on owner-funding to fund those losses.
- Clubs' size and risk vary across and within leagues. The market value of player registrations is not fully reflected on a club's balance sheet. Player sales can raise cash, but only during transfer windows.
- Shareholder loans are widely used in football and operate differently from commercial debt. They typically carry lower interest rates, are often unsecured and are sometimes referred to as 'soft loans'.
- Football clubs are subject to their competition organiser's financial rules.

3.2 Liquidity

Chapter at a glance

This chapter considers clubs' ability to meet their short-term obligations and continue their day-to-day operations.

- 83% of EFL and National League clubs have negative operating cashflow, meaning their day-to-day operations use more cash than they generate.
- Most clubs do not have sufficient liquid assets to cover their short-term liabilities, and liquidity has declined in recent years.
- Many clubs are heavily reliant on financing. Of clubs in the top five English leagues:
 - 66% of clubs said they could not survive more than 90 days without owner funding.
 - 29% of clubs said they could not survive more than 30 days without owner funding.
 - most Championship, League One and League Two clubs hold less than 30 days of cash.
- Owner funding is often provided on a just-in-time basis. Between March 2025 and March 2026, 67 clubs received six or more owner funding injections and 28 clubs received 12 or more.
- Despite this reliance on owner funding, most EFL and National League clubs do not have a contingency plan if their owner stops funding the club.

Introduction

Our assessment of liquidity focuses on:

- operating cashflow, which assesses the extent to which clubs generate cash from their operations
- coverage of short-term liabilities, which assesses whether clubs have sufficient liquid assets to meet short-term obligations
- given clubs' reliance on owner funding, we also assess the available days a club could operate with existing cash balances, the frequency of owner funding and whether clubs have a contingency plan.

This analysis considers both traditional accounting measures of liquidity and measures tailored to football clubs' business models, providing a more comprehensive assessment of liquidity.

Assessment of liquidity

Operating cashflow

Operating cashflow measures the net cash generated or used by a club's core operations. This includes cash from matchday, broadcasting and commercial activities, less outflows such as player wages, staff wages and other operating expenses.¹⁸⁵ A positive operating cash flow means a club generates cash from its day-to-day operations and a negative operating cash flow means those operations consume cash. Operating cashflow does not include cashflows from player transfers.

As shown in Chart 3.2.1 (Page 91), clubs on average have negative operating cash flow. **For every £1 of revenue:**

- the average Championship club consumes 57p through its operations
- a League One club consumes 41p
- a League Two club consumes 32p
- a National League club consumes 30p
- Premier League clubs are the exception, generating an average 4p of operating cash for every £1 of revenue

Most clubs do not generate enough cash from their day-to-day operations to cover their expenses. They rely on other sources of cash, including owner funding, third-party lending and player sales.

Adjusted quick ratio

The adjusted quick ratio measures whether a club has enough liquid assets to meet its short-term liabilities. Liquid assets include cash and transfer receivables, while short-term liabilities include transfer payables, loan repayments, tax and social security liabilities. We calculate the ratio by dividing a club's liquid assets by its short-term liabilities. The calculation is adjusted to focus on financial assets and discount shareholder loans or injections.¹⁸⁶ A ratio above one indicates that a club has sufficient liquid assets to cover its short-term liabilities; a ratio below one indicates that it does not.

A key consideration is the extent to which a club's squad market values can be used to generate cash. As set out in our licensing guidance, the IFR does not consider football players as liquid assets due to the limited ability to realise value outside transfer windows.¹⁸⁷ However, player sales are often a key element of clubs' business models and a common method of generating cash, particularly following relegation, and can help clubs manage financial shocks.

As such, we present the adjusted quick ratio both excluding and including a proportion of clubs' squad market values. This shows clubs' ability to generate cash both outside and during a transfer window. When including squad market values, we assume 40% could be used to generate cash, this is consistent with the Premier League's approach. The analysis is highly sensitive to this assumption, and the proportional value of player sales that could be used to generate cash is likely to vary by club.

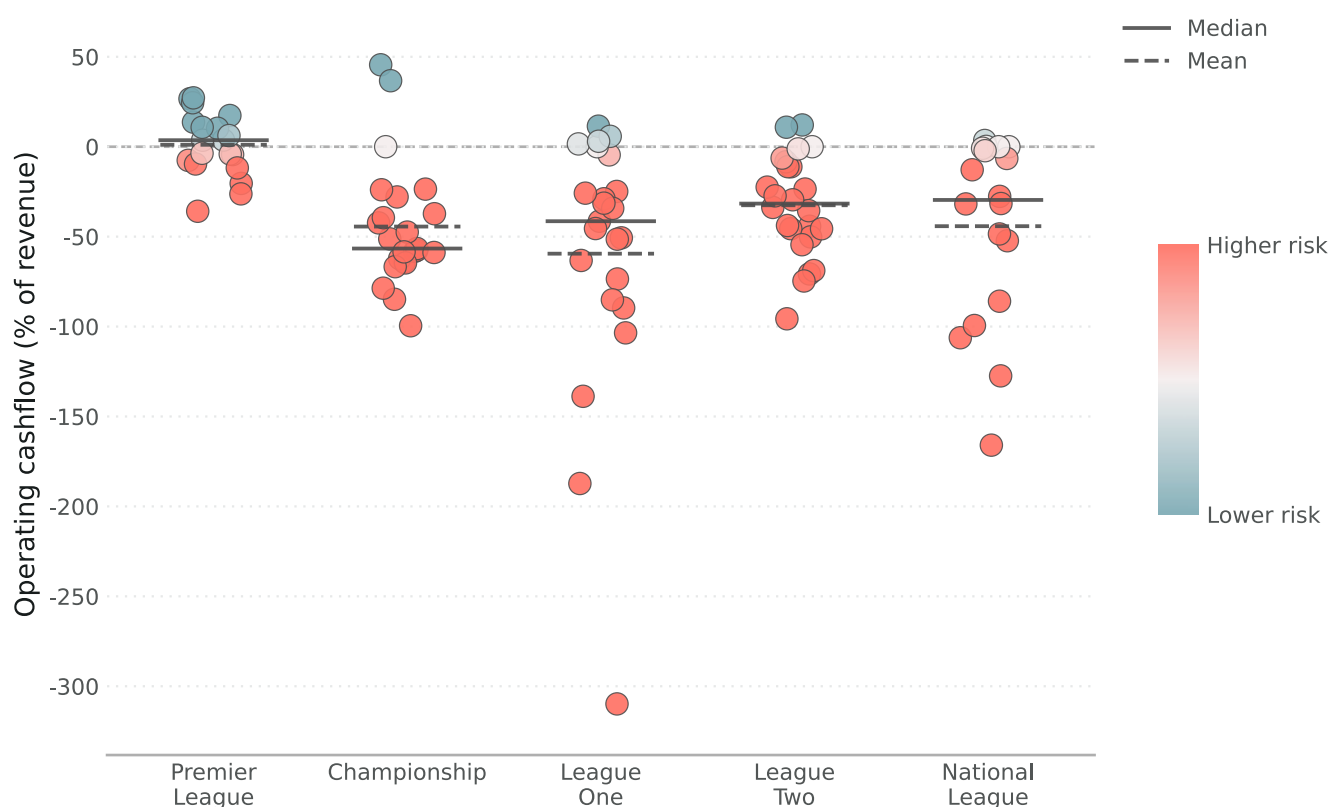
Outside of a transfer window: Chart 3.2.2 (Page 92), which does not factor in a proportion of squad market value, shows that **most clubs do not have sufficient liquid assets to cover their short-term liabilities. For every £1 owed in the short-term:**

- Premier League clubs have 57p in liquid assets
- Championship clubs have 41p
- League One clubs 94p
- League Two clubs 46p
- National League clubs 58p

Most clubs therefore rely on external financing to meet their short-term obligations, particularly where their day-to-day operations do not generate cash.

83% of EFL and National League clubs have negative operating cash flow.

Chart 3.2.1: Operating cash flow as a percentage of revenue, 2025/26

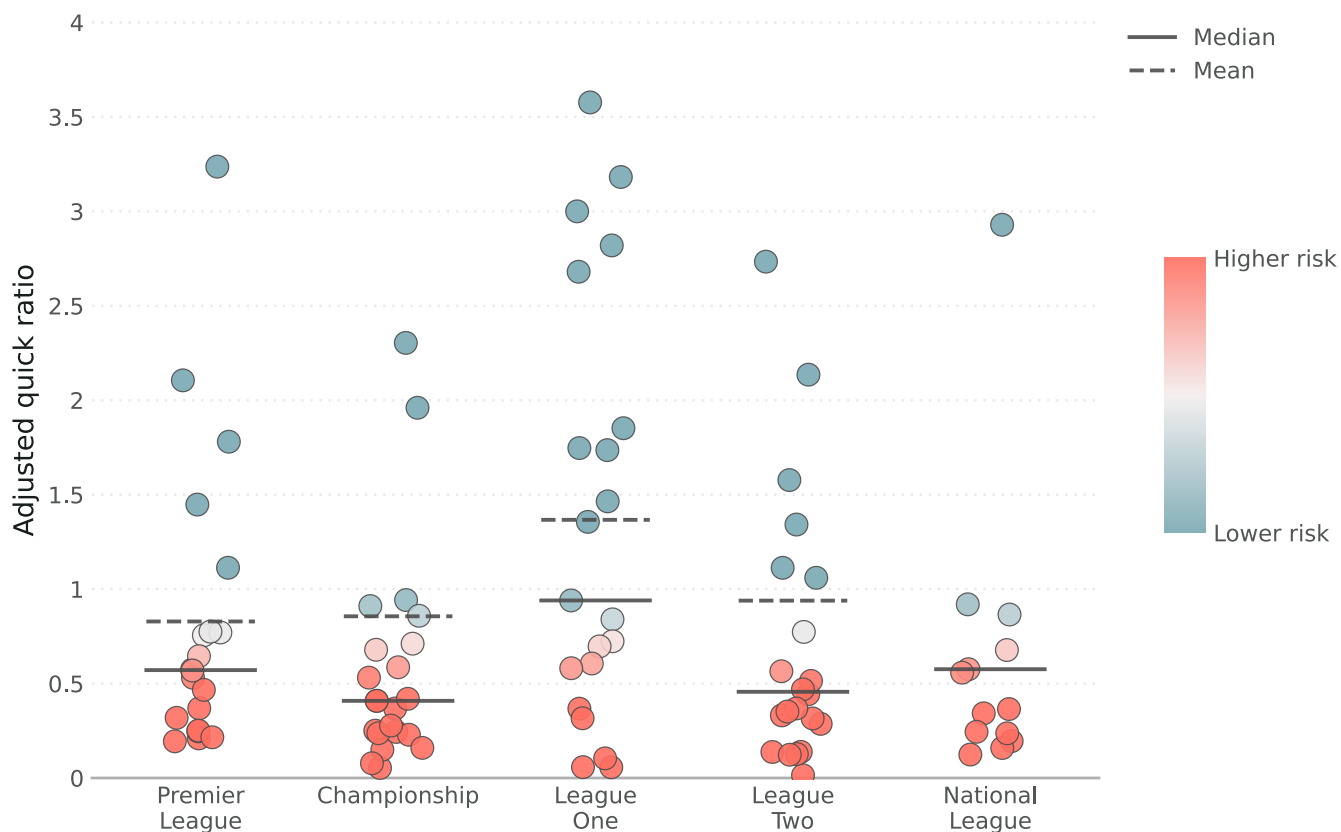


Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: Each dot represents a club's operating cash flow as a percentage of revenue in 2025/26. The colour scale indicates the level of liquidity risk, with coral representing higher risk and teal lower risk. The solid line shows the median for each league and the dashed line shows the mean. The mean shows the average of the division, while the median is the middle value that separates the higher half from the lower half.

Most clubs do not have sufficient liquid assets to cover their short-term liabilities.

Chart 3.2.2: Adjusted Quick Ratio by Division (2025/26)



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart above shows the IFR adjusted quick ratio by division, where each dot represents a club during the 2025/26 season. A value above one indicates that a club has sufficient liquid assets to over its short-term liabilities, while a value below one indicates that it does not. The colour scale represents the implied liquidity risk for this metric, with coral representing higher risk and teal representing lower risk. The mean shows the average of the division, while the median is the middle value that separates the higher half from the lower half.

Box 3.2.1: Premier League SSR Liquidity Tests

Ahead of the 2026/27 season, the Premier League introduced new Sustainability and Systemic Resilience (SSR) rules comprising three tests. Two assess liquidity.¹⁸⁸

Working Capital Test:

- Clubs must demonstrate that, for each month of the season, projected cash balances (Adjusted Cashflow Figure) and qualifying working capital funds total at least £12.5 million. Qualifying funds include undrawn credit facilities, receivables and other funds accessible within 28 days.

Liquidity Test:

- Clubs must demonstrate non-negative 'Liquidity Headroom' for the current and following season, after applying an £85 million stress test. The Stress Test reflects potential adverse events, including the financial impact of relegation or failure to qualify for UEFA Club Competitions. Liquidity Headroom is calculated from liquid assets less liquid liabilities and the £85 million stress test adjustment. The calculation includes 40% of a club's squad market value (as opposed to its book value).

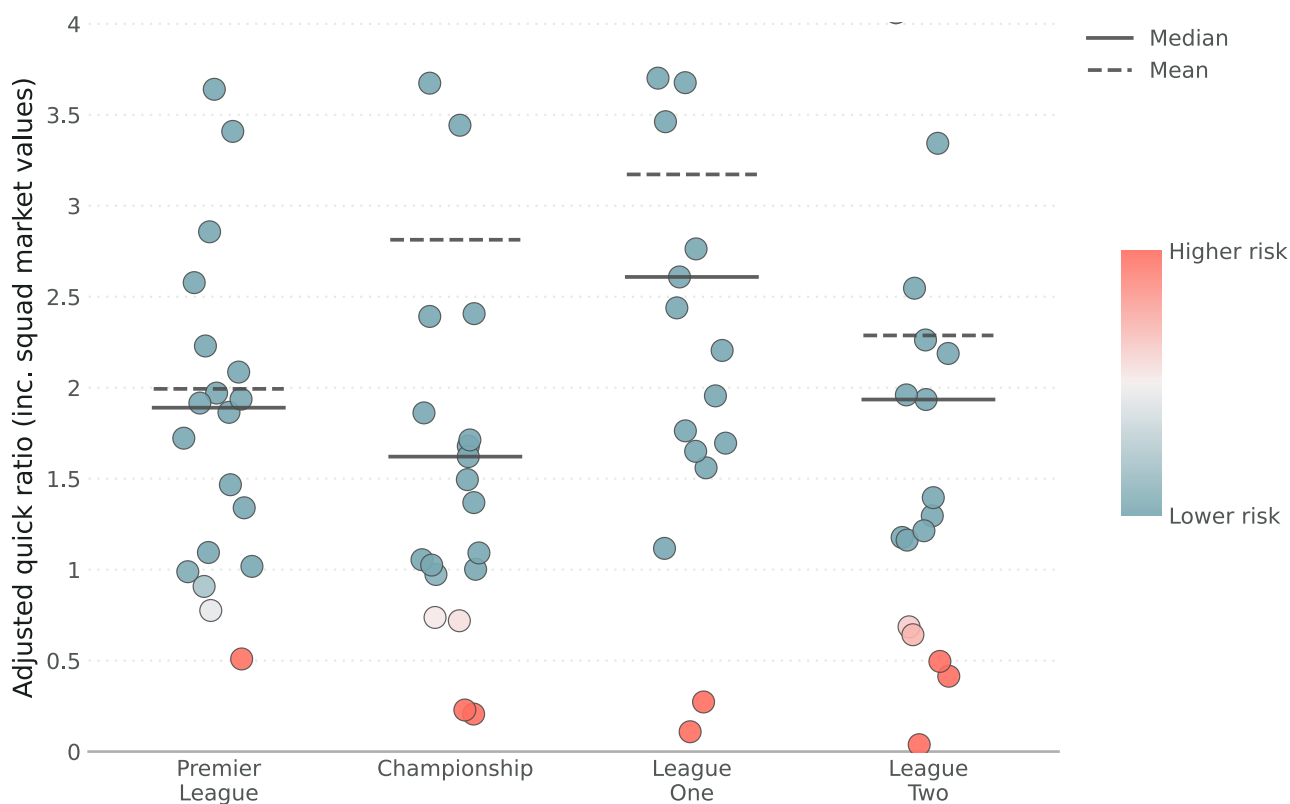
During a transfer window:

When including 40% of squad market values, clubs' liquidity positions improve substantially. This more closely represents a club's ability to generate cash during a transfer window. The median adjusted quick ratio rises from below one to above 1.5 in each league for which squad market value data is available (Chart 3.2.3) (Page 94).¹⁸⁹

However, a minority of clubs in every league remain higher risk even after including 40% of squad market value. This analysis should be considered indicative. The proportion of a squad that can be sold varies between clubs. Player values can also be volatile, changing with factors such as form, injuries or remaining contract length.

Clubs' liquidity improve substantially when 40% of squad market value is treated as a liquid asset.

Chart 3.2.3: Adjusted quick ratio including 40% of squad market value, by division, 2025/26



Note: Each dot represents a club's adjusted quick ratio in 2025/26, including 40% of its squad market value as a liquid asset. A value ratio of one or above indicates sufficient liquid assets to cover its short-term liabilities. The colour scale represents the implied liquidity risk for this metric, with coral representing higher risk and teal representing lower risk. The mean shows the average of the division, while the median is the middle value that separates the higher half from the lower half.

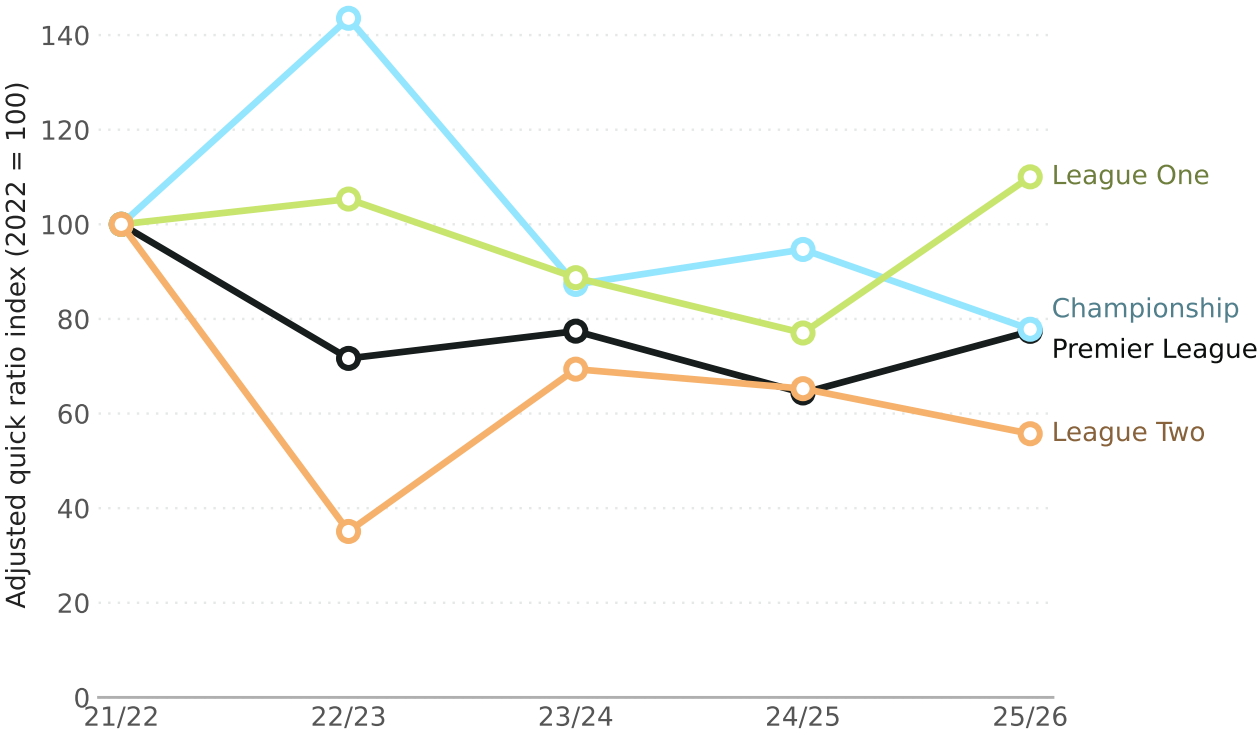
Club liquidity has fallen in recent years, with League One the notable exception (Chart 3.2.4). Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, the adjusted quick ratio exclusive of squad market values:

- fell by 44% for League Two clubs
- fell by 23% for Premier League clubs
- fell by 22% for Championship clubs
- improved by 10% for League One clubs.

Despite this improvement, the average League One club still does not hold sufficient liquid assets to cover its short-term liabilities.

Liquidity has declined across most leagues since 2021/22.

Chart 3.2.4: Trends in adjusted quick ratio, 2021/22 to 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Operating days

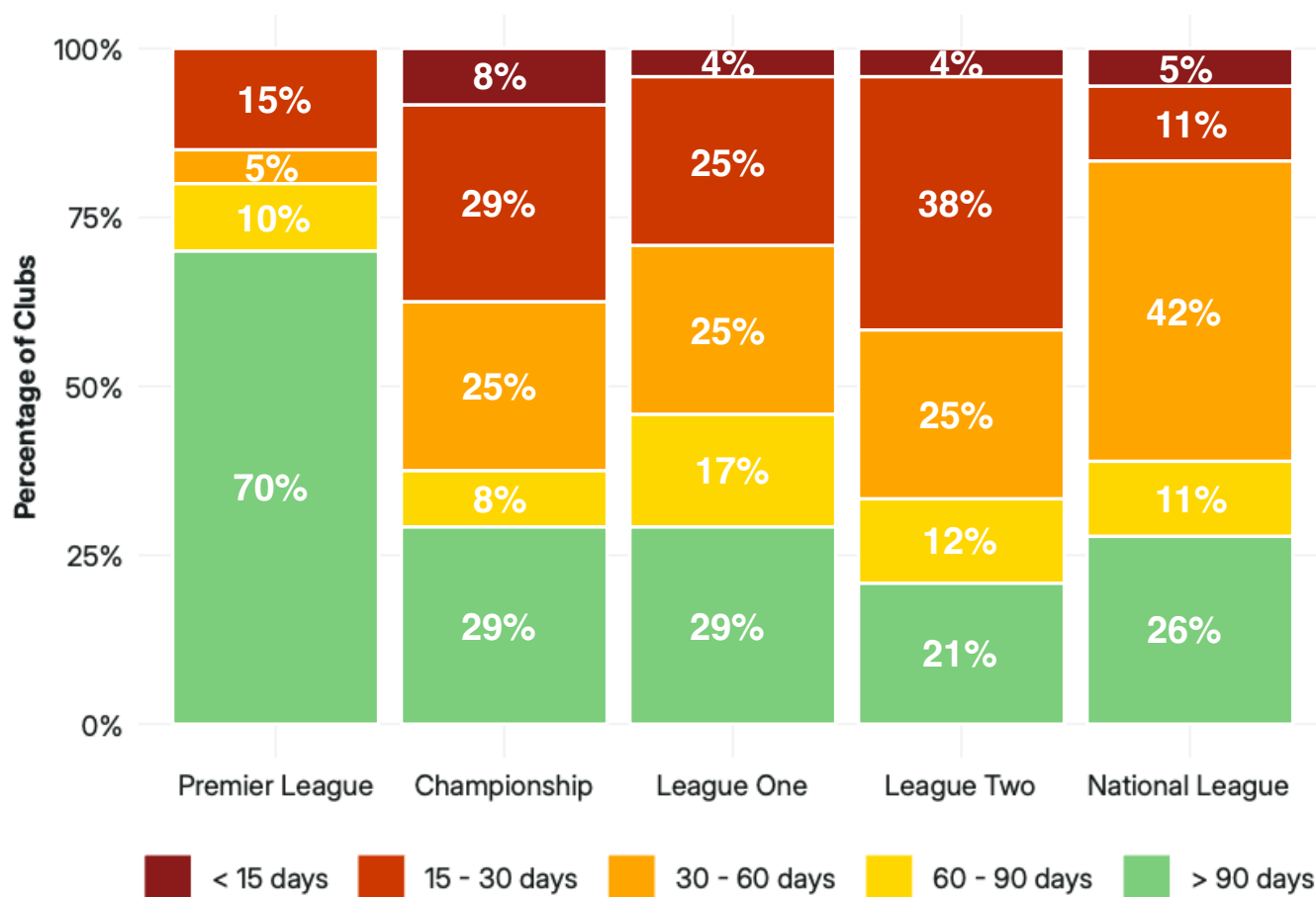
To assess clubs' resilience to short-term funding pressures, we estimate how long they could continue operating using their existing cash resources without external financing. We consider both clubs' self-reported estimates and an adjusted measure based on their financial statements.

Self-reported operating days:

The IFR asked clubs to estimate how long they could continue operating if new owner funding injections stopped after the club's March 2026 payroll. As shown in Chart 3.2.5, a large proportion of clubs (66%) reported that they could not survive for more than 90 days without new owner funding. 29% reported that they could not survive more than 30 days.

29% of clubs say they could not survive more than 30 days without owner funding.

Chart 3.2.5: Proportion of self-reported operating days in the event of owner funding withdrawal after the March 2026 payroll



Source: IFR analysis of data received from clubs in response to IFR request for information.

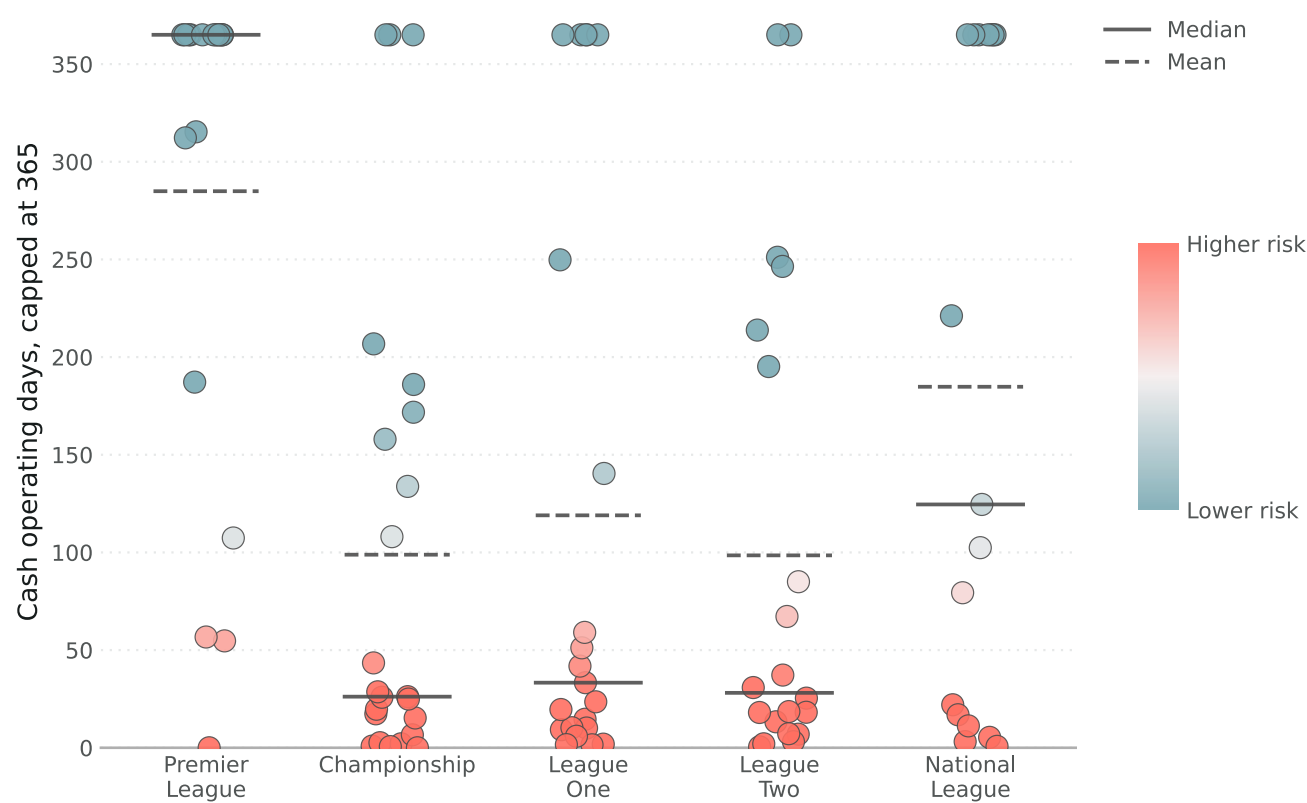
Cash operating days estimate how long clubs could continue operating using their existing cash balances, based on estimated daily net operating cash flows. **Our analysis shows that most Championship, League One and League Two clubs hold less than 30 days of cash, while many National League clubs also have very low cash reserves.**

This indicates a weaker liquidity position than clubs' self-reported survival estimates, suggesting that some clubs may have fewer days of liquidity than they expect.

This leaves many clubs with limited time to secure alternative funding or adjust their business model in response to a liquidity shock, such as the loss of owner funding.

Most Championship, League One and League Two clubs hold less than 30 days of cash.

Chart 3.2.6: Cash operating days, capped at 365 days, 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: Each dot represents a club's cash operating days in 2025/26, capped at 365 days. The colour scale represents the implied liquidity risk for this metric, with coral representing higher risk and teal representing lower risk. The mean shows the average of the division, while the median is the middle value that separates the higher half from the lower half.

Dependency on owner injections

Low liquidity and negative operating cash flow leave many clubs reliant on external financing, particularly owner funding. The frequency of owner injections provides an indication to the extent of this dependency: more frequent injections suggest that clubs have less capacity to sustain their operations without further funding.

Many clubs rely on owner funding on a just-in-time basis. Between March 2025 and March 2026, 67 clubs received six or more funding injections through shareholder loans or equity, while 28 clubs received 12 or more.

Limited access to commercial financing means shareholder loans are particularly important for EFL and National League clubs, providing liquidity that may not otherwise be available. **Shareholder loans account for:**

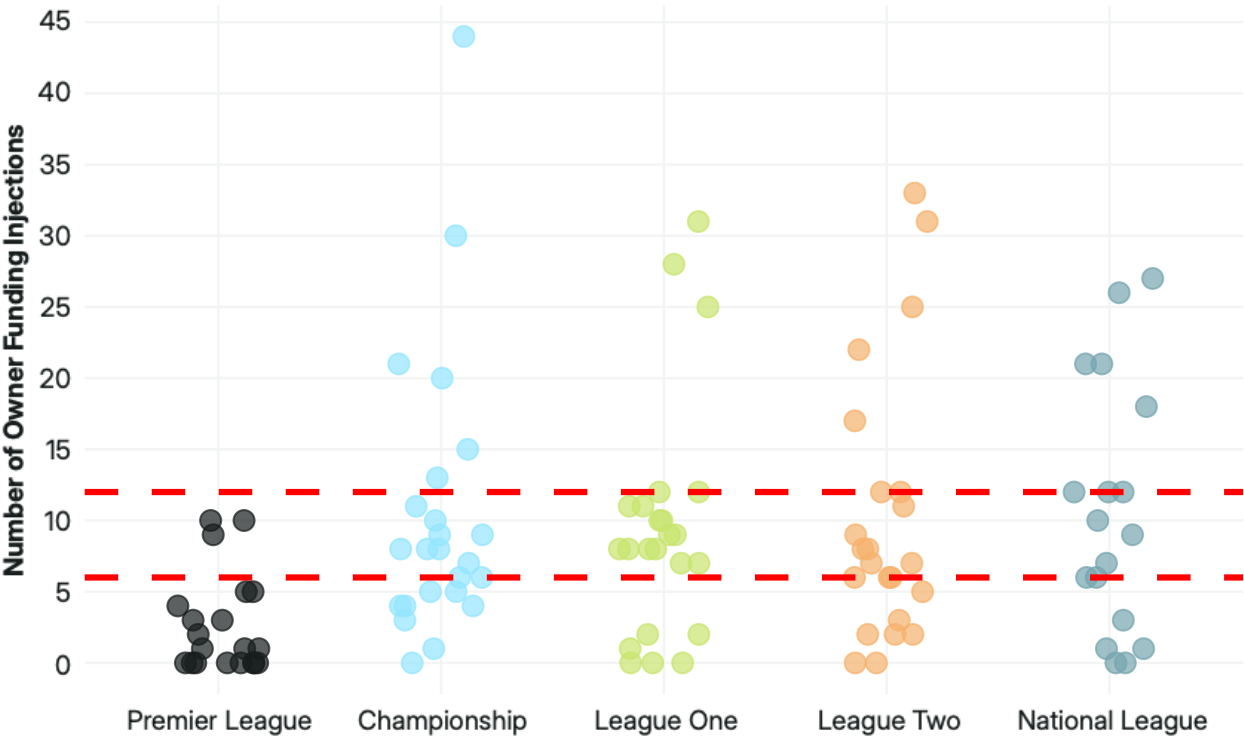
- 78% of debt in the Championship
- 90% in League One
- 67% in League Two
- 63% in the National League¹⁹⁰

While clubs may be able to continue operating while shareholder funding remains available, many could struggle to secure replacement financing if it is withdrawn.

This makes contingency planning particularly important in case owners are unable or unwilling to continue providing funding.

Many clubs rely on owner funding on a just-in-time basis.

Chart 3.2.7: Number of owner funding injections received by club, March 2025 to March 2026



Source: IFR analysis of data received from clubs in response to IFR request for information.

Contingency plans

Contingency planning can help clubs prepare for financial shocks and foreseeable downside risks, such as relegation or poor sporting performance. The IFR asked clubs whether they had a funding contingency plan in the event of owner funding being withdrawn and whether they produced downside forecasts.

As set out in Chart 3.2.8, **most EFL and National League clubs do not have a contingency plan for the withdrawal of owner funding, despite their reliance on owners and limited access to commercial financing.**

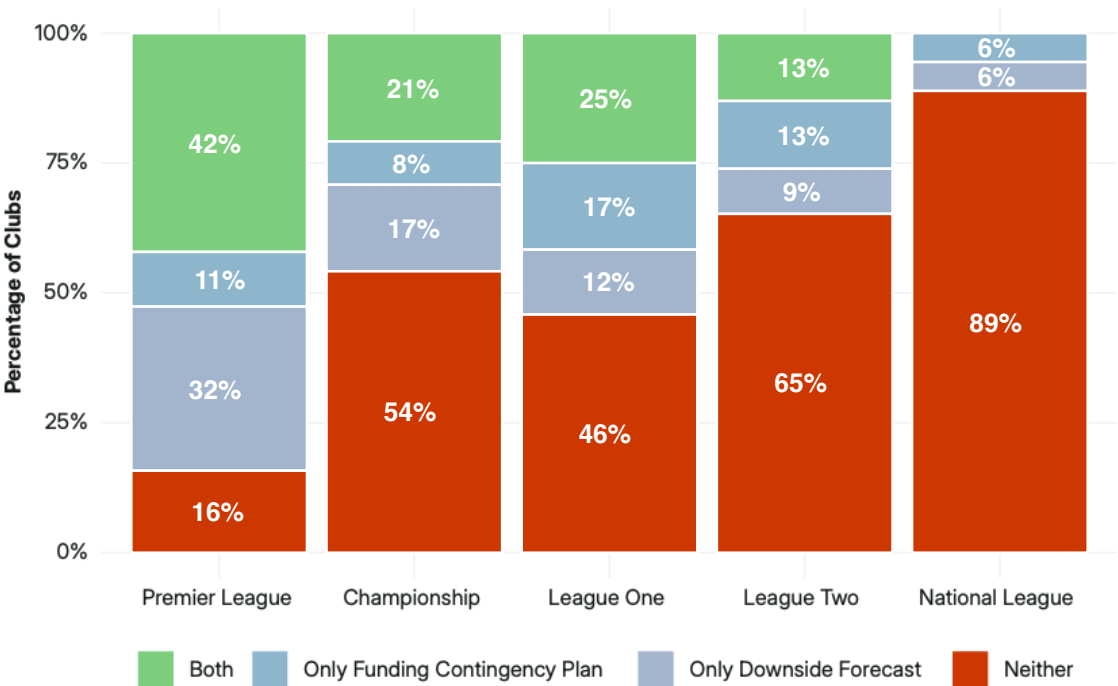
In total:

- 76 clubs reported having no funding contingency plan
- 71 do not forecast a downside risk scenario

This leaves clubs particularly exposed if an owner becomes unwilling or unable to continue providing finance, particularly as many EFL and National League clubs appear to have limited access to alternative sources of financing.

Most EFL and National League clubs have no contingency plan for the withdrawal of owner funding.

Chart 3.2.8: Contingency planning for owner funding withdrawal, 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from clubs in response to IFR request for information.

Summary

Overall, our analysis indicates a significant risk to the short-term financial viability of many football clubs.

- The vast majority of clubs outside the Premier League consume cash through their day-to-day operations. As a result, clubs typically rely on external financing or player sales to meet their obligations as they fall due.
- Clubs’ ability to use liquid assets to meet short-term obligations depends partly on transfer windows. Outside a transfer window, most clubs do not have enough liquid assets to cover their short-term liabilities. During a transfer window, when players can be sold to generate cash, clubs’ liquidity positions improve significantly.
- Many clubs receive owner funding multiple times during the year to meet short-term liquidity needs. This leaves them exposed at multiple points if expected owner funding does not materialise.
- Limited cash reserves mean that, following a liquidity shock, many clubs would have only a short period in which to secure alternative funding or adjust their business model.
- Despite low liquidity and reliance on owner funding, most clubs do not have a contingency plan if an owner becomes unable or unwilling to continue to provide finance. This risk is compounded by the limited access of many EFL and National League clubs to alternative sources of funding.

3.3 Solvency

Chapter at a glance

This chapter considers a club's ability to meet its medium- and long-term obligations.

- More than 60% of EFL and National League clubs have liabilities exceeding the book value of their assets. Even after factoring in the market value of playing squads, 46% of EFL clubs have negative equity.
- 97% of EFL and National League clubs generate negative EBITDA, meaning they do not generate sufficient earnings from their operations to repay outstanding debt.
- 27% of EFL and National League clubs have combined financial and transfer debt exceeding their estimated enterprise value. This may reduce owners' economic incentive to continue providing funding to preserve the value of their equity.
- Solvency is worsening for League One and League Two clubs, as measured by EBITDA and football net debt to enterprise value. If this trend continues, football clubs may become increasingly reliant on owner financing while owners' economic incentive to provide this financing diminishes.
- Overall, many football clubs appear financially unsustainable over the medium to long term and increasingly reliant on continued support from owners and other external sources of finance.

Introduction

Our assessment of solvency focuses on:

- **clubs' levels of indebtedness:** we assess whether clubs' liabilities exceed clubs' total values. If they do, the club owes more money than it is worth, which is a sign of excessive indebtedness. As part of this, we consider the book value of assets, squad market value and the estimated enterprise value of the club.
- **clubs' debt serviceability:** we assess clubs' ability to repay debts from their business operations. If they are not able to repay debts from their operations, then this suggests they are financially unsustainable.

Levels of indebtedness

Net assets

Net assets represent a club's net equity position and are calculated as total assets minus total liabilities, as per a club's balance sheet.

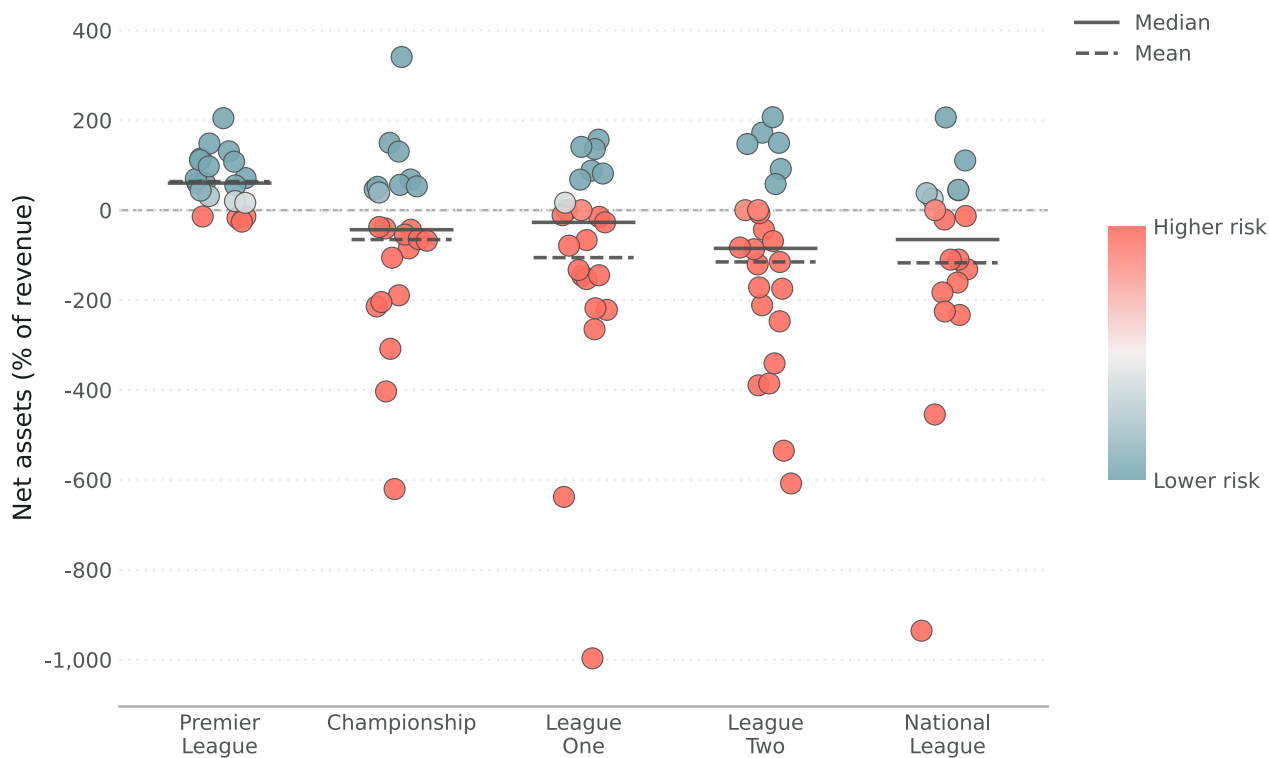
- Clubs' largest assets include playing squads, infrastructure such as stadia and training facilities, and transfer receivables.
- Clubs' largest liabilities include shareholder debt, bank and other third-party debt, transfer payables and tax liabilities.

Shareholder debt is often considered a 'soft' liability because shareholders may have less incentive than third-party lenders to initiate insolvency proceedings if repayments are missed. It also typically carries a lower interest rate than third-party debt and in some cases is interest-free. However, for the purposes of this analysis, we continue to treat shareholder debt as a liability because it may need to be repaid or become third-party debt following a sale or insolvency event.

Chart 3.3.1 shows that on an accounting basis, **63% of EFL and National League clubs have liabilities exceeding the book value of their assets**, in some cases substantially. This is the case for **20% of Premier League clubs**. On that basis, **these clubs therefore have negative equity**, which means their liabilities are greater than their assets, so **they are technically insolvent**.

More than 60% of EFL and National League clubs have liabilities exceeding the value of their assets.

Chart 3.3.1: Net Assets as a percentage of revenue, 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart shows net assets as a percentage of revenue per club by division, where each dot represents a club during the 2025/26 season. The colour scale represents the scale of solvency risk based on this metric, with coral representing higher risk and teal representing lower risk.

Net assets accounting for squad market values

The analysis above uses the book value of player registrations, which can significantly understate their market value for the following reasons:

- Players acquired without a transfer fee, including academy players, may have no value recognised on the balance sheet
- The market value of a player may have increased since joining the club but this would not necessarily be reflected on the balance sheet
- The book value of players acquired for a fee reduces as that fee is amortised over the contract term, irrespective of subsequent changes in market value.

As a result, clubs' balance sheets may understate squad values and therefore their equity positions. However, caution is needed when incorporating squad market values.

Squad market values can be volatile as they depend on market conditions, the willingness of other clubs to purchase player registrations and individual performance. There is also some evidence of speculative bubble effects in the European transfer market.¹⁹¹

We therefore assess clubs' net asset positions using the book values of player contracts, and then with the squad market values of players.

Box 3.3.1: Premier League SSR Solvency Test

Ahead of 2026/27, the Premier League introduced new Sustainability and Systemic Resilience (SSR) rules comprising three tests, including a solvency test.¹⁹²

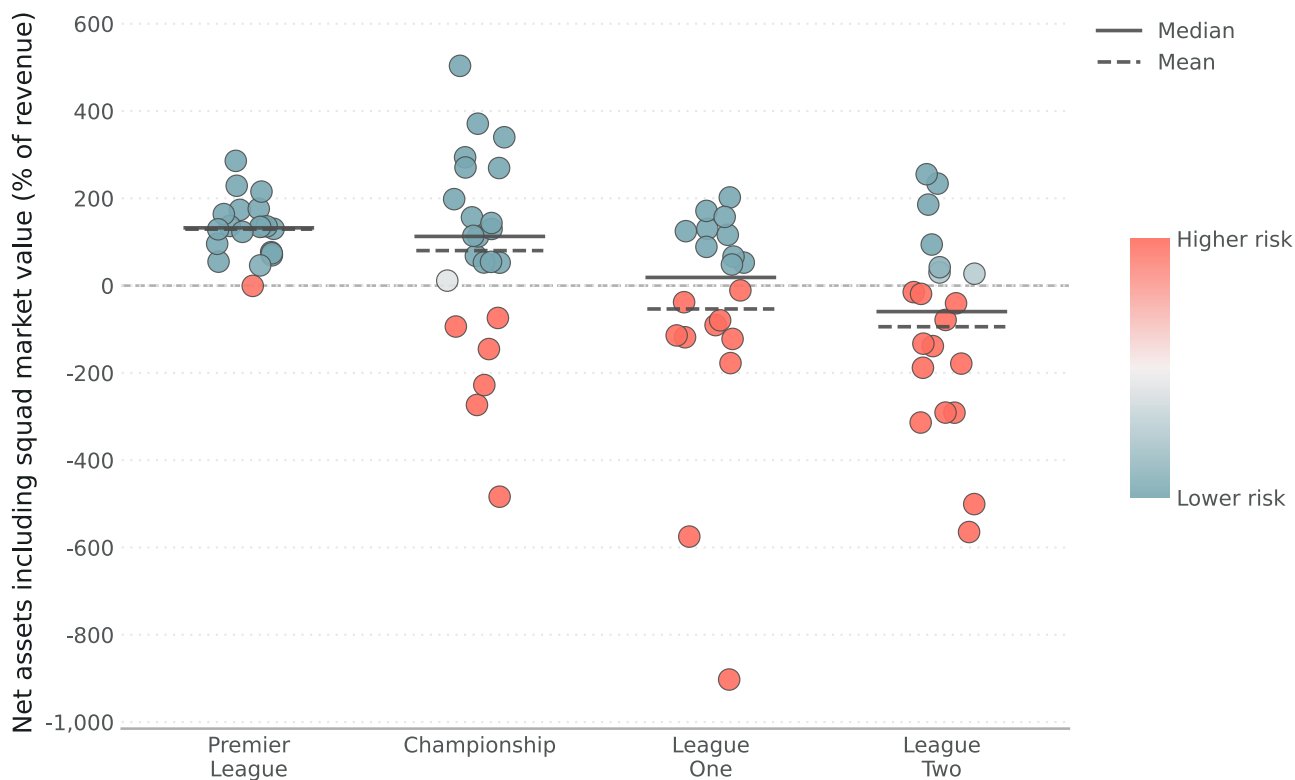
Positive Equity Test:

- A club must demonstrate that its 'Positive Equity Ratio' (liabilities ÷ adjusted assets) is no more than 90% in 2026/27, 85% in 2027/28 and 80% from 2028/29 onwards. Adjusted assets include the club's full squad market value (or the net book value of players, if higher). Liabilities include those reported on the balance sheet, including shareholder loans and external debt.

As shown in Chart 3.3.2, incorporating squad market values improves clubs' net asset positions. However, **46% of EFL clubs still have negative equity after accounting for squad market values**. The improvement is more pronounced in the Premier League, where no club has liabilities exceeding the value of its assets after squad market values are incorporated.

46% of EFL clubs still have negative equity, even after adjusting for the market value of playing squads.

Chart 3.3.2: Net assets including squad market value as a percentage of revenue, 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information, and squad market values obtained from Transfermarkt.co.uk.

Note: Each dot represents a club during the 2025/26 season. The colour scale represents the scale of solvency risk based on this metric, with coral representing higher risk and teal representing lower risk.

Net debt to estimated enterprise value

It is possible that a club's assets, even when accounting for squad market value, do not fully capture the value of a football club. Analysis of past transactions indicates that a non-big six club can be broadly valued using an EV/Revenue multiple of 2x, compared with 6x for a big six club.¹⁹³ Actual valuations vary depending on factors including fanbase size, financial position and stadium ownership. We therefore assess whether a club's debt is greater than the estimated value of the club.

Chart 3.3.3 below calculates clubs' football net debt as a proportion of their estimated enterprise value (EV).¹⁹⁴ This provides a football-specific measure of leverage based on the estimated realisable value of a club rather than its book value.¹⁹⁵

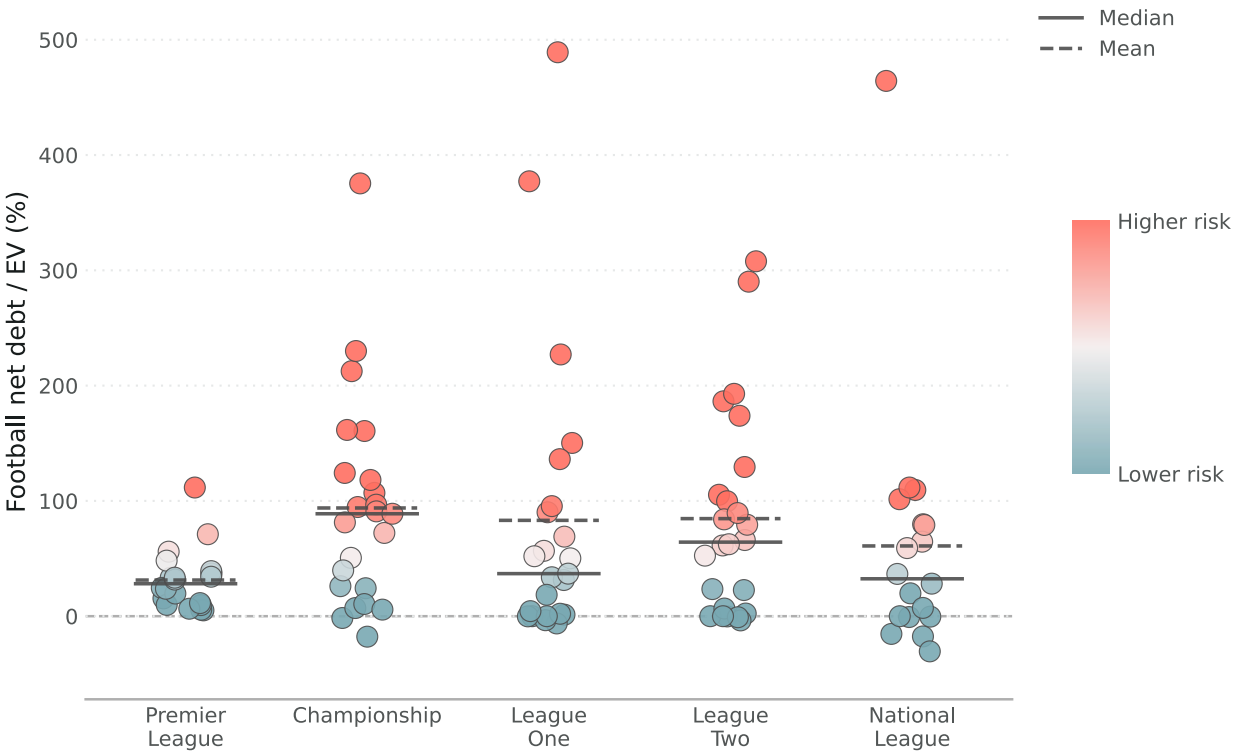
A higher net debt-to-EV ratio indicates greater potential solvency risk because debt represents a larger proportion of the club's value, reducing shareholders' equity.

As the ratio approaches or exceeds one, shareholders may have less economic incentive to provide further financing to protect the value of their equity.

Chart 3.3.3 shows that **more than a quarter (27%) of EFL and National League clubs have combined financial and transfer debt that exceeds the estimated saleable value of the business.** These clubs are therefore more reliant on owners continuing to invest without the expectation of a financial return.

More than a quarter of EFL and National League clubs have debts exceeding the estimated saleable value of the business.

Chart 3.3.3: Football Net Debt as a percentage of Enterprise Value, 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart above shows football net debt as a percentage of enterprise value per club by division, where each dot represents a club for the 2025/26 season. The colour scale represents the scale of solvency risk based on this metric, with coral representing higher risk and teal representing lower risk. The mean shows the average of the division, while the median is the middle value that separates the higher half from the lower half.

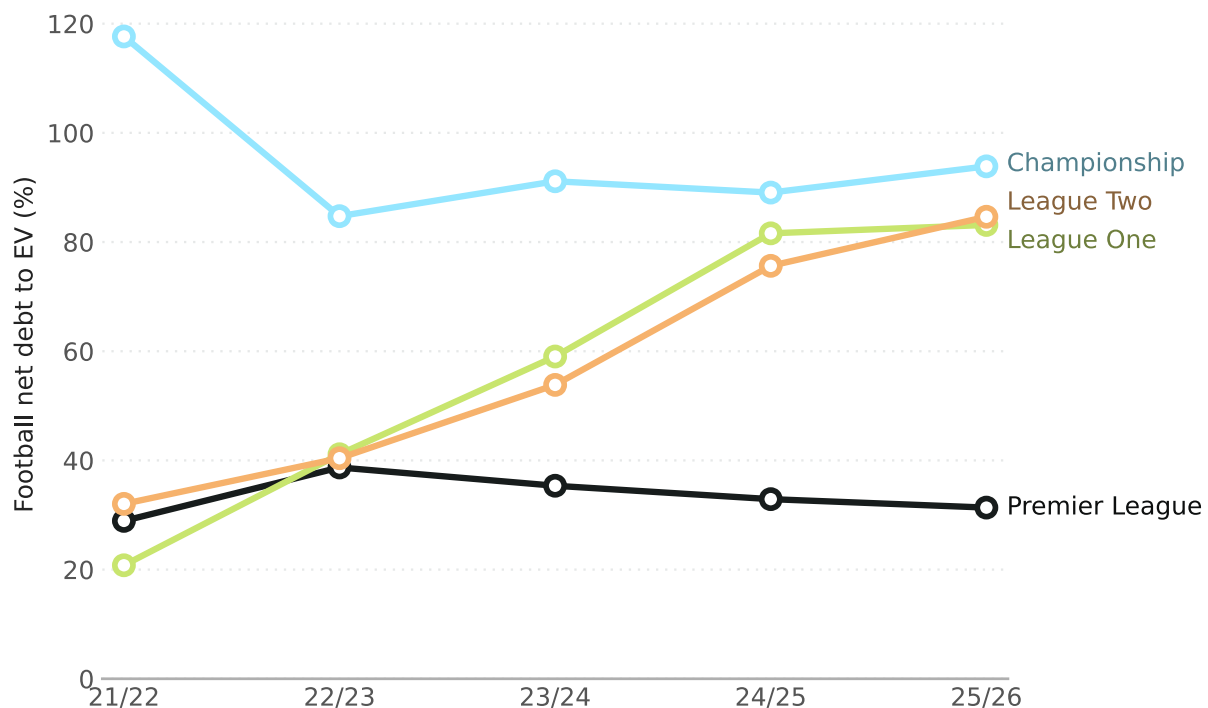
To understand whether this position is likely to change, we considered recent trends. Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, football net debt as a proportion of estimated enterprise value:

- increased from 20.8% to 83.1% in League One
- increased from 32% up to 85.2% in League Two
- increased more modestly from 28.9% up to 31.4% in the Premier League
- decreased from 117.7% to 93.9% in the Championship, reflecting a shift towards equity financing and a reduction in shareholder debt

For many EFL clubs, debt and owner funding are increasing faster than clubs' estimated values.

League One and League Two clubs are becoming more highly leveraged.

Chart 3.3.4: Football net debt to enterprise value, 2021/22 to 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Debt serviceability

Debt serviceability can be measured by a club's ability to cover its interest payments and its ability to repay its debts.

- Interest coverage measures a company's ability to meet interest payments on its outstanding debt from earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT). However, most football clubs have negative EBIT and therefore do not generate sufficient operating earnings to cover their interest costs.

- A club's ability to repay its debt can be measured using its debt-to-EBITDA ratio. This measures a club's ability to repay debt from its operating earnings and is used by credit rating agencies to assess creditworthiness. The ratio divides total debt by earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA). It indicates the number of periods, usually years, it would take to repay debt if earnings remain unchanged.

Both these measures of debt serviceability require a positive measure of profitability, either EBIT or EBITDA, in order to cover interest costs and meet debt repayments.

However, as shown in Chart 3.3.5, 97% of EFL and National League clubs generate negative EBITDA and therefore do not generate sufficient operating earnings to repay outstanding debt. If EBITDA losses persist, these clubs will require further debt, equity financing or sustained profits from player trading to meet their funding needs.

97% of clubs outside the Premier League generate negative EBITDA.

Chart 3.3.5: EBITDA as a percentage of revenue, 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart above shows EBITDA as percentage of revenue per club by division, where each dot represents a club for the 2025/26 season. The colour scale represents the scale of solvency risk based on this metric, with coral representing higher risk and teal representing lower risk. The mean shows the average of the division, while the median is the middle value that separates the higher half from the lower half.

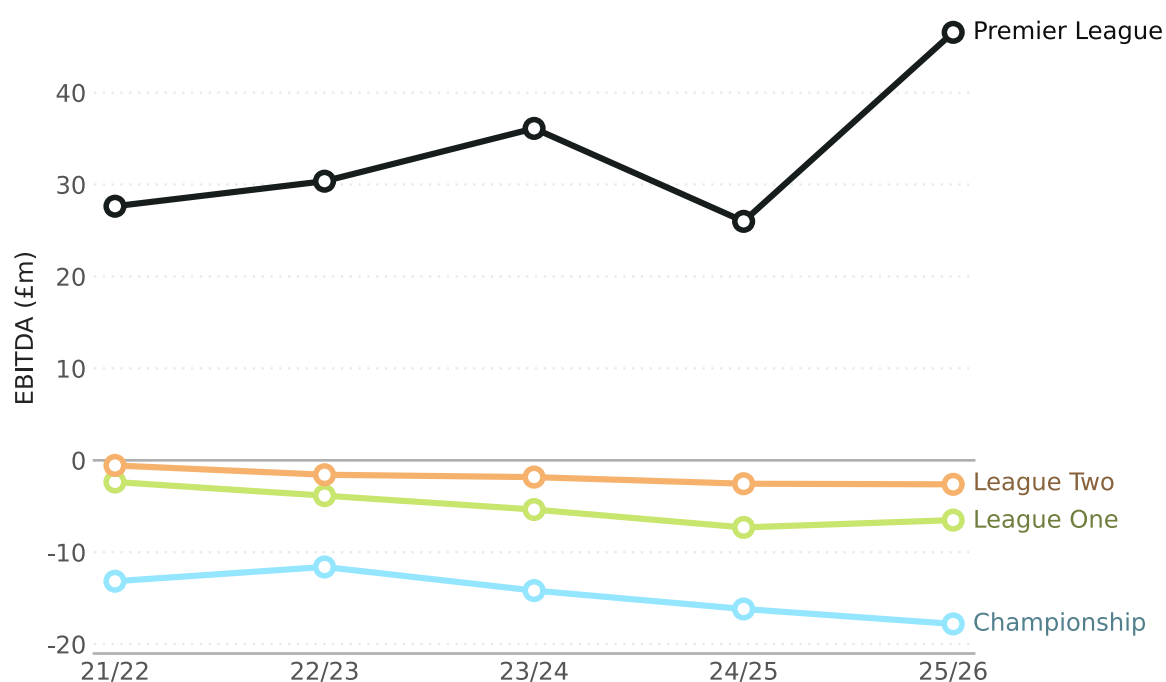
To assess whether EBITDA losses are likely to persist, we considered recent trends. Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, annual average EBITDA losses:

- increased from £13.2 million to £17.8 million in the Championship
- increased from £2.4 million to £6.5 million in League One,
- increased from £0.6 million to £2.6 million in League Two
- in contrast, average annual Premier League EBITDA profits increased from £27.6 million to £46.6 million over the same period

This suggests it is unlikely that EFL clubs will generate sufficient positive EBITDA to cover debt repayments in the future.

EBITDA performance has deteriorated across the Championship, League One and League Two.

Chart 3.3.6: Mean EBITDA by division over time, 2021/22 – 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Summary

Overall, the analysis indicates that many football clubs **are financially unsustainable over the medium to long term and increasingly reliant on continued support from owners and other external sources of finance.**

- The majority of EFL and National League clubs have liabilities greater than the book value of their assets. Accounting for squad market values improves their position, although many remain in negative equity.
- More than a quarter of EFL and National League clubs have debt exceeding their estimated enterprise value. Debt and owner funding are also increasing faster than estimated club values in parts of the EFL.
- 97% of EFL and National League clubs generate negative EBITDA, meaning they do not generate sufficient operating earnings to repay outstanding debt. EBITDA performance has also deteriorated across the Championship, League One and League Two, increasing their reliance on external financing.

3.4 Financial Distress

Chapter at a glance

This chapter considers the types, incidence and pathways to financial distress, as well as the financial metrics most strongly associated with clubs entering financial distress.

- While formal insolvencies in English football have been relatively rare over the last decade, at least 20 clubs have faced financial distress since 2018/19.
- Financial distress is typically triggered by a shock to a club's finances, such as a significant fall in revenue or an owner being unable or unwilling to continue providing funding.
- The impact of financial shocks depends on a club's underlying vulnerabilities. Clubs that are highly reliant on owner funding, have weak governance or engage in financial overreach are less resilient and more vulnerable to financial distress.
- Financial metrics can provide useful early warning signs of distress, with low liquidity appearing to be the most reliable indicator of immediate risk. However, wider factors at a club, including governance and owner suitability, also need to be considered.
- Identifying heightened risk of financial distress requires comprehensive and ongoing assessment of individual clubs, drawing on both financial indicators and wider factors such as governance and owner suitability. Overall, a reliance on owner funding, poor underlying financial health and inadequate contingency planning leave many clubs vulnerable to financial distress.

Types of financial distress

Financial distress arises when a club is unable to meet its financial obligations as they fall due. In English football, it can occur at three broad levels of increasing severity: overdue payables; formal insolvency procedures, including administration and Company Voluntary Arrangements (CVAs); and, ultimately, liquidation.

- **Overdue payables** arise when clubs fail to pay creditors on time, including HMRC, players, staff or other clubs. They are often the earliest sign of financial distress and typically reflect cash-flow pressures rather than insolvency. Persistent overdue payables may indicate deeper financial difficulties and can trigger regulatory action.¹⁹⁶
- **Administration** occurs when a licensed insolvency practitioner takes control of a club.¹⁹⁷ Its purpose is to rescue the club, achieve a better outcome for creditors than liquidation, or realise assets for creditors. Clubs can usually continue operating during administration, **although sporting sanctions such as points deductions often apply.**¹⁹⁸
- **A Company Voluntary Arrangement (CVA)** is a legally binding agreement to restructure a club's unsecured debts, for example through reduced repayments or extended payment terms, allowing the club to continue trading.¹⁹⁹ CVAs are commonly used to exit administration.²⁰⁰
- **Liquidation** is the most severe form of financial distress and involves winding up the club's corporate entity, selling its assets and distributing the proceeds to creditors.²⁰¹ League membership is terminated, although a successor or 'phoenix' club may subsequently enter the pyramid at a lower level.

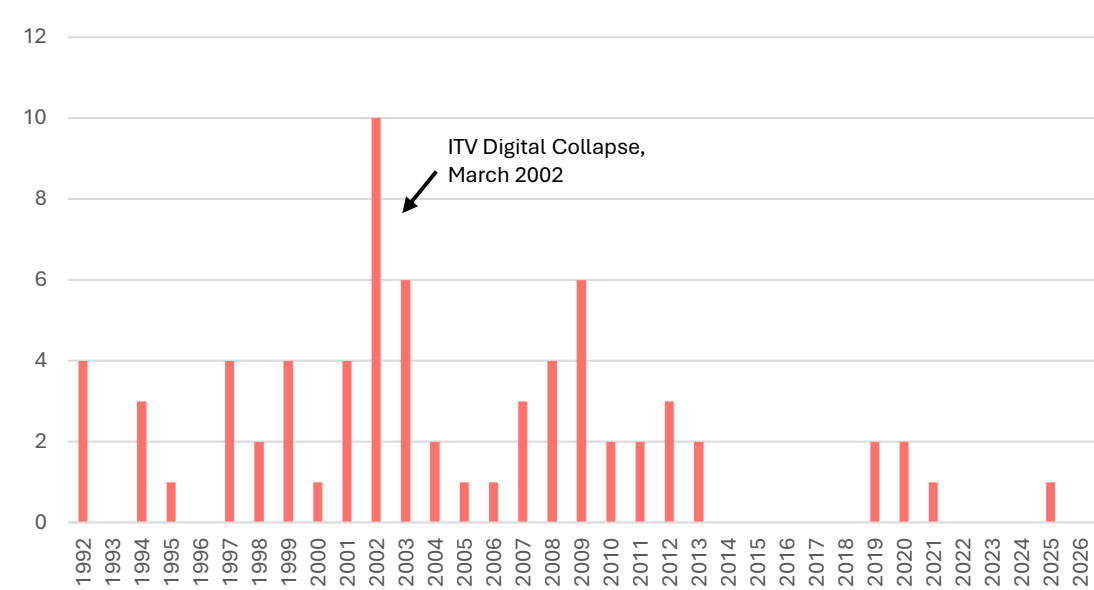
Financial distress over time

Chart 3.4.1 shows the 71 formal insolvency events - administrations, CVAs and liquidations - in the top five tiers of English football since 1992.²⁰²

- **1992 to 2001:** insolvencies were relatively frequent, averaging 2.3 per year.
- **2002 to 2003:** the collapse of ITV Digital, the EFL media rights holder, led to a sharp increase in insolvencies. At the time of its collapse in March 2002, ITV Digital owed the EFL £178.5 million under its £315 million three-year broadcasting deal.²⁰³ Sky agreed a replacement deal in July 2002 worth £95 million over four years, substantially below the value of the previous agreement.²⁰⁴ The resulting revenue shock contributed to 16 insolvency events in 2002 and 2003, as clubs that had built wage bills and debt against higher expected revenues ran into financial difficulties.
- **2004 to 2013:** insolvency events largely returned to pre-ITV Digital collapse levels, averaging 2.6 per year, with a modest increase during the financial crisis in 2008 and 2009.
- **2014 to 2026:** the frequency of insolvency events fell markedly, with only six during the period - fewer than 0.5 per year on average. During this period, Financial Fair Play regulations were introduced in the EFL and Premier League, restricting club losses. English football also benefitted from tailwinds such as significant growth in the value of broadcast deals during this period.²⁰⁵
- **Covid-19 (2020 to 2021):** despite the significant loss of income during the pandemic, particularly matchday revenue, there was no corresponding increase in insolvencies, with only three clubs entering formal procedures. The pyramid remained relatively resilient supported by deferred broadcast revenues,²⁰⁶ the renewal of the Premier League's domestic broadcast deals²⁰⁷ and significant support from leagues and government,²⁰⁸ including an initial £250 million Premier League support package for other clubs in the pyramid.^{209 210}

In recent years, formal insolvencies in English football have been relatively rare.

Chart 3.4.1: Clubs entering formal insolvency procedures in English football, 1992 - 2026



Source: IFR analysis expanding on Deloitte, 'Annual Review of Football Finance 2022', August 2022.

Note: The chart shows the number of clubs in the top five tiers of English football entering formal insolvency procedures (i.e. administration, a CVA or liquidation) in each year from 1992 to 2026.

Although formal insolvencies have been relatively rare, liquidation is rarer still. There have been only eight liquidations in the last 34 years. The low rate of insolvencies and liquidations can partly be explained by existing owners continuing to fund losses and new owners rescuing clubs that enter administration or a CVA. However, a broader definition of financial distress that includes overdue payables shows a much higher incidence in recent years. Between 2018/19 and 2025/26, **six clubs experienced financial distress that culminated in formal insolvency procedures, while at least a further 14 had significant overdue payables** during the same period.^{211 212 213}

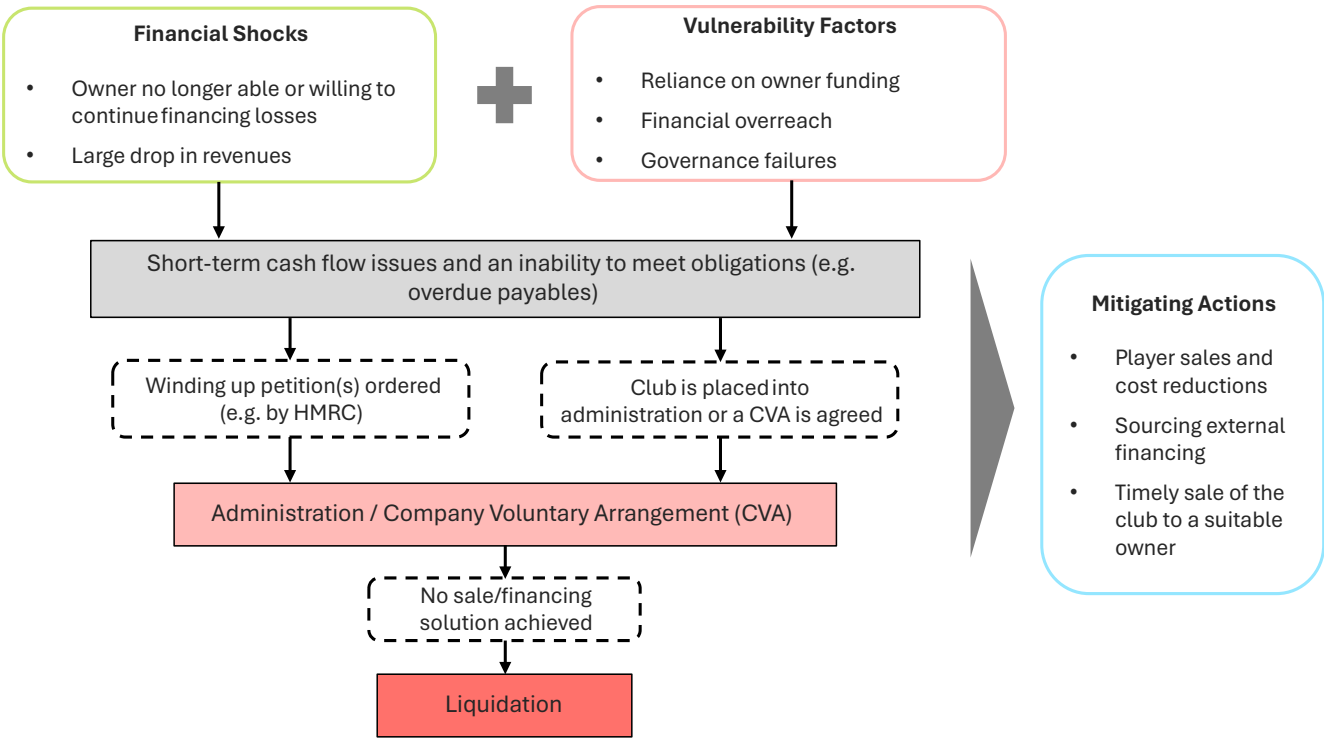
Common pathways to financial distress

Financial distress typically results from several contributing factors. Based on IFR analysis of distress events and a review of academic literature, Figure 3.4.2 identifies three broad elements in the common pathways to financial distress:²¹⁴

- financial shocks
- vulnerability factors
- mitigating actions

Financial distress is typically caused by a combination of financial shocks and vulnerability factors.

Figure 3.4.2: Common pathways to financial distress for English football clubs



Source: IFR analysis of financial distress events, drawing on Beech et al., 'Insolvency events among English football clubs', 2010; Szymanski, 'Insolvency in English professional football: Irrational exuberance or negative shocks?', 2012; and Evans, 'The S-Score of financial sustainability for professional football clubs', 2024.

Financial shocks

Financial distress is typically triggered by one or more shocks that disrupt a club's funding or revenues. The most common shocks fall into two categories:

- **Owner funding shocks:** an owner becoming unwilling or unable to continue financing losses because of changing priorities, poor sporting or financial performance, or wider financial difficulties.
- **Revenue shocks:** significant falls in revenue can cause financial difficulties where clubs cannot reduce costs accordingly. Examples include relegation and wider shocks such as the collapse of ITV Digital or the Covid-19 pandemic.²¹⁵

Vulnerability Factors

Although financial distress is typically triggered by a shock, its impact depends on a club's underlying characteristics. These factors do not necessarily cause distress directly but can increase exposure to financial shocks and reduce a club's ability to absorb them.

- **Reliance on owner funding:** almost every club in the English pyramid is loss-making and reliant on owner financing to fund losses. Greater reliance on owner funding increases vulnerability if that funding is reduced or withdrawn.
- **Governance failures:** the Fan-Led Review identified governance weaknesses across English football, including inadequate board structures and financial controls.²¹⁶ Weak governance can increase vulnerability to financial distress through excessive risk-taking, poor financial oversight and inadequate contingency planning.^{217 218}
- **Financial overreach:** clubs face strong incentives to spend heavily, particularly on players, in pursuit of sporting success.²¹⁹ All else being equal, higher spending, greater debt and lower liquidity can reduce clubs' capacity to absorb shocks to funding or revenues.

Mitigating actions

Clubs often take a range of actions to avoid, or limit the severity of, financial distress.

- **Player sales and cost reductions:** clubs can improve their short-term cash position and ability to meet obligations by selling players and/or reducing costs.
- **Sourcing external financing:** clubs may seek additional financing including through loans or investment from the sale of an ownership stake. Where financing is unavailable, clubs may raise funds through asset sales, such as stadia or training facilities, although this may create further risks where governance is weak.
- **Sale of the club to a new owner:** for clubs in severe financial difficulty, a sale to a suitable new owner can provide a route out of formal insolvency proceedings and avoid liquidation. A sale to an unsuitable owner may instead exacerbate existing problems and lead to renewed financial distress.

As Figure 3.4.2 illustrates, where financial difficulties persist and mitigating actions are unsuccessful, a club may enter formal insolvency proceedings and, if no financing or sale solution is found, ultimately face liquidation.

Case studies of financial distress

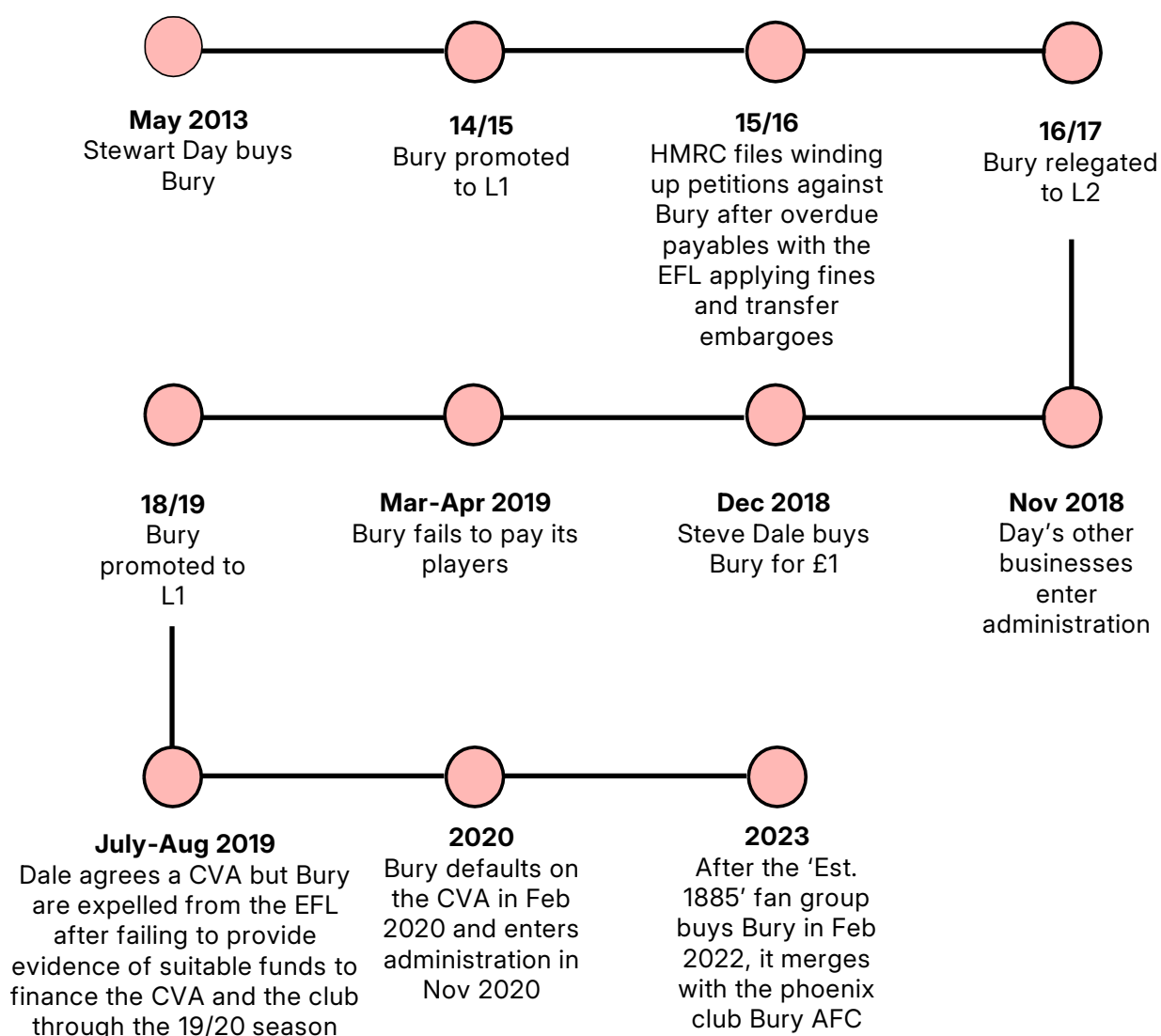
The common pathways to financial distress can be illustrated through the recent high-profile examples of Bury, Derby County and Wigan. These case studies show how different combinations of financial shocks and underlying vulnerabilities can lead clubs into financial distress.

Case study: Bury

Between 2013 and 2023, Bury Football Club experienced repeated financial distress. Figure 3.4.3 sets out the events that ultimately led to the club's expulsion from the EFL and entry into administration. Bury's experience illustrates several features of the common pathway to financial distress.

Case Study: Bury

Figure 3.4.3: Timeline of the events leading to Bury's financial distress



Source: IFR analysis based on publicly available sources cited in this case study section.

Case study: Bury continued

A high reliance on owner funding and financial overreach under Stewart Day's ownership between 2013 and 2018 were identified as key factors that left Bury vulnerable to financial distress.²²⁰ The club's wage-to-revenue ratio rose from close to 100% in 2013/14 to 140% by 2017/18, with the increase funded through cash injections from Day and high-interest loans.^{221 222}

The resulting financial pressures contributed to overdue payables, including late payments of transfer fee instalments and loan player wages.²²³

Day also repeatedly used Bury's stadium, Gigg Lane, as security for high-interest borrowing and took out a mortgage on the ground.²²⁴

The mortgage was subsequently cited as a reason that a potential sale of the club prior to entering administration fell through.²²⁵

HMRC filed winding-up petitions against Bury in 2015 and 2016 for non-payment of taxes, while the EFL imposed fines, withheld payments and applied transfer embargoes. In 2018, the collapse of Day's property businesses created a further financial shock, leaving him **unable to continue funding the club**.

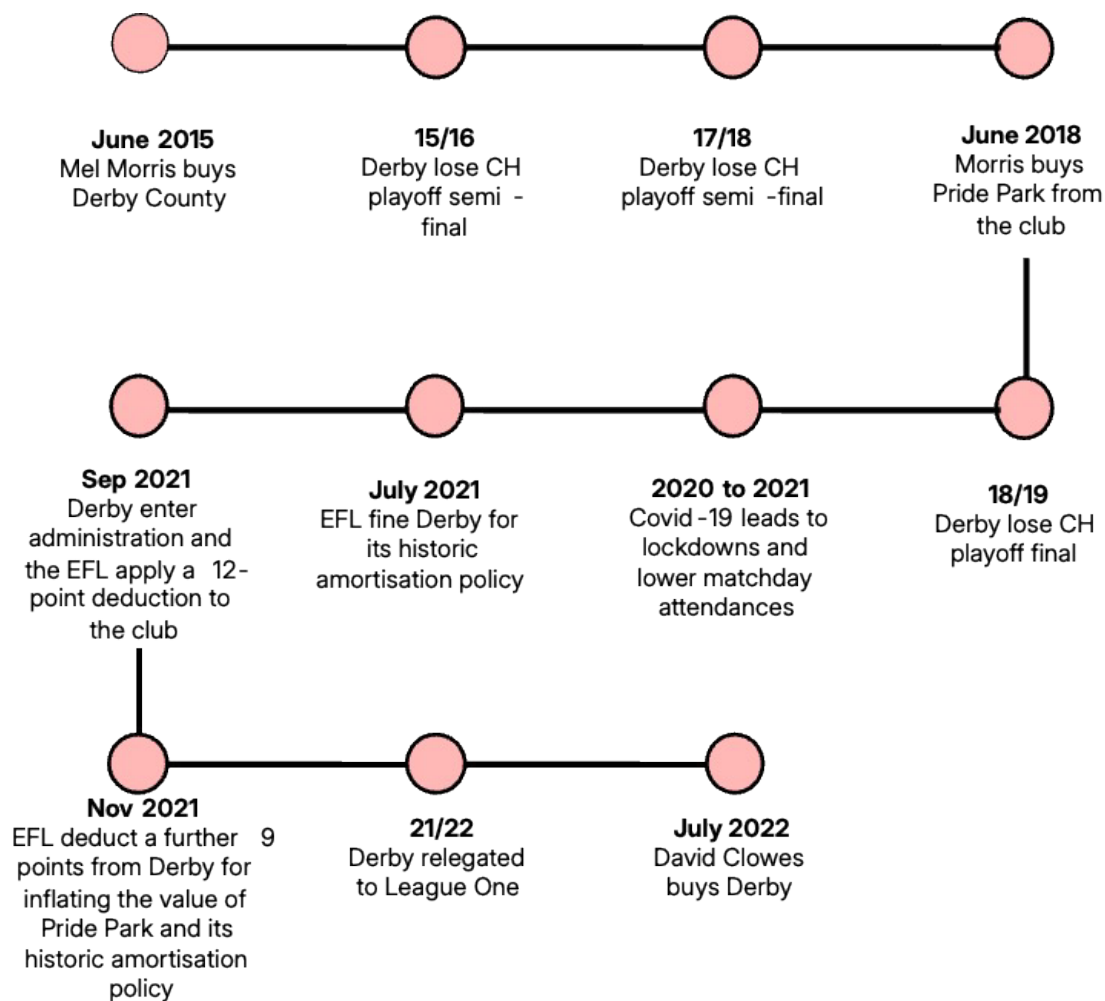
The subsequent change of ownership did not resolve Bury's financial distress. Steve Dale acquired the club from Stewart Day in December 2018. However, he did not provide sufficient evidence to the EFL that he was able and willing to fund the club going forward.²²⁶ Without sufficient owner funding, Bury continued to miss payments to players and was unable to service its debts. Despite achieving promotion in League One in 2018/19, the club did not have sufficient funding to participate in the 2019/20 season and was ultimately expelled from the EFL before entering administration.

Case study: Derby County

Derby County entered administration in September 2021. Figure 3.4.4 sets out the events that led to the club's financial distress, which reflected a combination of financial shocks, reliance on owner funding, financial overreach and governance failures.

Case Study: Derby County

Figure 3.4.4: Timeline of the events leading to Derby County's financial distress



Source: IFR analysis based on publicly available sources cited in this case study section.

Case study: Derby County continued

Financial overreach and a reliance on owner funding were key vulnerabilities under Mel Morris's ownership. After Morris acquired Derby in June 2015, the club broke its transfer record four times in his first three years of ownership.²²⁷

The wage bill increased by more than 80% between 2014/15 and 2017/18,²²⁸ while staff costs rose from 101% to 147% of revenue in the first season after Morris took control.²²⁹ Morris provided more than £200 million to fund the club's push for promotion to the Premier League. By the time Derby entered administration, he said the club was losing between £1.3 million and £1.5 million per month.²³⁰

This level of spending became increasingly dependent on continued owner funding. Morris was ultimately unable to maintain that support and began seeking external investment and a sale of the club towards the end of his tenure, stating in 2019 that current levels of spending were "not sustainable".²³¹

Derby's financial overreach was accompanied by governance failures and breaches of EFL rules.

In particular:

- **Player amortisation.** In 2017, Derby changed its amortisation policy to assign non-zero values to players at the end of their contracts, contrary to standard practice. This allowed the cost of players to be amortised over longer periods while the club reported compliance with EFL's profit and sustainability rules.²³² In June 2021, Derby was fined £100,000 and reprimanded for breaching EFL accounting rules.²³³
- **Stadium sale.** In June 2018 Derby sold its stadium to Morris for £81 million, shortly before the club's financial year end, allowing it to report compliance with the EFL's profit and sustainability rules.²³⁴ The stadium had previously been valued at £41 million.²³⁵ In November 2021, administrators settled the long-running dispute with the EFL over the stadium sale and amortisation irregularities. The EFL imposed a further nine-point deduction, in addition the standard 12-point deduction for entering administration.²³⁶ The resulting 21-point deduction contributed to Derby's relegation from the Championship in 2022.²³⁷
- **Board structure.** The 2021 DCMS' Fan Led Review of Football Governance cited Derby as an example of poor governance, noting that it appeared to lack a proper board structure.²³⁸

Sporting and external shocks compounded these underlying vulnerabilities. Between 2015 and 2019, Derby reached the Championship play-off semi-finals twice and the play-off finals once but failed to secure promotion. The club therefore did not receive the Premier League revenues that could have supported its increased spending.

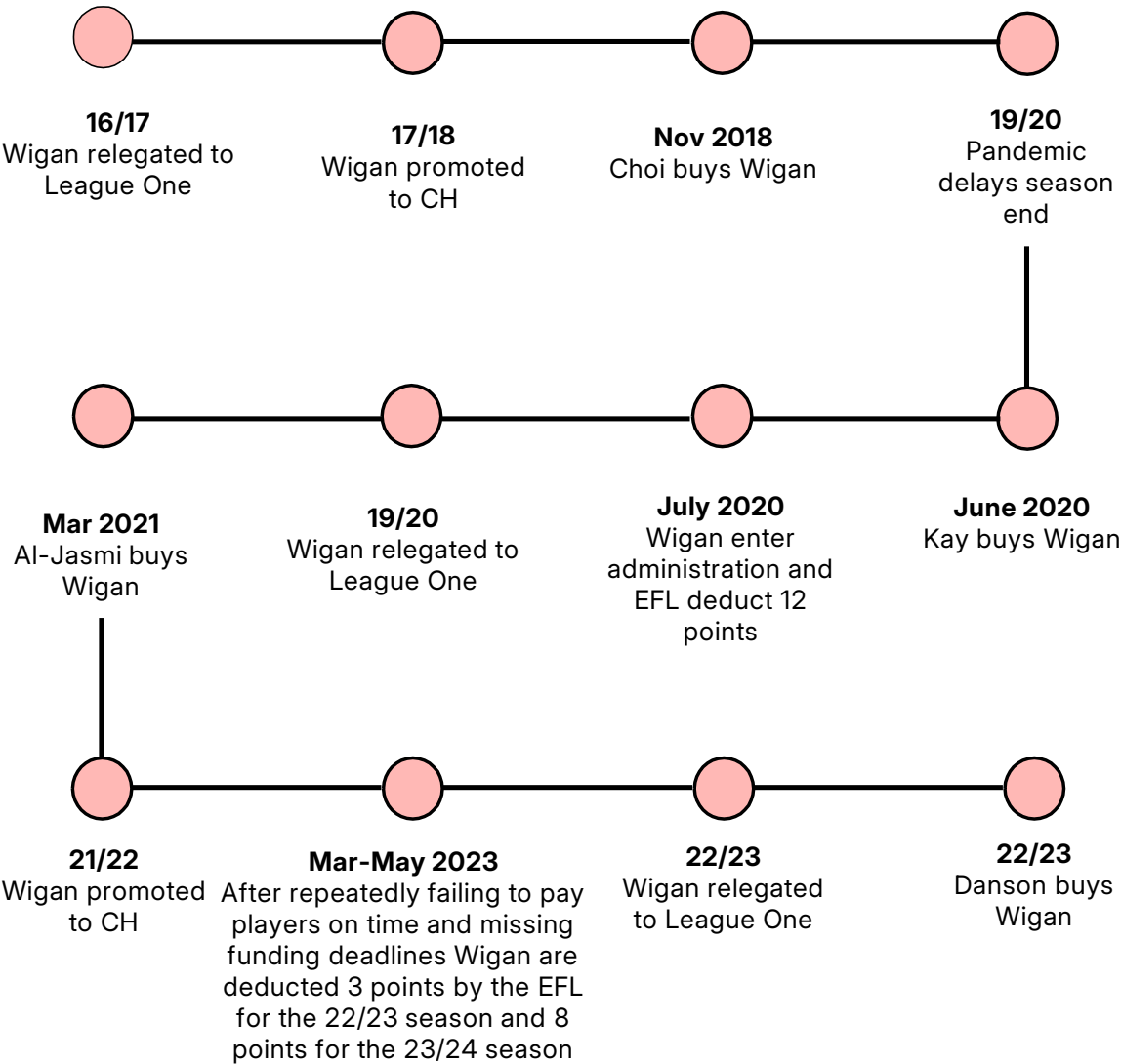
The Covid-19 pandemic placed further pressure on the club's finances. Morris subsequently said that the Covid-19 had cost Derby £20 million in lost revenue, and that, without the pandemic, the club would not have entered administration.²³⁹

Case study: Wigan Athletic

Over the last decade, Wigan Athletic experienced financial distress on multiple occasions, including entering administration in July 2020. Figure 3.4.5 sets out the events leading to the club's administration and illustrates the impact that sudden withdrawal of owner funding can have on a club.

Case Study: Wigan Athletic

Figure 3.4.5: Timeline of the events leading to Wigan Athletic's financial distress



Source: IFR analysis based on publicly available sources cited in this case study section.

Case study: Wigan Athletic continued

Financial overreach and reliance on owner funding increased Wigan's vulnerability to financial distress.

Between 2012 and 2018, the club experienced three relegations and two promotions, moving between the Premier League, Championship and League One. In November 2018, following promotion back to the Championship, Wigan was acquired by IEC, an investment company owned by Dr Stanley Choi.²⁴⁰

Spending on players increased significantly during the 2017/18 promotion season and 2018/19. **Wigan's staff costs rose from 66% of revenue in 2016/17 to 176% in 2017/18 and 168% 2018/19.**²⁴¹ While this spending contributed to promotion, it increased the club's reliance on owner funding. Between November 2018 and March 2020, Choi invested more than £24 million to cover the shortfall between income and expenditure.²⁴²

The withdrawal of owner funding then triggered the club's administration. In June 2020, Choi and IEC sold Wigan to the Next Leader Fund (NLF).²⁴³ Choi was initially the majority shareholder in both the IEC and NLF. Following completion of the sale, NLF minority shareholder Au Yeung Kay acquired Choi's 51% interest in NLF for £20 million, becoming sole owner of both NLF and the club.²⁴⁴

Kay did not provide £6 million of funding that had been promised, subsequently stating that although the money was available, his other business interest took priority.²⁴⁵ Wigan entered administration in July 2020, less than a month after the change of ownership.²⁴⁶

It was later reported that, prior to acquiring the club, Kay had explored several options with insolvency practitioner Begbies Traynor, including putting Wigan into administration.²⁴⁷ A League Arbitration Panel subsequently concluded that Wigan had been "let down" by those who had acquired it and that Kay had made a commercial decision to withdraw promised support.²⁴⁸

Wigan was bought out of administration by Abdulrahman Al-Jasmi in March 2021.²⁴⁹ However, high spending continued under the new ownership, with staff costs equivalent to 157% of revenue in 2021/22 season, when the club was promoted to the Championship, and 145% in the 2022/23.²⁵⁰ During 2022/23, the club repeatedly failed to pay player wages and amounts owed to HMRC, citing cash-flow issues.²⁵¹ The EFL subsequently imposed points deductions and transfer restrictions.²⁵² In June 2023, Al-Jasmi sold the club to local entrepreneur, Mike Danson.²⁵³

Predictors of financial distress

Predictors, or leading indicators, are quantitative metrics that are associated with a higher risk of a club entering financial distress. They are not necessarily the direct causes of distress; rather, they are characteristics observed more frequently among clubs that subsequently enter financial distress compared to those that didn't.

Identifying these leading indicators can help identify clubs at greater risk of financial distress and inform regulatory and supervisory monitoring.

To assess potential predictors of financial distress, we undertook two complementary analyses:

- **Characteristics of distressed clubs.** A comparison of average financial and sporting metrics between clubs that entered financial distress and those that did not.
- **Econometric analysis of financial distress predictors.** Statistical analysis of the association between different financial metrics and the probability of a club entering distress, while controlling for other factors. This helps identify which metrics may be the most useful predictors of distress.

The results of these analyses, together with a comparison with the existing academic literature, are summarised here. The full literature review, methodology, results and limitations are set out in Annex I – Financial distress.

Characteristics of distressed clubs

Using detailed data provided by the Premier League and EFL,²⁵⁴ we compare the average financial and sporting characteristics of the seven clubs in the top four tiers that entered financial distress between 2021/22 and 2025/26 with clubs that did not.²⁵⁵

Profitability and costs

Chart 3.4.6 compares average profitability and cost metrics for distressed and non-distressed clubs. The horizontal axis shows time relative to the distress event:

- **T-2:** two seasons before the club entered distress
- **T-1:** one season before the club entered distress
- **T:** the season in which the club entered distress

The greater the distance between the red and black lines, the greater the difference between distressed and non-distressed clubs.

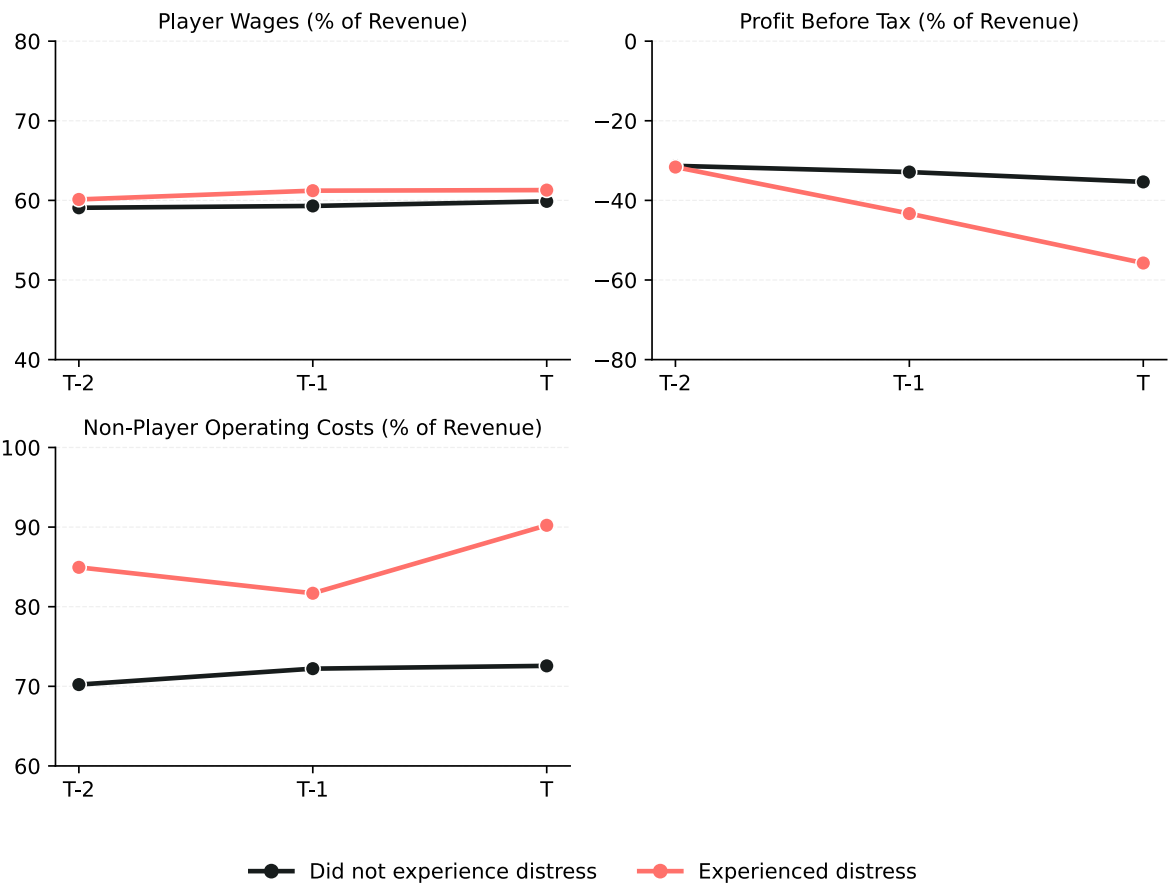
The chart shows that clubs that entered distress:

- **spent similar proportions of revenue on player wages** to non-distressed clubs in the years before entering distress

- **became increasingly loss-making** as they approached distress, with losses increasing from around 30% to more than 50% of revenue
- **had persistently higher non-player operating costs** as a proportion of revenue compared with clubs that did not enter distress

Clubs that experienced financial distress tended to have higher non-player operating costs and larger losses relative to revenue.

Chart 3.4.6: Average cost and profit metrics for clubs that entered financial distress vs. clubs that did not, 2021/22 – 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart above shows a set of average P&L metrics for clubs that entered financial distress during the period compared to clubs that did not experience financial distress during the period. The black lines are for clubs that did not experience financial distress during the period, and the red lines are clubs that did experience financial distress. The horizontal axis shows time relative to the distress event.

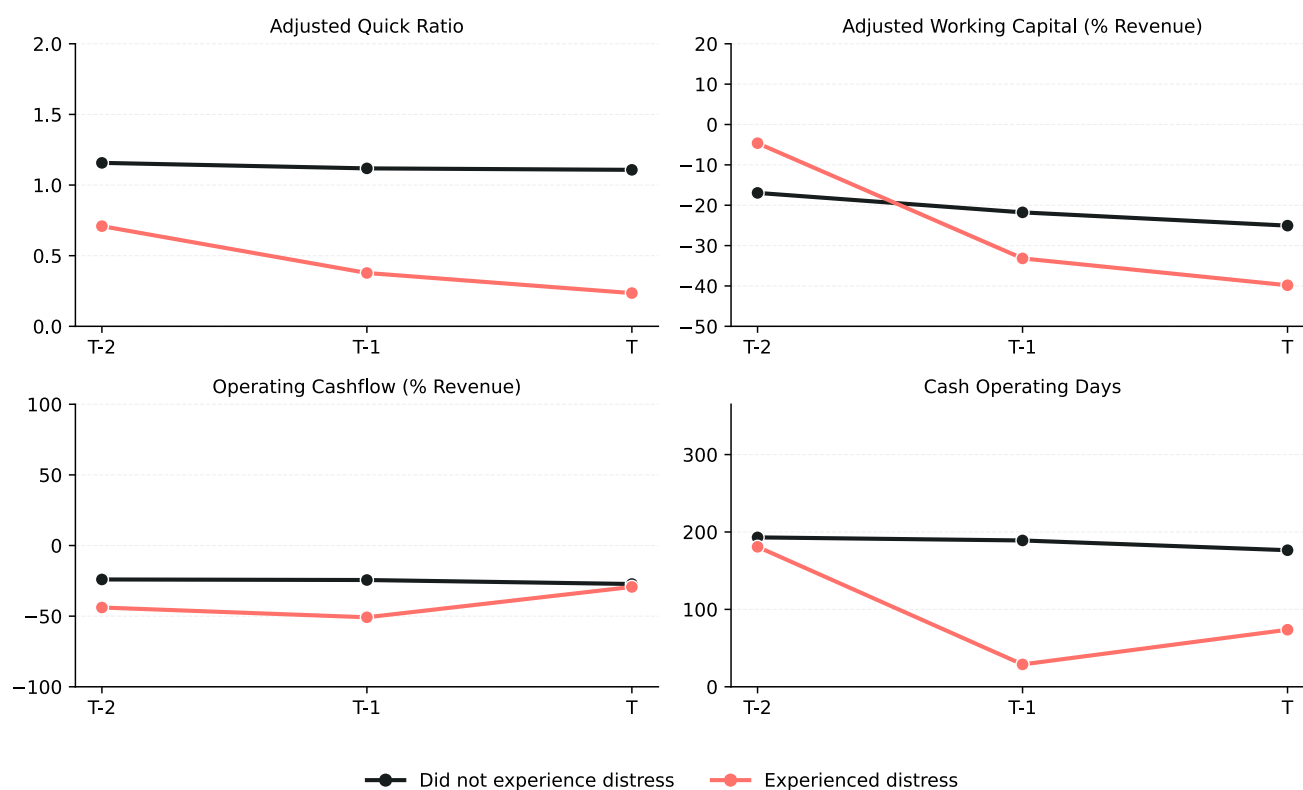
Liquidity

Chart 3.4.7 compares liquidity metrics for clubs that entered financial distress with those that did not. Higher values generally indicate stronger liquidity and a greater ability to meet short-term obligations. As expected, clubs that entered distress generally had weaker and deteriorating liquidity. However, in some cases liquidity levels may be a symptom of, or a response to, wider financial issues rather than their original cause:

- **Adjusted quick ratio** measures a club's ability to meet short-term liabilities using its most liquid assets. Clubs that did not enter distress maintained a relatively stable ratio of around 1.1, while the ratio for distressed clubs fell from around 0.7 at T-2 to around 0.25 by the year of distress, indicating a declining ability to meet short-term obligations from readily available resources.
- **Adjusted working capital (% revenue)** compares a club's short-term assets and liabilities relative to revenue. For distressed clubs, this fell from slightly negative at T-2 to around -40% of revenue by the year of distress, indicating increasing reliance on cash inflows to meet short-term obligations.
- **Operating cashflow (% revenue)** measures cash generated or consumed by day-to-day operations relative to revenue. Both groups had negative operating cashflows, although these were somewhat worse for distressed clubs in the years before distress. The gap narrowed considerably by the year of distress, potentially reflecting cost reductions as clubs experiencing issues moved closer to financial distress.
- **Cash operating days** estimates how long a club could continue operating using its available cash reserves, capped at 365 days. Non-distressed clubs consistently held around 180-190 days of cash reserves, while distressed clubs fell from around 180 days at T-2 to around 30 days at T-1, before partially recovering to around 75 days in the year of distress.

Clubs that experienced financial distress tended to have lower levels of liquidity.

Chart 3.4.7: Average liquidity metrics for clubs that entered financial distress compared with clubs that did not, 2021/22 – 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart above shows a set of average liquidity metrics for clubs that entered financial distress during the period compared to clubs that did not experience financial distress during the period. The black lines are for clubs that did not experience financial distress during the period, and the red lines are clubs that did experience financial distress.

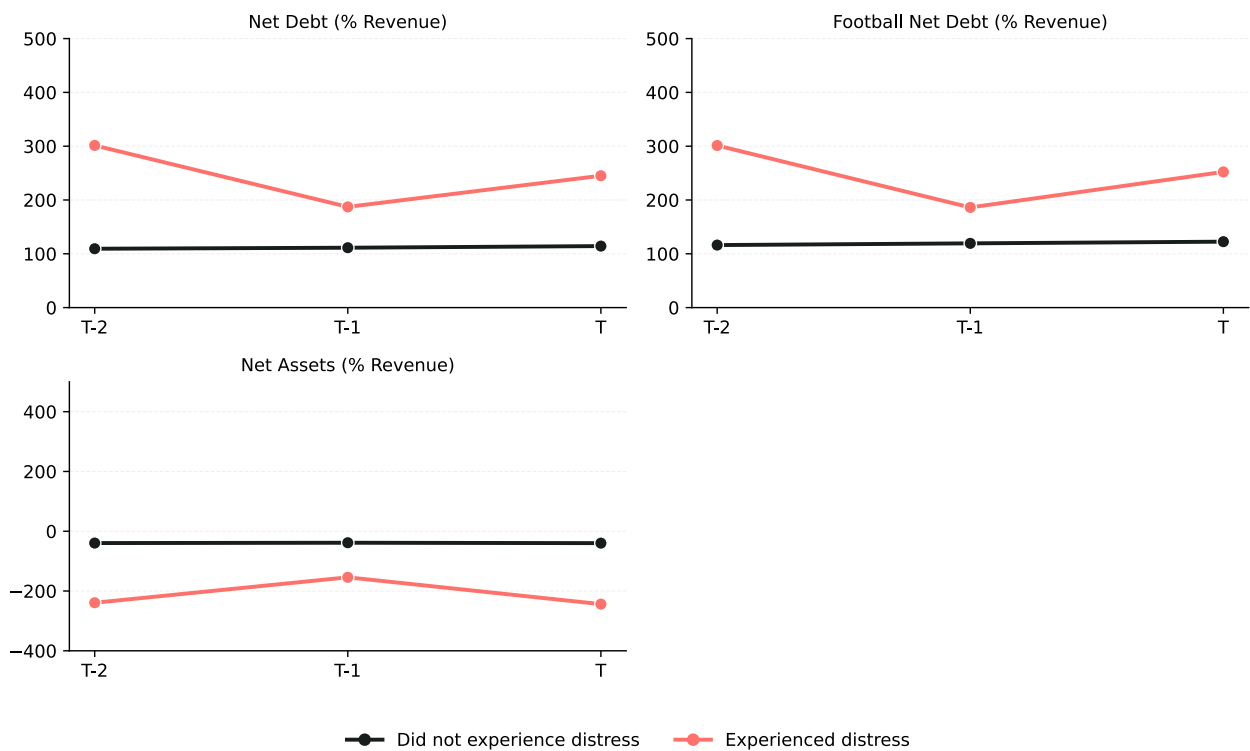
Solvency

Chart 3.4.8 compares solvency and indebtedness between clubs that entered financial distress and those that did not. The three balance sheet metrics – net debt to revenue, football net debt to revenue and net assets to revenue – point to similar conclusions:

- Clubs that entered financial distress had higher debt relative to revenue and weaker balance sheets than clubs that did not, typically carrying debt equivalent to around 2-3 times annual revenue and reporting much larger negative net asset positions.
- This higher leverage suggests that distressed clubs may have had less capacity to absorb financial shocks, increasing their vulnerability to reductions in revenues or owner funding.

Clubs that experienced financial distress tended to have higher debt and weaker balance sheets.

Chart 3.4.8: Average solvency metrics for clubs that entered financial distress compared with clubs that did not, 2021/22 – 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart above shows a set of average solvency metrics for clubs that entered financial distress during the period compared to clubs that did not experience financial distress during the period. The black lines are for clubs that did not experience financial distress during the period, and the red lines are clubs that did experience financial distress. The horizontal axis shows time relative to the distress event: T-2 = two seasons before the club entered distress; T-1 = one season before distress and T = the season the club entered distress.

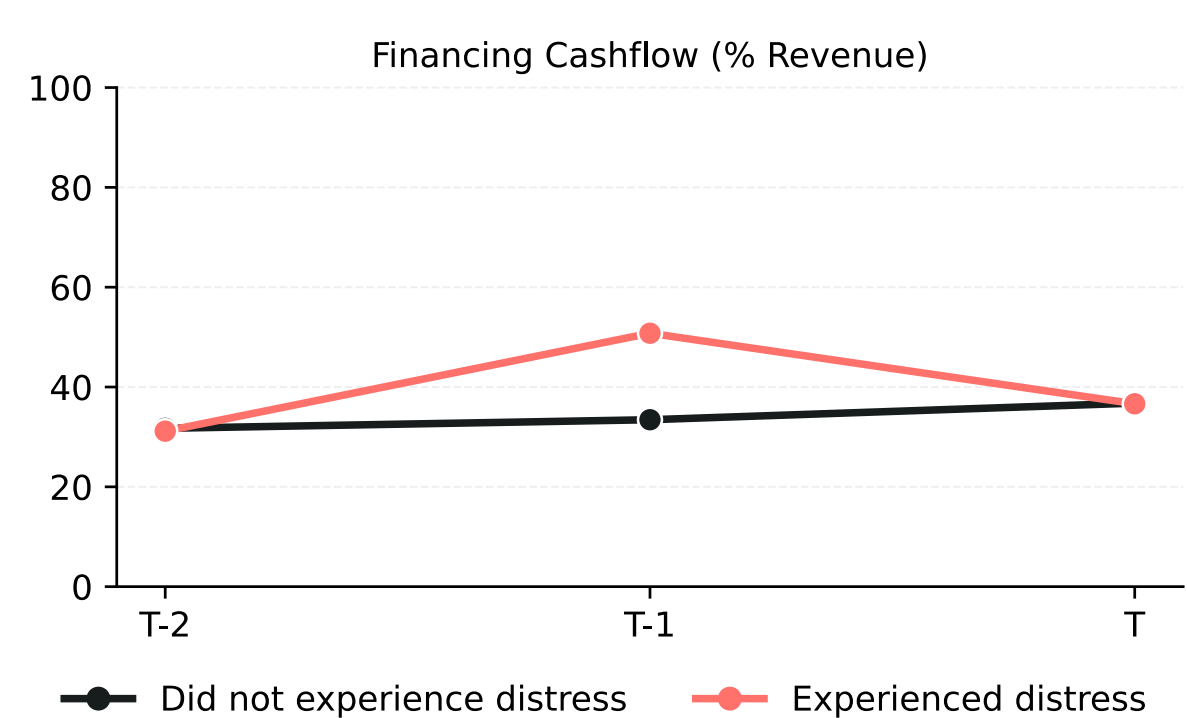
Financing

Financing cashflow to revenue measures clubs’ reliance on external funding, such as owner injections or borrowing, relative to revenue. Chart 3.4.9 shows that financing cashflows were broadly similar for clubs that entered financial distress and those that did not. Distressed clubs saw an increase in financing cashflows at T-1, but this difference had disappeared by the year of distress.

Overall, financing cashflow does not distinguish distressed clubs from non-distressed clubs as clearly as the liquidity and solvency measures. This may be because, as outlined in previous sections, many clubs are reliant on external funding,²⁵⁶ but it only creates a distress issue if that source of external finance can no longer fund the club.

Clubs that experienced financial distress had similar levels of external financing relative to revenue as other clubs.

Chart 3.4.9: Average financing cashflow (% of revenue) for clubs that entered financial distress compared with clubs that did not, 2021/22 – 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart above shows the average financing cashflow / revenue for clubs that entered financial distress during the period compared to clubs that did not experience financial distress during the period. The black line is for clubs that did not experience financial distress during the period, and the red line is for clubs that did experience financial distress. The horizontal axis shows time relative to the distress event: T-2 = two seasons before the club entered distress; T-1 = one season before distress and T = the season the club entered distress.

Sporting Metrics

Alongside the financial differences, there were also differences in sporting performance. On average, distressed clubs:

- **fell eight places in the football pyramid** in the season they entered financial distress, compared with the previous season.
- **were more likely to have been relegated in the previous season:** 29% of clubs that experienced financial distress during the period were relegated the season before.

This suggests that sporting shocks may also be associated with a heightened risk of financial distress.

Summary of the characteristics of distressed clubs

Overall, the analysis shows that **clubs entering financial distress tend to exhibit weaker profitability, poorer liquidity and weaker balance sheets**, with many of these differences emerging one to two years before a distress event. Taken together, deteriorating liquidity, high leverage and persistent losses could therefore provide useful early warning indicators of financial distress.

Econometric analysis of financial distress predictors

While the preceding comparisons indicate which metrics differ between clubs that enter financial distress and those that do not, average differences alone have limitations. Metrics may be related to one another, making it difficult to identify which are most informative.

Comparisons of distressed and non-distressed clubs across leagues may in part reflect structural differences between divisions rather than the clubs themselves. Averages can also be influenced by outliers and do not indicate whether patterns are meaningful or simply reflect variation within the small sample of distressed clubs.

Econometric modelling helps address these limitations by examining multiple metrics simultaneously and identifying which metrics are most strongly associated with financial distress after controlling for other factors.

Using the same data for the period 2021/22 to 2025/26,²⁵⁷ our econometric modelling, detailed in Annex I – Financial distress, shows that:

- **Liquidity measures were the strongest predictors of financial distress.** Clubs with lower levels of readily available cash and weaker short-term cash generation were significantly more likely to enter financial distress. In particular, a lower adjusted quick ratio and lower operating cashflow-to-revenue ratio were associated with a higher probability of entering distress in the following season, while a lower adjusted quick ratio was also associated with a higher probability of distress in the current season.
- **Absolute levels of solvency, profitability, spending and external financing were not meaningfully associated with financial distress risk.** After controlling for other factors, changes in these metrics were not associated with changes in the risk of financial distress. This does not mean that these factors do not influence financial distress, but that their absolute levels appear less useful in differentiating higher-risk from lower-risk clubs.
- **Increasing indebtedness and declining external financing were associated with a higher risk of distress.** An increase in net debt-to-revenue and a reduction in financing cashflow-to-revenue ratio were associated with a higher probability of entering financial distress in the same season. This suggests that clubs whose debt burden is growing and are unable to secure external financing are more likely to enter financial distress and that **changes in these measures may be more informative than their absolute levels.**
- **There is some evidence that clubs attempt to improve their liquidity before entering distress.** An improvement in operating cashflow-to-revenue was associated with a higher risk of financial distress. While counterintuitive, this may reflect clubs with already low levels of liquidity taking mitigating actions, such as cutting costs, as they approach distress.
- **A worsening league position was associated with a higher risk of distress.** This suggests that deteriorating sporting performance and a drop down the pyramid may increase the likelihood of a club experiencing financial difficulty.

These results should be viewed as an exploratory assessment and are subject to some limitations, particularly given the limited number of distress events (seven) in the sample.²⁵⁸

Despite these limitations, the results are broadly consistent with wider academic research on predictors of financial distress. Evans (2024), examining 33 historic insolvency events in English football, also found that **liquidity metrics were consistently strong predictors of financial distress.**²⁵⁹ For insolvencies associated with financing shocks or overspending on wages, the study also found solvency and wage-spend measures to be useful predictors.

Alaminos and Fernandez (2019), examining European football clubs, similarly found low liquidity, high leverage and poor sporting performance to be amongst the strongest predictors of financial distress, alongside a smaller population in the club's city.²⁶⁰

Summary

Overall, the analysis of financial distress in this section shows that:

- **Formal insolvencies in English football have been relatively rare over the last decade, but broader financial distress is more common.**
- **Financial distress is typically triggered by a shock**, such as an owner becoming unwilling or unable to continue funding a club or a significant fall in revenue.
- **The impact of financial shocks depends on a club's underlying vulnerabilities.** Clubs that are highly reliant on owner funding, have weak governance, or engage in financial overreach are generally less resilient to adverse events and therefore more vulnerable to financial distress.
- **Financial metrics can provide useful early warning indicators of distress, with liquidity appearing to be particularly informative in identifying clubs at higher short-term risk.**

Taken together, this evidence has clear implications for the IFR:

- **It is possible to identify and assess heightened risk of club financial distress, but a comprehensive and continuous assessment of individual clubs is required.**
While financial ratios, particularly liquidity measures, provide a strong indication of clubs at higher risk, historic examples show that the wider context - including governance and owner suitability – are also relevant to assessing risk.
- **Reliance on owner funding, poor underlying financial health and inadequate risk planning leave many clubs vulnerable to financial distress.**
Our assessment of liquidity and solvency shows that many clubs rely heavily on external financing, hold limited liquidity and lack contingency plans for the withdrawal of owner funding and/or downside forecasts. This can leave clubs particularly exposed if owners become unwilling or unable to continue providing funding.

- **Existing competition organiser rules alone have not been sufficient to address the risk of financial distress.**
Despite collecting data on club finances, enforcing transfer bans and applying points deductions upon administration, many clubs still enter financial distress. In addition, in many cases, sporting sanctions upon administration often punish the club and the next owner rather than the owner responsible for the financial distress.
- **As part of its licensing regime, the IFR will continuously monitor the risk of financial distress and work with clubs to ensure they have the appropriate resources in place to manage that risk.**

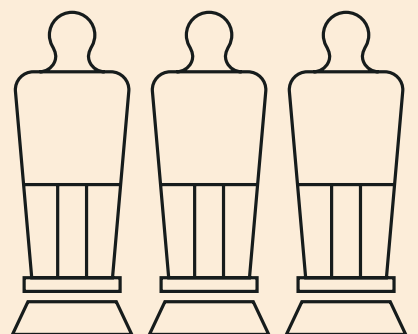
3.5 Conclusions

The combination of features identified in this Section creates significant vulnerabilities and financial risks for regulated clubs across the pyramid, jeopardising the IFR’s ability to advance its objective of protecting and promoting the financial soundness of regulated clubs. In particular:

- There is a significant risk to clubs’ short-term financial viability. Many clubs consume significant cash through their operations and have insufficient liquid assets to cover short-term liabilities. This vulnerability is compounded by the fact that most clubs could survive for less than a month without owner funding and do not have a contingency plan in place.
- Many football clubs face challenges to their financial sustainability over the medium to long term and are reliant on continued support from owners and other external sources of finance. Many clubs have negative equity, generate negative EBIT and EBITDA and have debts that exceed their estimated sale value.
- Although formal insolvencies have been relatively rare over the last decade, broader financial distress is more common. Liquidity appears to be particularly informative in identifying clubs at higher short-term risk. More broadly, reliance on owner funding, poor underlying financial health and inadequate risk planning leave many clubs vulnerable to financial distress.

Systemic resilience and future risks

04



4.1 Introduction

As set out in the Football Governance Act, the IFR has an objective to protect and promote the financial resilience of English football, referred to as the 'systemic financial resilience objective'.²⁶¹

The explanatory notes to the Football Governance Act state that systemic risks *'might not threaten any one club significantly but, given the club's relationship with the wider football system, their potential aggregated, correlated, and/or multiplied effects may pose a significant risk to the pyramid as a whole. Equally, there may be structural issues in the industry with implications for all clubs'*.²⁶²

Systemic risk refers broadly to risks to the functioning of the football system as a whole. Identifying, monitoring and assessing these risks is an ongoing exercise.

At this stage, we have identified and assessed four potential sources of systemic risk:

- **Financial cliff-edges and the distribution of revenue.** We assess how revenue distribution arrangements affect clubs' incentives to spend and the financial impact of relegation.
- **Investor landscape.** Given the importance of owners and investors to English football, we assess who is investing in the game, their motivations and the factors that could affect their willingness to continue investing.
- **Future broadcast landscape.** Given the importance of broadcast revenues to club finances, we consider future uncertainty in the broadcast market and its potential financial impact.
- **Transfer debt and transfer financing.** We examine trends in net transfer debt, the role of transfer financing and the risks associated with both.

4.2 Financial cliff-edges and distributions

Chapter at a glance

This chapter considers the impact of financial cliff-edges and distribution arrangements on clubs across the pyramid.

There are significant financial cliff-edges across the football pyramid. The growth of Premier League broadcast revenues and current distribution arrangements have contributed to those cliff-edges, particularly across the Premier League and Championship.

- In 2025/26, a Premier League club received 10 to 17 times as much as non-parachute Championship clubs in domestic competition distributions, whereas a year one parachute club received five times as much.
- This creates significant financial risk upon relegation, even with parachute payments in place.
- This also creates an incentive for non-parachute Championship clubs to overspend to compete with parachute clubs and pursue promotion.
- This can also impact sporting competition across the leagues.
 - The performance of newly promoted clubs in the Premier League has declined over the last ten years, with these clubs performing worse than their international and lower-league counterparts.
 - The evidence on the sporting performance of parachute clubs is mixed. Parachute clubs increasingly outperform non-parachute clubs, taking 17 of 30 promotion spots in the last ten years, but this is broadly in line with European and lower-league counterparts.
- There are also financial cliff-edges between League Two and the National League and within the National League.
 - Although the financial impact of relegation is relatively limited because of parachute payments, clubs that are relegated from League Two can lose their academy status.
 - The financial reward from promotion to League Two, coupled with the gap between parachute and non-parachute clubs, creates some incentive to overspend. Achieving promotion is more difficult as only two teams are promoted each season.

Introduction

There are significant financial cliff-edges between and within leagues, and these have grown over time. This reflects differences in the growth rates of clubs’ revenues and competition organiser revenues, as well as how competition organiser revenues are distributed across leagues. In this chapter, we assess the impact of these distribution arrangements on clubs across the pyramid. In particular, we:

- set out the key revenue cliff-edges across the pyramid
- examine how central broadcast revenues are distributed and the role these distributions play in creating cliff-edges between and within leagues
- set out our framework for assessing the impact of distribution arrangements, before considering their effect on incentives to spend, relegation and competition
- define the issue and consider potential options to address it, including the trade-offs involved

This analysis focuses on the current distribution arrangements. However, in the last few months, the IFR has facilitated discussions between the Premier League and the EFL but remained neutral as they seek to reach a new revenue distribution arrangement. At the time of writing, they had not reached an agreement so we have not analysed the potential impact of any new arrangement.

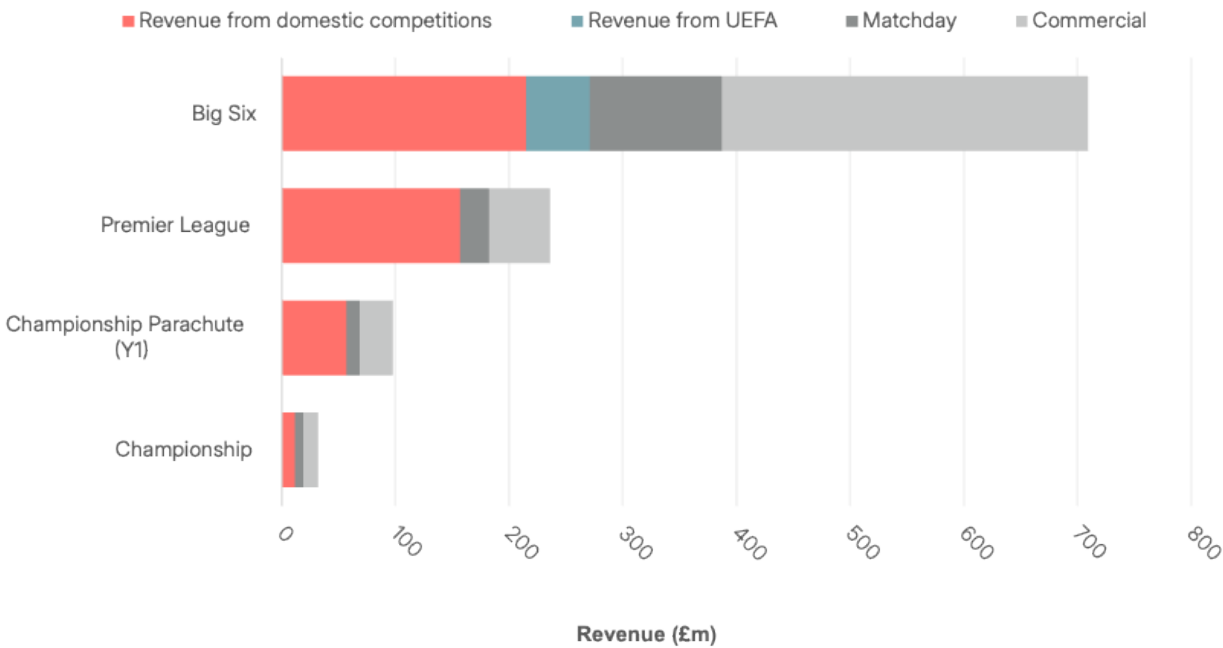
Financial cliff-edges

There are significant financial cliff-edges within and between leagues, although their drivers vary.²⁶³ Chart 4.2.1 illustrates the main cliff-edges within and between the Premier League and Championship for the 2025/26 season. We identify three material cliff-edges:

- **Within the Premier League.** On average, the big six clubs generate significantly higher revenues than other Premier League clubs (£709 million vs. £236 million), largely due to higher commercial and matchday revenues (£438 million vs. £79 million combined). UEFA broadcast revenues also contribute to this gap. In 2024/25, Premier League clubs participating in the Champions League received £80 million on average, compared with £33 million for those participating in the Europa League, while Chelsea received £19 million for participating in the Europa Conference League.²⁶⁴ However, UEFA broadcast revenues are not the primary driver of the gap, as big six clubs do not qualify for UEFA competitions every year and other Premier League clubs also qualify periodically.²⁶⁵
- **Between the Premier League and the Championship.** Non-big six Premier League clubs generate significantly higher revenues than Championship clubs, largely due to differences in broadcast revenues. On average, non-big six Premier League clubs receive £157 million in broadcast revenues, compared with £56 million for clubs receiving year-one parachute payments and £12 million for non-parachute Championship clubs.
- **Within the Championship.** The main cliff-edge is between parachute and non-parachute clubs, primarily driven by broadcast revenues (£56 million for clubs receiving first-year parachute payments vs. £12 million for non-parachute clubs). Parachute clubs also generate higher commercial and matchday revenues because those clubs typically have larger fanbases (£41 million vs. £20 million).

Significant financial cliff-edges exist within and between the top two divisions.

Chart 4.2.1: Cliff-edges by club category, £m, 2025/26 season



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information, and analysis of UEFA, 'UEFA Financial Report 2024/25', 2026.

Note: UEFA revenue depends on qualification. UEFA revenue earned by non-big six Premier League clubs is not included. 2024/25 UEFA revenue is used as an estimate.

In addition to the cliff edges within and between the Premier League and the Championship, cliff-edges also exist further down the pyramid.²⁶⁶ Although smaller in absolute terms, they remain significant relative to average club revenues.

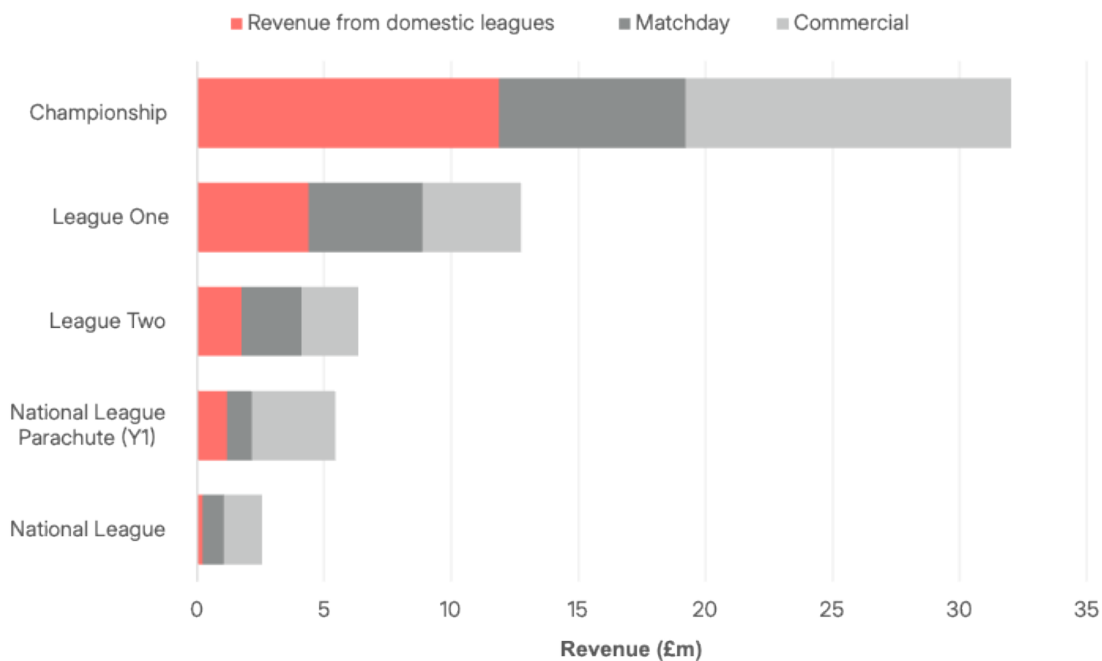
- **Between the Championship and League One:** Non-parachute Championship clubs earn around three times as much broadcast revenue as League One clubs (£12 million compared with £4 million on average), alongside higher commercial and matchday revenues (£20 million vs. £8 million on average).
- **Between League One and League Two:** League One clubs earn around £2 million more in broadcast revenue and £4 million more in commercial and matchday revenue than League Two clubs, on average (£8.4 million vs. £4.6 million).

- **Between League Two and the National League:** League Two clubs earn around ten times as much broadcast revenues as National League clubs (c. £1.8 million vs. £0.2 million), although broadcast revenues represent a relatively small proportion of revenues in both divisions. League Two clubs also earn significantly higher commercial and matchday revenues (£4.6 million vs. £2.4 million on average).

- **Within the National League.** Clubs relegated from League Two receive a parachute payment of around £1 million, compared with broadcast revenues of c. £0.2 million for other National League clubs. Newly relegated clubs also earned higher commercial and matchday revenues in 2025/26 (£4.3 million vs. £2.4 million on average). Relegation from League Two also results in the loss of academy status and EPPP funding, while only two National League clubs are promoted to the EFL each season.

Significant cliff-edges exist further down the pyramid.

Chart 4.2.2: Cliff-edges by club category (Championship to National League), £m, 2025/26 season



Source: IFR Analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Distribution of broadcast and other central revenues across the pyramid

Although financial cliff-edges reflect differences across all revenue streams, the distribution of competition organisers’ central revenues is an important driver across the pyramid.

Before the formation of the Premier League in 1992, 75% of domestic broadcast revenues were distributed to top-flight clubs and 25% to clubs in the next three divisions.²⁶⁷ Following its formation, the Premier League and EFL generated broadcast and other central revenues separately, although a proportion of Premier League revenues continued to be distributed across the leagues. Clubs relegated from the Premier League have received parachute payments since 1992, while solidarity payments to other EFL clubs were introduced in 2007. The size and structure of both payments were subsequently revised in 2010, 2016 and 2019.²⁶⁸

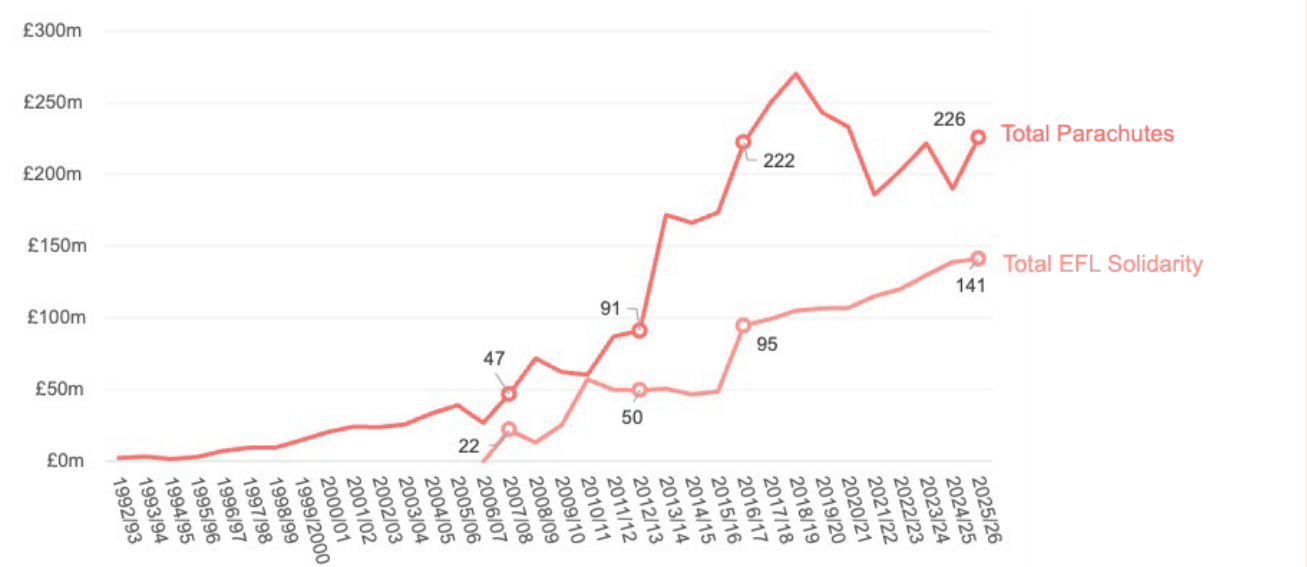
Chart 4.2.3 shows significant increases in both total parachutes and total EFL solidarity since 2007/08, particularly alongside the growth in Premier League broadcast revenues during the 2010s.

Parachute payments and total EFL solidarity payments have fallen as a proportion of Premier League revenues since 2012/13:

- **2012/13:** parachute payments totalled £91 million (7.1% of Premier League revenues), while EFL solidarity payments totalled £50 million (3.9%).²⁶⁹
- **2025/26:** parachute payments totalled £226 million (5.7% of Premier League revenues), while EFL solidarity payments were £138 million (3.5%).²⁷⁰

Parachute and solidarity payments have both increased significantly since 2007/08, but parachute payments have increased by more and are distributed across fewer clubs.

Chart 4.2.3: Premier League distributions as parachute payments and solidarity payments (1992/93 - 2025/26)



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, and of data received from the EFL in response to IFR request for information.

Note: The data for 2025/26 are forecasts as at March 2026.

In 2025/26:

- the **Premier League** distributed £3.1 billion to its own clubs, £226 million in parachute payments, £141 million in solidarity payments to EFL clubs and £5 million to National League clubs²⁷¹
- the **EFL** distributed £145 million to Championship clubs, £36 million to League One clubs and £24 million to League Two clubs²⁷²
- the **National League** distributed £0.8 million to its clubs²⁷³

These distributions create significant financial cliff-edges within and across leagues. In terms of the distribution of domestic competition organiser revenues in 2025/26 on a per club basis:

- Premier League clubs received between £117 million and £198 million in domestic competition distributions, two to three times as much as Championship year-one parachute clubs, and 10 to 17 times as much as non-parachute Championship clubs²⁷⁴
- Championship year-one parachute clubs received £55 million, five times as much as non-parachute Championship clubs²⁷⁵
- Non-parachute Championship clubs received £12 million, five times as much as League One clubs²⁷⁶
- League One clubs received £2.4 million, 1.4 times as much as League Two clubs²⁷⁷
- League Two clubs received £1.7 million, eight times as much as National League clubs²⁷⁸

In addition to these, the Premier League distributed a further £130 million to the wider game in 2025/26.²⁷⁹ This included £44 million to its Charitable Fund, £25 million to the PFA, £24 million to the Football Foundation and £12 million to the Premier League's Stadium Fund.²⁸⁰ The Premier League and EFL also apply a transfer levy, that funds the academies, player pensions and wider player support totalling £123m in 2025/26, with the significant majority funded by the Premier League.²⁸¹

As noted above, in the last few months, the IFR has facilitated discussions between the Premier League and the EFL. The IFR has remained neutral as the competition organisers seek to reach a new revenue distribution arrangement. Box 4.2.1 summarises the key elements of the proposal that Premier League clubs voted to approve but, at the time of writing, are still subject to discussions between the two competition organisers.

Box 4.2.1: Premier League 2026 proposal

Premier League clubs have voted to approve a funded proposal for a new football-led strategic partnership with the EFL. The new strategic partnership would start in 2026/27 and would include:

- **Increased solidarity payments:** The proposal would more than double existing solidarity payments to EFL clubs.
- **Merit rakes:** The size of each club's solidarity payments would be dependent on sporting performance for all EFL leagues.
- **Ring-fenced infrastructure fund:** Part of the additional funding would be ring-fenced for infrastructure projects to advance sustainability requirements.
- **Tighter financial controls:** To reduce financial losses in the Championship.
- **Life-boat fund:** The proposal would create a lifeboat fund to help prevent club liquidation.
- **Reducing parachute payments:** The proposal would implement a phased reduction in the level of parachute payments made to relegated Premier League clubs.

Framework for assessing the impact of the current distribution arrangements

Revenue distributions play an important role in supporting English football and the wider pyramid. A key question that the IFR would need to consider if it were required to exercise its functions under Part 6 of the Act would be whether features of the current distribution arrangements risk jeopardising its ability to advance its objectives.²⁸²

We therefore assess whether the current arrangements:

- i. create significant financial risk upon relegation
- ii. unduly increase clubs' incentives to spend on players
- iii. affect sporting competition

Given the IFR's statutory remit, this assessment focuses on the distribution of domestic competition organiser revenues, while taking wider financial cliff-edges into account. It focuses on the structure of distribution arrangements rather than the absolute amount each club receives, as relative financial resources and spending power are more important in determining club behaviour.

Assessing whether distribution arrangements create a significant financial risk upon relegation

Relegation typically reduces a club’s revenues, reflecting both lower matchday and commercial revenues and reduced central distributions. While this can strengthen competition by increasing clubs’ incentives to avoid relegation, a significant revenue reduction can create financial risk if a club is unable to adjust its costs accordingly. We therefore assess the financial impact of relegation in each league by considering the reduction in revenues and club responses through player wage spending, profitability and external financing.

Assessing whether distribution arrangements unduly increase clubs’ incentive to spend on players

Given the link between player spending and sporting success,²⁸³ clubs have an incentive to invest in playing talent to compete. This is an inherent feature of the football industry and can support on-pitch investment, quality and competition. In particular, promotion and relegation provide strong incentives to invest in playing talent,²⁸⁴ in contrast to closed leagues where the absence of relegation can reduce incentives to spend to compete.²⁸⁵

However, distribution arrangements can amplify these incentives where they create or exacerbate significant differences in spending power within or between leagues. Clubs may spend more to compete with better-resourced rivals within a league, while significant financial cliff-edges between leagues can incentivise overspending in playing talent to achieve promotion or avoid relegation.²⁸⁶ The potential increase in revenues and club value following promotion, or reduction following relegation, can strengthen these incentives.

As such, we systematically consider whether the distribution arrangements create cliff-edges within and between leagues, and whether these increase incentives to overspend on players. We assess this by considering the proportion of revenue spent on players and whether clubs sustain persistent losses. As part of this, we also take into account the league financial rules, which can impact the ability of clubs to spend on players.

Assessing the impact of distribution arrangements on sporting competition

Distribution arrangements can affect sporting competition. They can incentivise on-pitch investment and help ensure clubs have sufficient financial resources to compete. However, where they create significant differences in spending power within a league, less well-resourced clubs may struggle to compete. Where they create significant differences in revenues between leagues, clubs at risk of relegation may limit spending to reduce exposure to a potential relegation revenue shock, affecting competition within the league.

Although the IFR’s primary focus is club financial soundness and systemic financial resilience, sporting competition is relevant for two main reasons.

- 1. **The IFR is required, when undertaking its duties, to consider the impact its actions have on the competitiveness of regulated clubs** including relative to other regulated clubs and non-regulated clubs, such as in UEFA competitions.
- 2. **The competitiveness and quality of English football are a key driver of demand.**²⁸⁷ If distribution arrangements negatively affect sporting competition, they could therefore pose a long-term systemic risk to English football’s revenues.

As such, we assess whether financial cliff-edges created by distribution arrangements affect competition within and between leagues.

The financial impact of relegation

The distribution of central revenues means that clubs can experience a significant reduction in revenue following relegation. This subsection assesses the financial impact of relegation in each league. Further detail is provided in Annex J – Assessment of distributions.

Premier League to the Championship

For clubs relegated in 2024/25, even with parachute payments in place:

- total revenue fell by an average of £70 million (42%), including a £55 million reduction in broadcast revenue²⁸⁸
- wage costs fell by an average £29 million (34%), which did not offset the revenue shortfall²⁸⁹
- average EBITDA fell by £32 million (447%)²⁹⁰
- external financing increased by £11 million (28%)²⁹¹

Over a longer period, clubs have adopted different strategies following relegation. Some sell players, reducing wage costs and generating income, while others invest in players, potentially to increase their chances of promotion back to the Premier League. Just over half of completed parachute payment windows since 2006/07 have resulted in a return to the Premier League.²⁹²

Championship to League One

For clubs relegated in 2024/25:

- average total revenue fell by £10 million (37%), including a £7.6 million reduction in broadcast revenue.²⁹³ This was proportionally smaller than the fall for clubs relegated from the Premier League to the Championship (37% vs. 42%)²⁹⁴
- wage costs fell an average of £10 million (47%), almost offsetting the revenue reduction and representing a proportionally larger reduction than for clubs relegated from the Premier League to the Championship (47% vs. 34%)²⁹⁵
- average EBITDA remained broadly stable, improving from -£16 million to -£14 million (10% increase)²⁹⁶

League One to League Two

The financial impact of relegation from League One to League Two in 2024/25 was limited:

- total revenues fell by £0.3 million (4%), despite a £0.4 million fall in broadcast revenues, suggesting higher non-broadcast partially offset the reduction
- wage costs fell by an average of £0.5 million (12%), more than offsetting the fall in total revenue
- average EBITDA remained broadly stable, falling slightly by £0.3 million (9%)
- external financing fell by £1.3 million (38%)

League Two to National League

Due to data limitations, we cannot undertake the same pre- and post-relegation analysis for clubs relegated from League Two to the National League. Instead, we compare revenues in the two leagues to estimate the impact of relegation.

The revenue shock associated with relegation from League Two to the National League appears relatively limited. Central distributions fall from around £1.7 million in League Two to around £1.3 million in the National League (including National League parachute payments), a reduction of approximately 27%. This is materially smaller than the reductions in broadcast revenue observed higher up the pyramid: 50% for clubs relegated from the Premier League and 69% for those relegated from the Championship.²⁹⁷

Moreover, average player wages in 2025/26 for clubs receiving National League parachute payments (£3.2 million) were slightly lower than the League Two average (£3.3 million).²⁹⁸ This £0.1 million (5%) difference suggests that relegated clubs are able to reduce their player wage bill to some extent to manage the £0.4 million fall in centrally distributed revenues.

In addition to these financial impacts, clubs relegated to the National League can lose their academy status under the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP).

Conclusion on financial impact of relegation

Overall, the financial impact of relegation is greatest at the top of the English football pyramid, where revenue gaps between divisions are largest. Parachute payments play a key role in cushioning the substantial revenue fall on relegation from the Premier League to the Championship. Further down the pyramid, the financial consequences of relegation become progressively less severe.

Assessing the impact of distributions arrangements on incentives to spend on players

In the following subsections, we assess whether current distribution arrangements unduly increase clubs’ incentives to spend on players by analysing whether they are incentivised to sustain losses over time. For further details, see Annex J – Assessment of distributions.

Premier League

There is a significant financial gap between the big six, that earned average revenues of £709 million in 2025/26, and other Premier League clubs, that earned average revenues of £236 million. However, this gap is driven primarily by differences in matchday and commercial revenues (£438 million vs £79 million) and revenues from UEFA competitions, rather than the distribution of Premier League broadcast and other central revenues. The Premier League’s overall top-to-bottom central distribution ratio is limited to 1.8:1, making it the most equal among Europe’s big five leagues.²⁹⁹

Premier League broadcast revenues do not appear to create a clear incentive to overspend on players in a given season. Non-big six clubs would have needed to spend an additional £146 million in 2025/26 on player wages to match the big six. Even if this were to have resulted in similar sporting performance, this would have only generated an additional £114 million in average broadcast revenue. As such, in a single season, the increase in player wage spend would likely be greater than the potential increase in broadcast revenues. Closing the revenue gap would require a non-big six club to sustain success over multiple seasons to build commercial and matchday revenues, likely requiring sustained player investment.

In addition, Premier League financial rules also limit how much clubs can spend on players. The previous Profitability and Sustainability Rules limited adjusted losses to £105m over a rolling three-year period. From 2026/27 onwards, the Squad Cost Ratio (SCR) will limit squad costs to 85% of football revenue, although clubs have a multi-year allowance permitting spending up to 115%.³⁰⁰

As such, in terms of their actual player spend, although non-big six clubs spend a greater proportion of their revenue on player wages than big-six clubs, they spend significantly less in absolute terms. Most Premier League clubs spend 60% or less of their revenues on player wages, allowing them to break even in terms of EBITDA. This suggests the distribution arrangements, or financial cliff-edges, are not driving an incentive to overspend in the Premier League.

Championship

For Championship clubs, there are two significant financial cliff-edges, both primarily driven by the distribution of domestic broadcast revenues.

- **Between the Premier League and the Championship:** From 2023/24 to 2024/25, promotion increased parachute clubs’ total revenues by £73 million (70%) and non-parachute clubs’ total revenues by £139 million (376%). Despite higher player wages, underlying EBITDA improved for all promoted clubs, while higher revenues increased their estimated enterprise value.
- **Between parachute and non-parachute clubs:** In 2025/26, parachute clubs had average total revenue £60 million higher than non-parachute clubs and spent £27 million more on player wages (£53 million compared with £26 million).

Together, the financial rewards from promotion and the gap between parachute and non-parachute clubs appear to incentivise non-parachute clubs to overspend to compete with parachute clubs. Our analysis of Championship player wage spend finds that:³⁰¹

- Parachute clubs spent more on player wages in absolute terms than non-parachute clubs (£53 million vs £26 million) but less as a proportion of revenue (57% vs 84%)
- Non-parachute clubs would break even in EBITDA terms if they spent 19% of revenues on player wages. However, all spent at least 59% with ten clubs spending more than 80%

This suggests that non-parachute clubs incur significant losses to maintain higher player-wage spend.

To assess this incentive further, we modelled the expected financial pay-off from a £10 million increase in an individual club’s player-wage spend, including its effect on the likelihood of promotion and relegation. The analysis finds that non-parachute clubs, particularly those with higher revenues, have a strong incentive to increase player-wage spending because it increases the likelihood of promotion and reduces the risk of relegation.

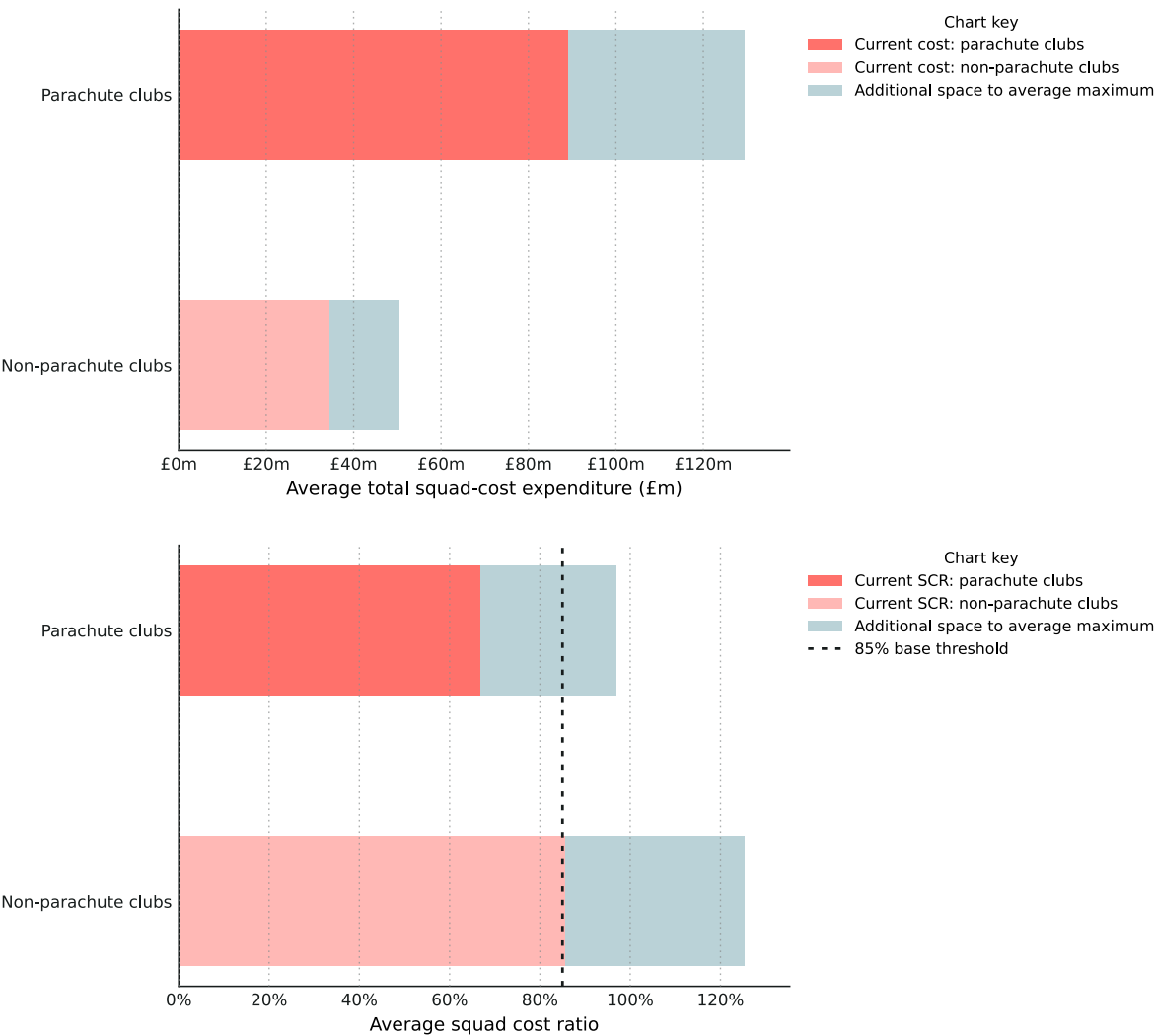
However, Championship clubs' ability to spend on players was by Championship P&S rules. These rules limited adjusted losses to £39m over a rolling three-year period.³⁰² However, from 2026/27 onwards, the Championship moved to an SCR system. As in the Premier League, clubs can spend up to 85% of income on squad costs but they also have a permitted top-up allowance of £33m over three years, capped at £15m in any one season.³⁰³

Our analysis suggests that the new SCR rules will significantly loosen the financial constraints on football clubs in the Championship. Charts 4.2.4 and 4.2.5 show the squad cost expenditure and ratios in 2025/26, split by parachute and non-parachute clubs, under the old profit and sustainability financial rules. If Championship clubs were to utilise all the available headroom under the new rules, we estimate that this would increase total squad cost expenditure by £460m from £1.02 billion to £1.48 billion.

- On average, non-parachute Championship clubs could increase their squad cost ratios from 86% to 125%, representing an extra £15.8m of spending from £34.7m to £50.5m. For the 2025/26 season this would represent a combined increase of £300m in spending across 19 non-parachute clubs, from £660m to £960m.³⁰⁴
- Parachute clubs could increase their squad cost ratios from 67% to 97%, representing an extra £40.3m of spending from £89.1m to £129.4m. For the 2025/26 season this would represent a combined increase of £160m across four parachute clubs, from £360m to £520m.

The total squad cost of the Championship could increase by over £450m (45.5%) as a result of loosening financial constraints.

Charts 4.2.4 and 4.2.5: Average squad cost expenditure (£m) and average squad cost ratio (%) with additional headroom under new financial rules in the Championship (2025/26)



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: Values are unweighted club averages.

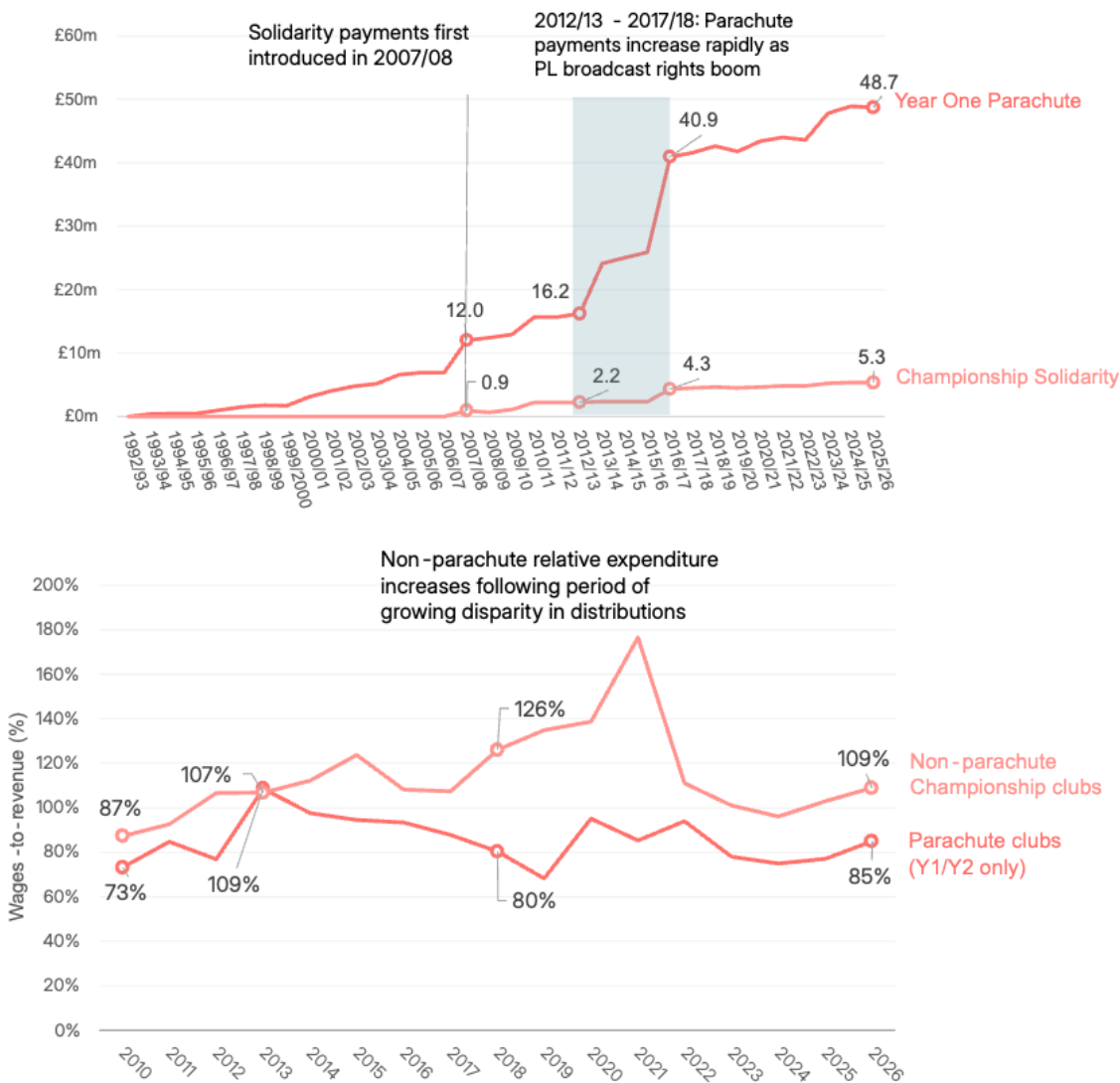
We also considered how the incentive to overspend has changed as the gap between parachute and non-parachute clubs has grown:

- the gap increased from £14 million in 2012/13 to £43 million in 2025/26
- the wage-to-revenue ratio of non-parachute clubs rose from 107% in 2012/13 to almost 180% in 2021, before falling to 109% in 2025/26

This suggests that the growing gap increased the incentive for non-parachute clubs to overspend, although the level of overspending has fallen in recent years despite the gap remaining significant.

As the gap between parachute payments and solidarity payments has grown, relative overspend from non-parachute clubs has increased.

Charts 4.2.6 and 4.2.7: Growth in Year One parachute payments and Championship solidarity payments over time (1992/93 – 2025/26). Comparison between Parachute and Non-parachute wages-to-revenue ratios over time, 2009/10 – 2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of companies house financial accounts and data from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: Parachute and solidarity payments are budgeted figures. 2025/26 data are forecasts as of March 2026.

League One

In League One, distribution arrangements do not create a cliff-edge within the league because clubs receive similar broadcast and other central revenues. However, they do create an increase in revenues upon promotion to the Championship.

From 2023/24 to 2024/25, promotion to the Championship increased average total revenue by £15 million, including a £9.1 million increase in broadcast revenues. Average player-wage spend doubled from £12 million to £24 million, while underlying EBITDA still improved by £5 million but remained negative. Higher revenues can also increase enterprise values: applying a typical revenue multiple of 2x suggests that promotion could increase a club's enterprise value by £30 million.

There is therefore a financial reward from promotion, but the increase in revenue (£15 million; 71%) is considerably smaller than for non-parachute clubs promoted to the Premier League (£139 million; 376%), suggesting that the incentive to overspend to achieve promotion is lower for League One clubs. Similar distributions within League One also mean there is no within-league cliff-edge that incentivises overspending.

This is reflected in player wage spend: only four League One clubs spent more than 80% of revenue on player wages in 2025/26, compared with ten Championship clubs.

However, our analysis of League One player wage spend indicates that clubs are still incurring significant losses:³⁰⁵

- League One clubs would need to spend 8% of revenue on player wages to break even in EBITDA terms, holding revenue and other costs constant. This is substantially lower than the Championship break-even ratio because non-player operating costs account for a larger proportion of expenditure.
- Most League One clubs spend more than 40% of revenue on player wages, including two spending more than 100%, suggesting that they are sustaining losses even before non-player operating costs are accounted for.

League One financial rules place constraints on what clubs can spend. The EFL Salary Cost Management Protocol (SCMP) capped League One player wages and agents' fees at 60% of turnover, which has now been reduced to 50% from 2026/27 onwards. In addition, clubs can only spend 50% of equity injections on wages.³⁰⁶

This loss-making does not appear to be driven by distributions arrangements: the financial reward from promotion is limited and there is no material imbalance in distributions within League One. Instead, it may reflect high non-player costs, shareholders' non-financial motivations to achieve sporting success, or competitive responses to clubs willing to overspend to pursue promotion.

The modelling finds that distribution arrangements do not create a financial incentive for League One clubs to overspend. Although additional spending increases the likelihood of promotion and reduces the likelihood of relegation, the resulting increase in expected revenues does not outweigh the additional £5 million of spending.

Any incentive to overspend is therefore more likely to reflect non-financial factors or individual clubs' sporting ambitions.

League Two

As with League One, distribution arrangements do not create a cliff-edge within League Two, as clubs receive similar distributions of broadcast and other central revenues. However, they result in a limited increase in revenues upon promotion to League One.

Between 2023/24 and 2024/25, promotion to League One:

- increased average total revenues by £3 million (28%), including a £0.6 million increase in broadcast revenues
- increased player-wage spend by £1.7 million, from £4.6 million pre-promotion to £6.3 million post-promotion
- worsened EBITDA by £1.5 million

Given a typical revenue multiple of 2x, the £3 million revenue increase would also imply only a modest increase in enterprise value (of around £6 million).

The financial reward from promotion is therefore modest. The £3 million (28%) increase in revenues is considerably lower than for clubs promoted to the Championship (£15 million; 71%) or non-parachute clubs promoted to the Premier League (£139 million; 376%). The financial incentive to overspend to achieve promotion is consequently likely to be lower for League Two clubs, while similar distributions within League Two mean that there is no within-league financial cliff-edge that incentivises overspending.

This is reflected in comparatively lower player-wage spending as a proportion of revenue:

- 55% in League Two, compared with 64% in League One and 84% for non-parachute Championship clubs
- only two League Two clubs spent more than 80% of revenues on player wages in 2025/26, compared with four League One clubs and 10 in the Championship

However, our analysis indicates that League Two clubs are still incurring significant losses.³⁰⁷

- League Two clubs would need to spend 11% of revenues on player wages to break even in EBITDA terms, holding revenues and other costs constant. This low break-even ratio reflects the larger proportion of expenditure accounted for by non-player operating costs.
- The majority of League Two clubs spend more than 40% of revenues on player wages, with one club spending over 100%, indicating continued loss-making.

League Two financial rules place constraints on what clubs can spend. The EFL Salary Cost Management Protocol (SCMP) caps League Two player wages, manager related expenditure and agents' fees at 50% of relevant turnover.³⁰⁸

As with League One, this loss-making does not appear to be driven by distribution arrangements: the financial reward from promotion is limited and there is no imbalance in distributions within the league. Instead, it may reflect high non-player operating costs, shareholders' non-financial motivations to achieve sporting success, or competitive responses to other clubs' spending.

This is supported by our modelling of a League Two club's financial incentive to increase player-wage spend by £5 million to improve its chances of promotion and reduce its risk of relegation. This modelling finds that distribution arrangements do not create a financial incentive for League Two clubs to overspend: although the additional spending increases the likelihood of promotion and reduces the likelihood of relegation, the resulting increase in revenues does not outweigh the additional £5 million spend. Any incentive to overspend is therefore more likely to reflect non-financial factors or individual clubs' sporting ambitions.

National League

As in the Championship, there are two financial cliff-edges in the National League driven by distributions arrangements.

- **Cliff-edge between League Two and the National League:** Based on 2025/26 data, promotion to League Two would likely increase a parachute club's revenue by c. £1 million (19%), compared with at least £3.8 million (146%) for a non-parachute club.³⁰⁹ Promotion is also more competitive because only two clubs are promoted each year, and allows clubs to secure academy status under the EPPP.
- **Cliff-edge between parachute and non-parachute clubs:** Parachute clubs earned £5.4 million on average, compared with £2.6 million for non-parachute clubs. Of this £2.8 million difference, £1.9 million was attributable to non-broadcast revenues. This enables parachute clubs to spend more than twice as much on player wages on average (£3.2 million compared to £1.5 million).

This difference within the National League, coupled with the rewards of promotion, appears to create some incentive for non-parachute clubs to overspend to compete with parachute clubs. However, this is less pronounced than in the Championship.

This lesser incentive to overspend is reflected in comparatively lower player-wage spending as a proportion of revenue. Average wages represented 59% of revenue for parachute clubs and 63% for non-parachute clubs, compared with 84% for non-parachute Championship clubs. Only three National League clubs spent more than 80% of revenue on player wages, compared with 10 Championship clubs.

However, our analysis indicates that National League clubs are still incurring significant losses.

- To break even in EBITDA terms, non-parachute National League clubs would need to spend 22% of revenues on player wages, assuming non-player costs and revenues remain constant.
- The majority of clubs spent over 40% of revenues on player wages, well above the 22% break-even ratio, indicating significant loss-making.

This may in part reflect the financial rewards from promotion and the financial gap between parachute and non-parachute clubs, part of which is driven by distributions arrangements.

Conclusion on incentives to spend

Overall, the analysis indicates that the extent to which distribution arrangements create incentives to overspend varies significantly across the football pyramid.

- **Distribution arrangements create the strongest incentives to overspend in the Championship.** Non-parachute clubs face both a substantial financial reward from promotion to the Premier League and a significant revenue disadvantage relative to parachute clubs. These gaps are driven by broadcast distributions and have increased materially over time. Persistently high wage-to-revenue ratios among non-parachute clubs are consistent with increased spending to compete with parachute clubs.

- **By contrast, there is little evidence that the structure of distributions creates similar incentives in the Premier League, League One or League Two.** In the Premier League, financial differences between the big six and other clubs are driven largely by commercial, matchday and UEFA-related revenues rather than domestic broadcast distributions. In League One and League Two, promotion rewards are materially smaller and there are no material differences in central distributions within each league. Where clubs overspend, this appears to reflect individual ownership strategies and sporting ambitions rather than the distribution system itself.

- **The National League occupies a middle ground.** The financial reward from promotion to League Two is greater for non-parachute clubs, while the gap between parachute and non-parachute clubs creates some incentive to overspend. Promotion is also more competitive because only two clubs are promoted each year, and promotion can allow clubs to secure academy status. However, both the gap between leagues and the gap within the National League are driven more by differences in non-broadcast revenues than by broadcast distributions or parachute payments. Consistent with this, there is less evidence of widespread overspending than in the Championship.

The impact of distribution arrangements on sporting competition

In this subsection, we assess whether distribution arrangements affect sporting competition by creating cliff-edges across leagues and within leagues. Sporting competition can be defined as the level of jeopardy within individual matches, across a season, particularly for key positions, and over multiple seasons. Where distribution arrangements increase or reduce the likelihood of certain clubs winning, they can affect sporting competition.

Do distribution arrangements between leagues affect sporting competition?

Where distribution arrangements create financial cliff-edges between leagues, this can reduce the competitiveness of newly promoted clubs if they are unable to adapt their squads to the higher level of competition within one transfer window. Although newly promoted teams might be expected to perform less well because of their historically weaker sporting performance, this cliff-edge could further reduce their competitiveness. Clubs at risk of relegation may also be reluctant to invest in players because of ongoing financial commitments, such as multi-year player contracts and transfer fees paid in instalments.

Given that the largest cliff-edge between divisions is between the Premier League and the Championship, we have focused our analysis on clubs promoted to the Premier League, while taking into account the performance of promoted clubs across the pyramid.

We analyse:

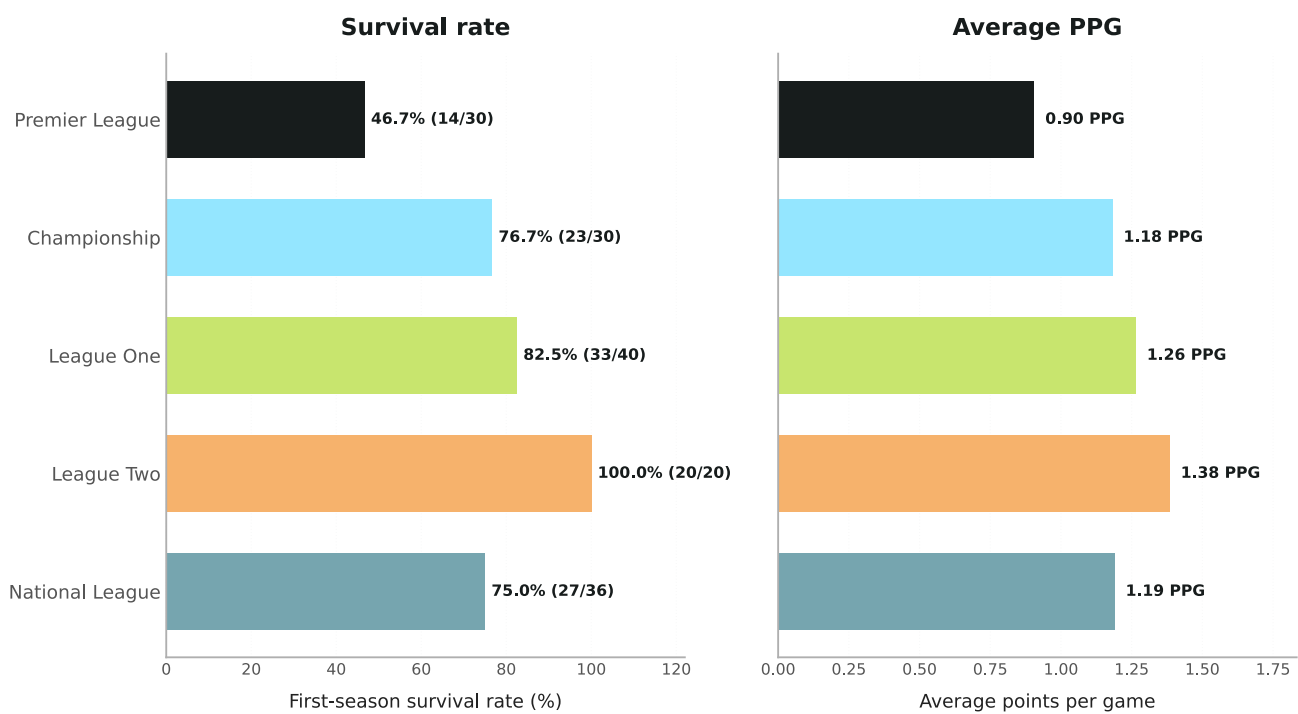
- the performance of clubs promoted to the Premier League compared with clubs promoted to other English divisions
- the performance of clubs promoted to the Premier League compared with clubs promoted to equivalent international divisions
- changes in the performance of promoted Premier League clubs over time

Chart 4.2.8 compares the first-season outcomes of newly promoted clubs across the English leagues over the 10 seasons from 2016/17 to 2025/26, using first-season survival rates and average points per game.

The chart shows that clubs promoted to the Premier League perform significantly worse than clubs promoted into other English leagues. Only 47% of newly promoted Premier League clubs survive their first season, compared with around 80% in the Championship, League One and National League, and 100% in League Two.

Clubs promoted to the Premier League perform worse than clubs promoted to other English leagues.

Chart 4.2.8: First-Season Outcomes for Promoted Teams Across the English Pyramid, Last 10 Seasons (2016/17-2025/26)



Source: IFR analysis of publicly available league table data sourced from the [Premier League](#), the [EFL](#), and the [National League](#).

Note: The analysis tracks promoted clubs’ performance in their first season after promotion in the last 10 seasons. Survival rate is means avoiding relegation in the first season following promotion.

Given that the revenue gap between the Premier League and the Championship is the largest financial cliff-edge in both relative and absolute terms, lower Premier League survival rates could suggest that it may affect sporting competition by making it harder for newly promoted clubs to adapt. However, there are also other factors that influence the performance of promoted teams such as their ability to adapt their playing style to a new league and their ability to plan tactically and recruit effectively.³¹⁰

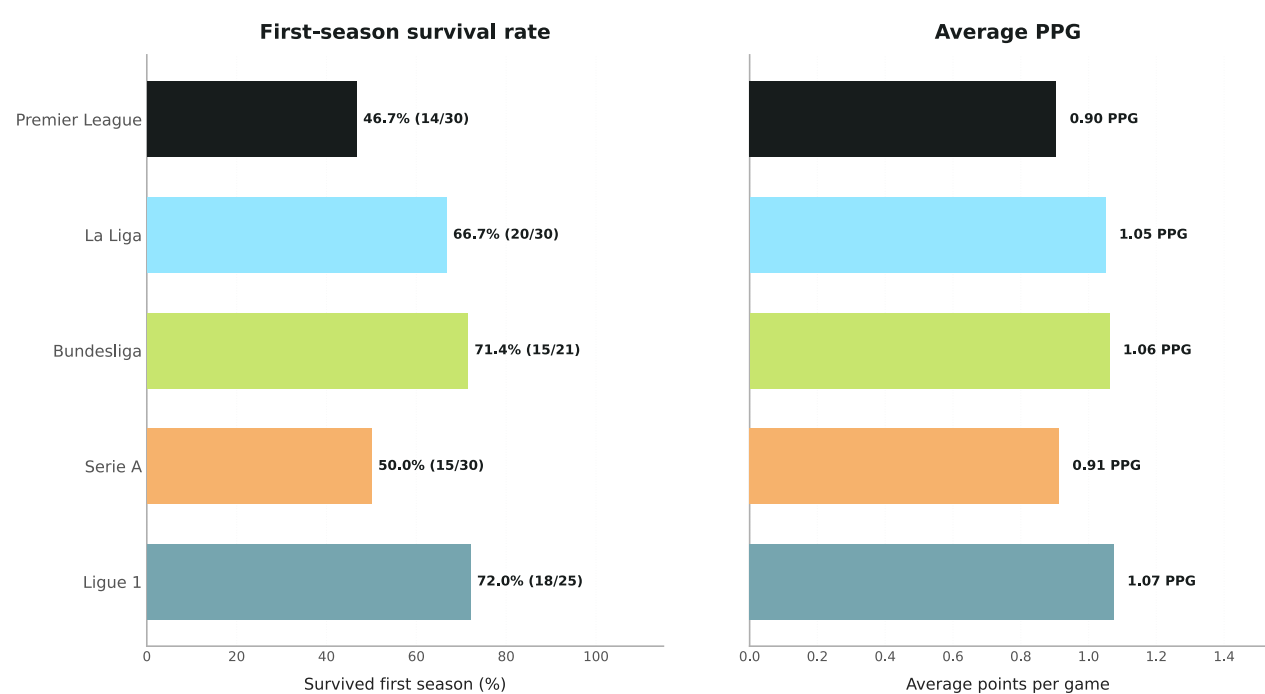
We then compare the first-season performance of clubs promoted to the Premier League with that of other clubs promoted to other major European top divisions. As with the domestic comparison, performance is assessed using first-season survival rates and average points per game. While the analysis is as consistent as possible across leagues, differences in league size, the number of relegation places and the use of relegation play-offs should be considered when interpreting the results.

Chart 4.2.9 shows that clubs promoted to the Premier League typically perform worse than those promoted to most other major European top divisions, although their outcomes are broadly comparable with clubs promoted to Serie A.

The first-season survival rate for clubs promoted to the Premier League was 46.7%, compared with 50% in Serie A, 66.7% in La Liga and approximately 70% in the Bundesliga and Ligue 1.

Clubs promoted to the Premier League perform worse than those promoted to other major European leagues.

Chart 4.2.9: First-Season outcomes for promoted teams across major European leagues pyramid, last 10 seasons, 2016/17-2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of publicly available league table data sourced from FBref (Sports Reference).

Note: The chart above compares the first-season performance of clubs promoted into the Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga, Serie A and Ligue 1 over the last 10 seasons. It shows the proportion of promoted clubs that avoided relegation in their first season and their average points per game (PPG) during that season. Some caution is needed when comparing outcomes across leagues, as league size, the number of relegation places and the use of relegation play-offs vary between countries.

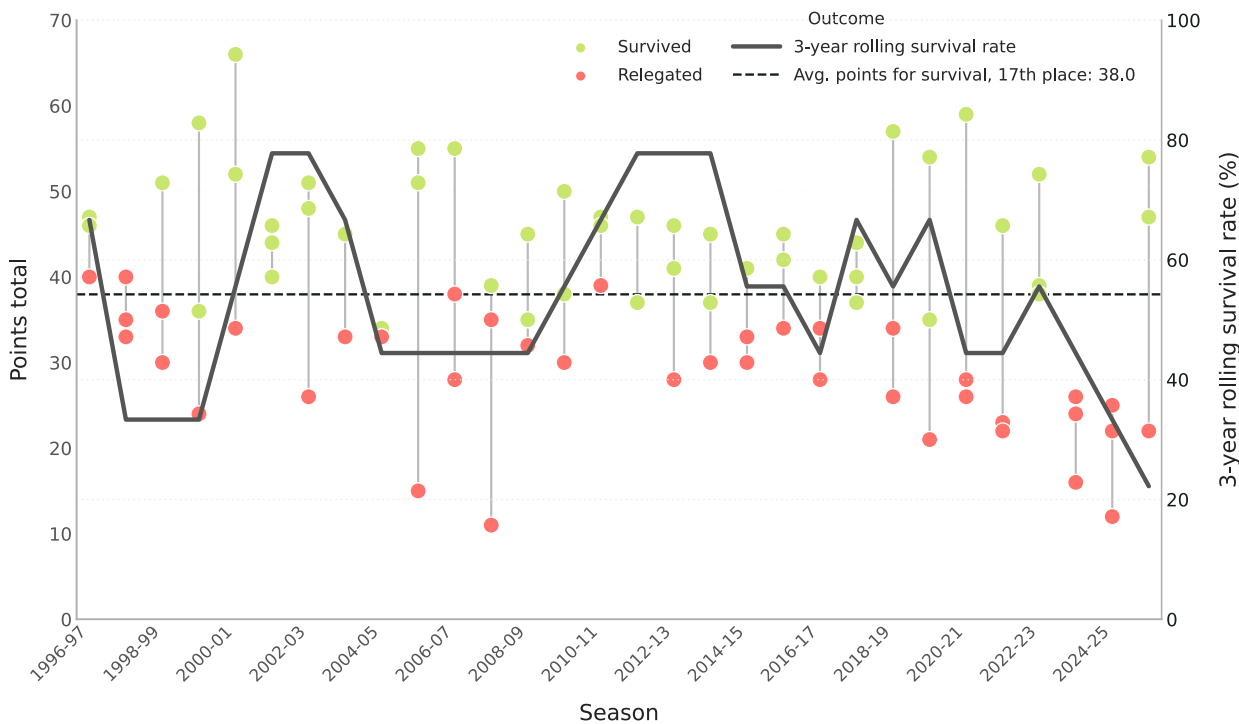
Chart 4.2.10 shows the points totals and survival rates of newly promoted Premier League clubs in their first season from 1996/97 to 2025/26. While performance and survival rates have fluctuated considerably over this period, outcomes have deteriorated in recent seasons.

All three promoted clubs were relegated in both 2023/24 and 2024/25, although results improved in 2025/26, when two of the three promoted clubs survived. Nevertheless, the three-year rolling average survival rate declined from around 65% in 2017/18 to approximately 20% in 2025/26.

Although not shown in the chart, survival rates also vary considerably by club type: non-parachute clubs promoted to the Premier League have a first-season survival rate of 67%, compared with 33% for parachute clubs.³¹¹

Newly promoted Premier League clubs’ performance has declined in recent years.

Chart 4.2.10: Individual points totals of newly promoted teams in the Premier League, 1996/97-2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of publicly available league table data sourced from the [Premier League](#). Inspired by BBC Sport analysis (2025) – ‘[All three promoted clubs to go down? The stats around relegation](#)’.

Note: The chart above shows the individual points totals achieved by newly promoted Premier League clubs in their first season between 1996/97 and 2025/26. Each dot represents a newly promoted club, with colours indicating whether the club survived in the Premier League (green) or was relegated at the end of the season (red). The black line shows the three-year rolling survival rate. The dashed black line shows the average points needed for survival (i.e., the average points total of the club finishing 17th in the Premier League). In some seasons, two or more newly promoted clubs achieved identical points totals; where this occurs, the corresponding dots overlap and may appear as a single point.

Overall, this analysis shows that the performance of newly promoted clubs has declined in recent seasons, potentially reflecting the growing financial cliff-edge between the Championship and the Premier League.

Do distribution arrangements within leagues affect sporting competition?

Financial cliff-edges created by distribution arrangements within leagues can affect sporting competition by giving better-resourced clubs an advantage. Within leagues, these cliff-edges can arise from parachute payments to newly relegated clubs. Although newly relegated teams would typically be expected to perform better than other clubs because of their stronger historic sporting performance, this cliff-edge could further increase this sporting advantage.

Given that the largest cliff-edge within divisions is between parachute and non-parachute clubs in the Championship, our analysis focuses on these clubs, while also considering the performance of newly relegated teams across the pyramid. We analyse:

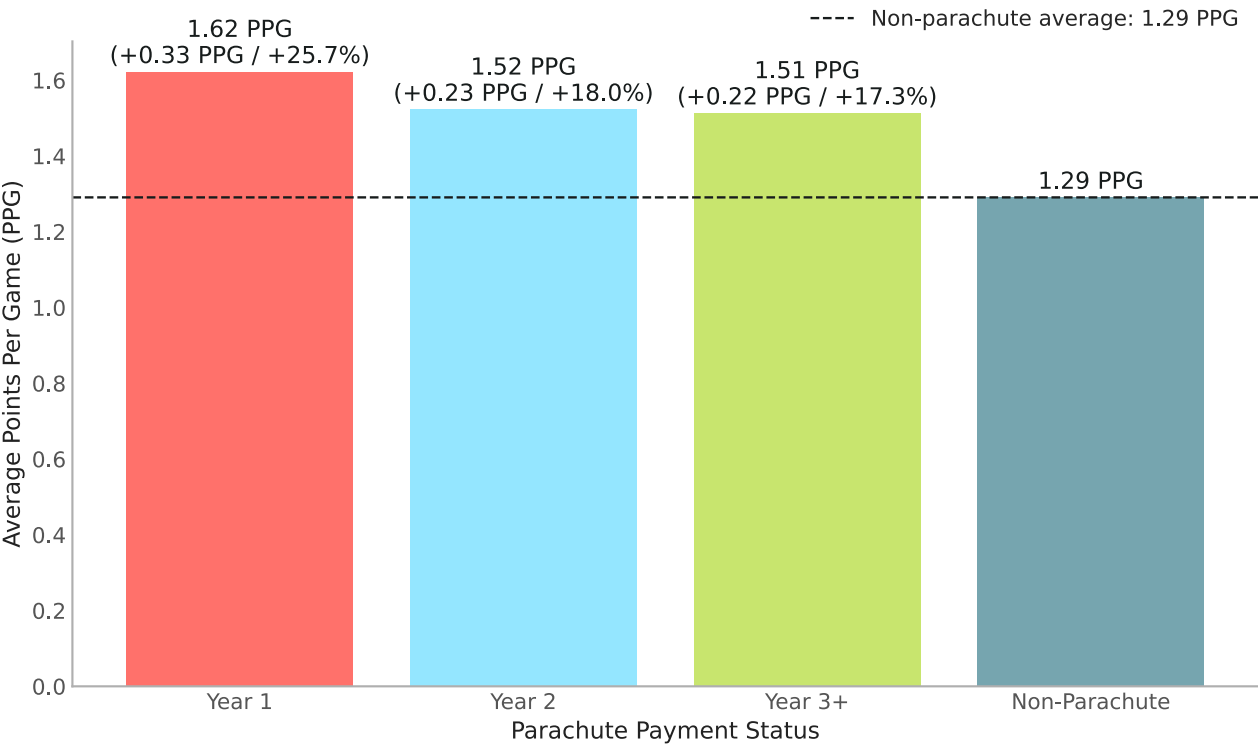
- the performance of newly relegated Championship teams compared with other non-parachute clubs
- the performance of newly relegated Championship teams compared with newly relegated teams in other English divisions
- the performance of newly relegated Championship teams compared with newly relegated teams in comparable international leagues
- the performance of newly relegated Championship teams over time

Between 2016/17 and 2025/26, parachute clubs outperformed non-parachute clubs on average (Chart 4.2.11):

- Year 1 parachute clubs scored 15 more points over a season
- Year 2 and Year 3+ parachute clubs scored 11 and 10 more points, respectively
- Parachute clubs secured 17 of 30 promotion places, including 13 of 20 automatic promotion places
- At club level, 28% of parachute clubs secured promotion, compared with 7% of non-parachute clubs

Year 1 parachute clubs earn 25% more points than non-parachute Championship clubs.

Chart 4.2.11: Average points per game (PPG) in the Championship by parachute payment status, last 10 seasons, 2016/17 – 2025/26



Source: Publicly available league table data published by the [English Football League \(EFL\)](#).

Note: The chart compares the average Championship points per game of clubs by parachute-payment status over the last 10 seasons. Year 1 refers to a club’s first season after relegation from the Premier League, while Year 2 and Year 3+ refer to subsequent seasons of parachute-payment eligibility; non-parachute clubs form the comparison group. The dashed line represents the non-parachute control group average. The figures in brackets show the absolute and percentage difference in average points per game compared with non-parachute clubs.

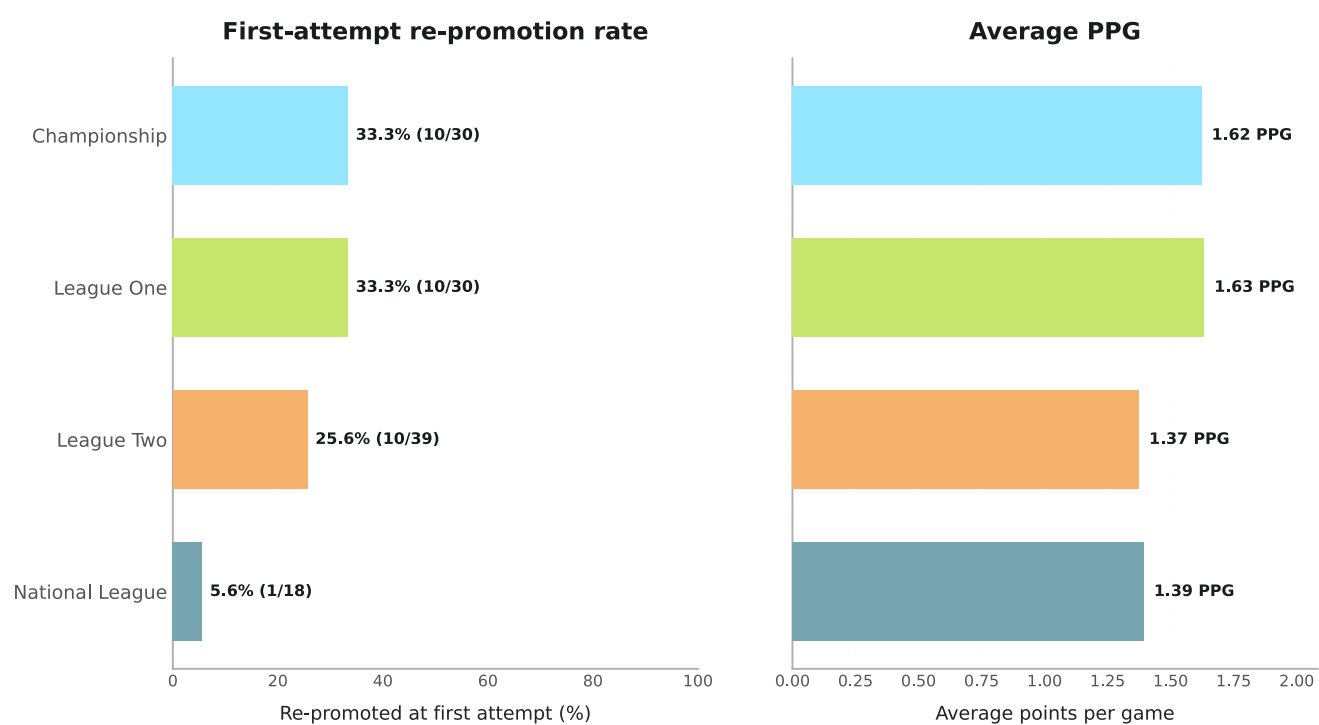
While this could suggest that parachute payments provide clubs with a competitive advantage, newly relegated clubs would also be expected to perform better than other clubs in the league. We therefore compare the performance of newly relegated clubs across English leagues, across Europe and over time.

Chart 4.2.12 compares the performance of newly relegated teams across the English pyramid, based on first-season re-promotion rates and average points per game. Clubs relegated from the Premier League to the Championship perform slightly better than clubs relegated to League Two or National League but in line with clubs relegated to League One.

Conversely, clubs relegated from League Two to the National League have a relatively low re-promotion rate, despite receiving high parachute payments relative to clubs relegated to League One and League Two. This is likely to reflect the more limited promotion opportunities from the National League: one automatic promotion place and one through the play-offs.

Newly relegated clubs perform similarly in the Championship and League One, with poorer outcomes in League Two and the National League.

Chart 4.2.12: First season outcomes of relegated top division clubs across English divisions, last 10 seasons, 2016/17-2025/26



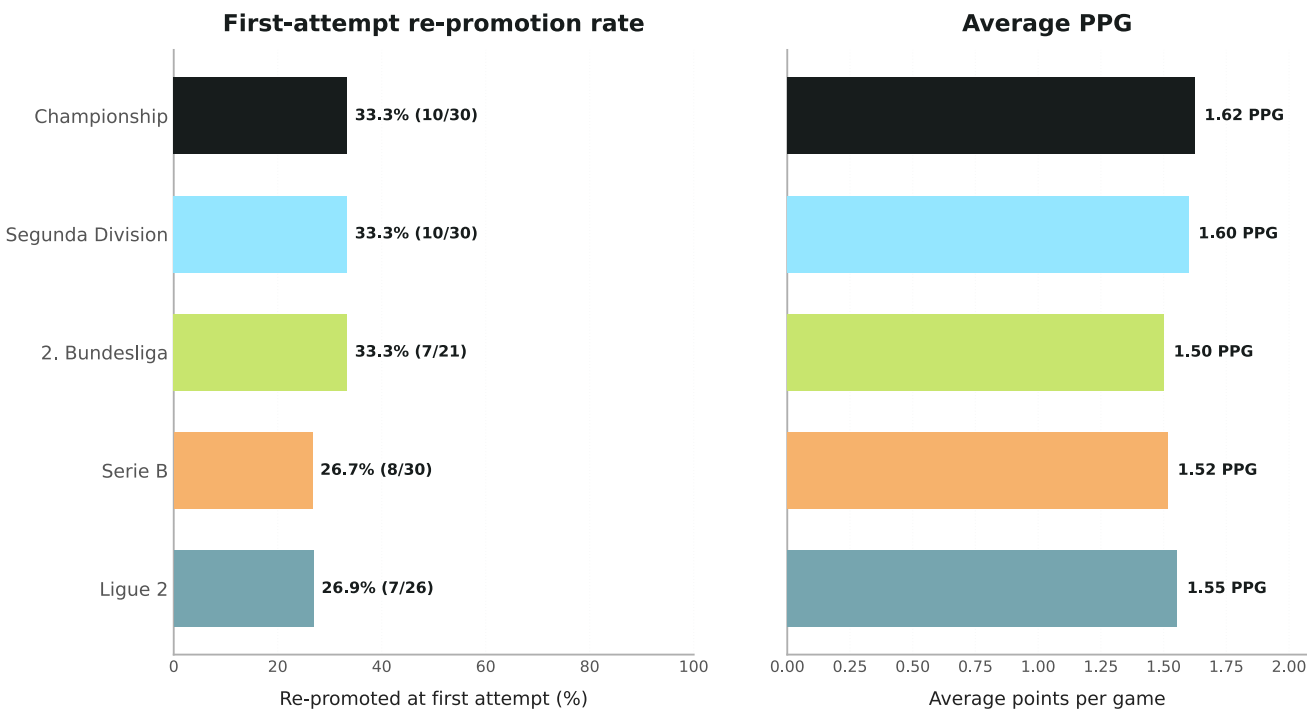
Source: Publicly available league table data published by the [Premier League](#), [English Football League \(EFL\)](#) and the [National League](#).

Note: The chart compares how clubs relegated from the Premier League, Championship, League One and League Two performed during their first season in the division below over the last 10 seasons. It shows the proportion that secured immediate promotion back to the top division and their average points per game in the lower league.

Chart 4.2.13 compares the performance of clubs newly relegated from the Premier League with their counterparts in other major European leagues. Overall, clubs newly relegated from the Premier League perform broadly in line with their counterparts in other major European second divisions.

Newly relegated clubs from the Premier League to the Championship perform broadly in line with their major European counterparts.

Chart 4.2.13: First season outcomes of relegated top division clubs across major European leagues, last 10 seasons, 2016/17-2025/26



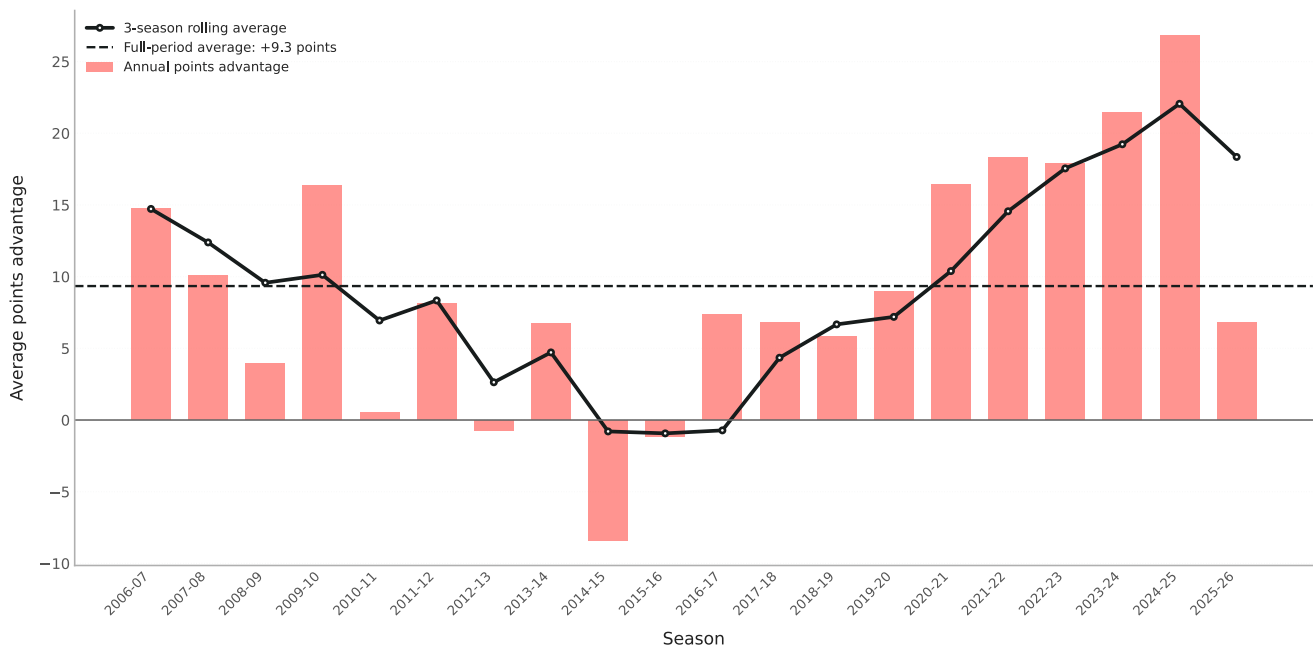
Source: IFR analysis of publicly available league table data sourced from FBref (Sports Reference).

Note: The chart compares how clubs relegated from the Premier League (England), La Liga, (Spain) Bundesliga (Germany), Serie A (Italy) and Ligue 1 (France) performed during their first season in the division below over the last 10 seasons. It shows the proportion that secured immediate promotion back to the top division and their average points per game in the lower league.

We then consider whether the widening gap between parachute and non-parachute clubs has affected competition over time.³¹² Chart 4.2.14 shows that parachute clubs' sporting advantage over non-parachute clubs has grown. From 2016/17, the points gap widened, reaching an average of 24 more points in 2024/25, before narrowing in 2025/26.

The points gap between parachute and non-parachute clubs has widened in recent years.

Chart 4.2.14: Average points gap between parachute clubs and non-parachute clubs, 2006/07-2025/26



Source: Publicly available league table data published by the [English Football League \(EFL\)](#).

Note: The bars show the annual difference between the average points earned by parachute and non-parachute Championship clubs, with positive values indicating stronger performance by parachute clubs. The solid black line shows the three-season rolling average, while the dashed black line shows the full-period average advantage of 9.3 points. The widening gap should not be attributed solely to parachute payments. It may also reflect changes in retained squad quality, wages, the financial gap between the Premier League and Championship, and the relative strength of other Championship clubs.

Overall, our analysis of the sporting performance of parachute clubs presents a mixed picture. Parachute clubs increasingly outperform non-parachute clubs, but newly relegated clubs in the Championship perform broadly in line with their European and lower-league counterparts.

This may reflect the fact that relegated clubs would be expected to perform better than other clubs regardless of parachute payments, while their effect on competition may also be moderated by non-parachute clubs overspending to compete with parachute clubs.

Conclusion

The key findings of our analysis of the impact of current distribution arrangements are that:

- The greatest financial shock from relegation occurs when clubs move from the Premier League to the Championship, although parachute payments play a crucial role in cushioning the impact.
- The gap between Championship parachute and non-parachute clubs, coupled with the financial reward from promotion to the Premier League, creates a strong incentive for non-parachute clubs to overspend.
- In relation to sporting competition, newly promoted Premier League clubs typically struggle, with performance declining in recent seasons, consistent with the growing financial cliff-edge between the Championship and the Premier League, whilst the evidence on the performance of parachute clubs is mixed.
- There are also financial cliff-edges between League Two and the National League and within the National League.
 - Although the financial impact of relegation is relatively limited because of parachute payments, clubs that are relegated from League Two can lose their academy status.
 - The financial reward from promotion to League Two, coupled with the gap between parachute and non-parachute clubs, creates some incentive to overspend. Achieving promotion is more difficult as only two teams are promoted each season. However, the gaps are driven more by differences in non-broadcast revenues than by broadcast distributions or parachute payments. Consistent with this, there is less evidence of widespread overspending than in the Championship

These distribution arrangements create risk and should be reformed. However, any changes in distribution should not lead to a further surge in costs for clubs, as this would not address the financial risks in the game.

In the last few months, the IFR has facilitated discussions between the Premier League and the EFL. The IFR has remained neutral as they seek to address some of these issues through a new revenue distribution arrangement. At the time of writing, discussions are ongoing. The IFR's preference remains for competition organisers to agree a new distribution arrangement. However, if this is not possible, a competition organiser may apply to trigger the backstop under Part 6 of the Act.

4.3 Investor Landscape

Chapter at a glance

This chapter considers the role of owners and investment in English football.

Across the English football pyramid, operations and player spending, infrastructure investment and the frequency and value of majority and minority takeovers have increased in recent seasons.

- There are a range of motivations for investing in a football club and a range of different types of owners. Those seeking financial returns tend to achieve it by growing the enterprise value of the club, which is typically calculated as a multiple of revenue.
 - The big six's revenue multiples, and therefore their enterprise value, have increased significantly over time.
- Investors themselves identified different financial risks and motivations across the football pyramid:
 - **Premier League:** investors highlighted the significant revenue risks associated with relegation or failure to qualify for European competition.
 - **Championship:** investors highlighted the high-risk, high-reward strategy of overspending in pursuit of promotion to the Premier League.
 - **Below the Championship:** owners were more likely to emphasise community objectives over financial returns, with some having acquired clubs to prevent administration.
- Our indicative analysis of investor returns illustrates the financial risks associated with club ownership.
 - Between 2021/22 and 2025/26, investors in clubs across the top five leagues were estimated to have lost 41% of their original investment. Over the same period, investment in the FTSE 100 stock market index would have generated a return of more than 36%.
 - Estimated financial returns were strongly associated with sporting performance. Promoted clubs generated an estimated return of 85%, rising to 187% if they reached the Premier League from the Championship.
 - Clubs that remained in the same league or were relegated had estimated average losses of 67% and 75%, respectively.
- Recent trends indicate continued appetite for investment in English football and a willingness to provide ongoing owner funding. However, persistent and increasing losses could make investment in English football less attractive. **This concern is reflected in owner views: 17 of 18 EFL club owners interviewed supported more robust cost controls to reduce reliance on external funding.**

Introduction

Owners have always played a crucial role in the success of English football, and unlike investors in many other industries, have not typically been motivated by profit in the traditional sense. Instead, they provide significant funding to clubs to cover losses.

Given the importance of investors, it is vital that the IFR understands who invests in English football, their motivations and the factors that may affect their incentives to invest. The Football Governance Act 2025 states that ‘the IFR must have regard to the desirability of exercising’ its ‘functions in a way that avoids any adverse effects on the financial growth of, or financial investment in, English football’.³¹³

As part of the research underpinning this chapter, the IFR commissioned Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to analyse investment in English football, including interviews with 39 owners and investors. This included:

- 11 in the Premier League
- seven in the Championship
- five in League One
- six in League Two
- three in the National League
- seven institutional investors

Interviews followed a set structure covering investment incentives, risks and how the IFR might impact investment conditions. The findings have been aggregated and/or anonymised and are referenced throughout this chapter.

This chapter first considers what investment means in the context of English football, then explores investor views on the attractiveness of English football, before assessing the likelihood of achieving a financial return.

What do we mean by investment in English football?

Investment in English football can be grouped into two broad categories: ownership transactions and investment expenditure.

Ownership transactions

English football's continued growth in revenues, quality, competitiveness and fan interest has attracted increasing investment in clubs in recent years.³¹⁴

Over the last five seasons:

- majority and minority ownership transactions increased 2.6-fold, from 30 between 2015/16 and 2019/20 to 78 between 2020/21 and 2024/25 across the Premier League, EFL and National League³¹⁵
- the **value of transactions also increased over the same period, from £2.4 billion to £7.2 billion**³¹⁶
- **around 50% of clubs across the pyramid and 65% of Premier League clubs experienced an ownership transaction between 2020/21 and 2024/25**³¹⁷

The underlying market value or theoretical takeover price of a club is typically based on a multiple of revenue.³¹⁸ This means that the value of a club depends on its revenue and revenue multiple.

- The specific revenue multiple depends on individual club circumstances, including stadium ownership, fanbase, heritage, history of sporting success and location, as well as whether the club is in financial distress.
- For the big six, revenue multiples appear to have increased over time, with recent transactions suggesting that these clubs are now valued at a revenue multiple of at least 5x.³¹⁹ In interviews, investors cited revenue growth, global brand values and the scarcity of clubs available to buy as drivers of this increase.³²⁰
- For other clubs across the pyramid, revenue multiples appear to have grown much more slowly, with clubs typically valued at around 2x revenue.³²¹

Investment expenditure

In traditional industries, investment is typically defined as spending on long-term improvements in infrastructure or technology. Football club owners tend to view investment more broadly, encompassing spending on players, operations and infrastructure, therefore including both operating expenditure (opex) and capital expenditure (capex). One investor described their approach as *‘looking at investment holistically across sporting personnel, commercial personnel, and revenue-driving facilities’*,³²² while another described it as investing in *‘both long-term sporting and financial health of the organisation’*.³²³

In addition to longer-term investment into infrastructure, including stadia and training facilities, spending on players and operations can therefore be viewed as short-term investment to achieve sporting success or reduce the risk of relegation.

- **Player and operations spending dominate cash outflows across the Premier League and EFL.** However, Premier League clubs typically spend more on players relative to operations, whereas the opposite is true for many EFL clubs. Between 2021/22 and 2024/25, operations accounted for 28% of Premier League clubs’ cash outflows compared with 56% for League Two clubs.³²⁴ The reverse is true for player spending, which accounted for 55% of Premier League clubs’ cash outflows, compared with 31% for League Two clubs.³²⁵ On aggregate, clubs in each of the three EFL leagues require external funding just to cover player and operations spending.³²⁶
- **Although infrastructure investment can generate additional revenues in the future, it typically represents a small proportion of overall expenditure.** Between 2021/22 and 2024/25, infrastructure spending accounted for 6% of cash outflows in the Premier League, compared with 4% in the Championship, 9% in League One and 2% in League Two.³²⁷ There is also significant variation within leagues, reflecting which clubs are undertaking infrastructure projects.

Clubs can fund investment through their operations, the sale of players and other assets, and external financing in the form of owner debt, equity injections and third-party debt.

Investor views on the attractiveness of English football

There are several motivations for investing in a football club and a range of different types of owners.

- Motivations for investing in a football club include the pursuit of sporting success, community mission, personal fulfilment, enhanced profile and financial returns. However, as set out in Box 4.3.1, there are also potential illicit motivations, which the IFR will seek to address through its Owners, Directors and Senior Executives regime.
- Owners include high- or ultra-high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs or UHNWIs);³²⁸ institutional investors; hybrid investment vehicles (which typically include one or more HNWIs, sometimes alongside institutional investors); nation states or sovereign wealth funds; and fan ownership groups. These investors may be local, national or international.

Investors’ views therefore vary both across the pyramid and by investor type. In the following subsections, we consider views on the pyramid as a whole before considering each league in turn.

Box 4.3.1: Potential illicit motivations for investing into football

In addition to the motivations set out above, the National Risk Assessment of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing 2025 finds that there are potential illicit motivations for investment into football.³²⁹ The assessment, published by the Home Office and HM Treasury, finds football's popularity and revenues could make it an attractive target for criminals, kleptocrats and other malign actors seeking to launder criminal funds or generate other illicit gains. In particular, clubs in financial distress may be vulnerable to exploitation by criminals offering easy money in return for ongoing access that facilitates future criminal activity.

The report finds that the diverse operating models of clubs mean there is no standard route for funnelling criminal funds into the sector. Many clubs have complex offshore corporate structures, often in jurisdictions with limited oversight, while the use of shell companies could further obscure clubs' ultimate beneficiaries. Clubs could also be used to launder funds through player transfers, falsified ticket sales or services provided.

As part of its suitability assessment of incoming owners, the IFR must decide whether it has grounds to suspect that the applicant has any source of wealth which is connected to serious criminal conduct. The IFR may likewise consider whether incumbent owners have any such source of wealth. Where it identifies sufficient evidence of illicit finance, it will not approve any prospective owner and may take steps to remove an incumbent owner.

The risk of illicit finance is not limited to funding received from owners. Wider commercial and sponsorship arrangements, third party investment and other activities could also result in a club receiving funding connected to serious criminal conduct. The Financial Conduct Authority has recently written to football clubs raising concerns about sponsorship arrangements between football clubs and firms operating cryptocurrency exchanges or trading platforms without FCA authorisation. As part of this, the FCA has warned clubs that funds received from an unauthorised firm may also constitute criminal property under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 ("POCA").³³⁰

If the IFR identifies funding that it suspects to be connected to serious criminal conduct, the IFR may use its licensing powers to restrict the club's ability to accept or receive such funding. Failure to comply could result in sanctions including potential financial penalties and, in the extreme, the revocation of club's operating licence.

Open pyramid

From an investor perspective, the open system of English football creates unpredictability and ‘romance’, offering potential upside but also downside risk. As one UHNWI investor stated, *‘the fact that a Luton Town or a Lincoln City, or a Wrexham could come through from National League status and get to the Premier League... is a fantastic story for the game’.*³³¹

However, as another investor put it, *‘what we as fans love about the game [promotion/relegation], kills the game’.*³³²

In particular, the financial impact of promotion and relegation can affect the attractiveness of an investment.

One institutional investor described the impact of this volatility: *‘the revenue cliffs make the [investment] case very hard for owners’.*³³³ Another investor stated, *‘I don’t like promotion/relegation, but at least the risk is baked into the purchase price multiple, otherwise you’d be paying a much higher price’.*³³⁴

This contrasts sharply with the American-style closed leagues, where there is no promotion or relegation, revenue generation is more centralised and league-wide revenue sharing provides greater financial certainty. As one club owner highlighted *‘the American system has financial safeguards. There is no relegation, which provides a financial floor for the franchise’s value’.*³³⁵

Premier League

The success of the Premier League has meant that investors typically see it as the most attractive league in English and European football. One institutional investor stated that *'the Premier League is continuing to separate itself from the rest of Europe'*, while another institutional investor said *'the enormous global following of the Premier League stands above everything else – it is incomparable with other leagues'*.³³⁶

The majority of Premier League owners interviewed cited sporting success, personal fulfilment or financial returns as their primary motivation, while a few cited community mission. However, motivations varied across investor groups. All institutional investors interviewed cited financial returns as their primary motivation, mostly through asset value appreciation, although this was not their only objective.

Many also said that investing in the local community and maintaining connections with fans were important both to financial returns and to their sense of responsibility. One investor explained, *'[whilst financial return was the main motivation...] it is so important to maintain the connection with fans, and understand the deep cultural roots that local teams have in their communities'*.³³⁷

Despite its attractiveness, investing in the Premier League is not without risk, particularly due to uncertainty around European qualification and relegation. One investor described *'two cliff edges: entry and exit from European competition, and entry and exit from the Premier League. Those cliff edges are each worth £80-100 million in full effect'*.³³⁸

- **European qualification risk.** There is a substantial opportunity cost from failing to qualify for European football, particularly for clubs with a high player wage bill. One investor noted that, *'the top clubs in England face much greater year-over-year volatility because Champions League qualification is less predictable than in leagues like La Liga'*.³³⁹
- **Fear of relegation.** Many investors were concerned about the longer-term consequences of relegation and the difficulty of securing re-promotion. One owner described the Championship as *'like the Colosseum, it's a bloodbath. Almost no one escapes alive.'*³⁴⁰ As a result, several owners noted that only the top six or seven Premier League clubs offered sufficiently stable conditions for an institutional investment risk-return profile. Other Premier League clubs were described as *'more like a VC (venture capital) bet'* according to one institutional investor, given the potential risk and impact of relegation.³⁴¹ Another institutional investor stated, *'I wouldn't invest in anything in the bottom half of the Premier League – it's too risky'*.³⁴²

This results in investment in the playing squad being the focus for many Premier League clubs. One owner summarised the approach of many investors: *'our priority at the moment is the players and getting the best team on the pitch'*.³⁴³ Others discussed the difficulty of balancing ambition with cost controls. As one owner stated, *'it's a balance you can never get right. If you allow anyone to spend whatever they want with no limits, then the team with the most money wins'*.³⁴⁴

Championship

Among investors focused on sporting success, Championship clubs were viewed as having a high-risk, high-return profile. These investors aim to increase a club's value by achieving promotion to the Premier League by an amount that exceeds the losses accumulated during their ownership.

Investors described this approach in a number of ways:

- *'many of these new investors enter the lower divisions with the goal of promoting the club to a higher division to realise a significant upside'*³⁴⁵
- *'clubs overspend to 'buy the lottery ticket' of promotion'*³⁴⁶
- *'when [overseas owners] first come in, they invest, and they invest big. 'Let's just spend whatever it takes!''*³⁴⁷
- *'[overseas owners] want to come in, buy their way up the pyramid, get that billion-dollar valuation, and sell at the Premier League level'*³⁴⁸
- *'investors are incentivised to enter the league simply to gamble on securing the \$200 million Premier League prize'*³⁴⁹

Many investors also noted the role of fan expectations. One investor described the pressure on owners to continue spending: *'Fan pressure and media headlines can mount... an owner who was a hardliner a few months prior might end up outbidding a competitor.'*³⁵⁰ Another noted *'new owners arrive and declare their ambition is to get to the Premier League. By saying that, they create an expectation among fans that they will spend money.'*³⁵¹

These dynamics can reduce the attractiveness of investment in the EFL. One institutional investor captured this sentiment, *'below the Premier League, it's high-net-worth money, it's gambling. Permanently cash burning entities'*³⁵² Another institutional investor noted that *'even if you get to the Premier League from the Championship you need to raise £300-400 million to stay up. It's very expensive and risky.'*³⁵³ Several other owners when discussing the same issue expressed similar views, although one Championship club owner stated that *'if a club's run properly, their asset value outgrows the cash that they're losing.'*³⁵⁴

League One, League Two and National League

In contrast to the Championship and Premier League, 9 of 13 (69% of) League One, League Two and National League owners surveyed cited community mission as their primary motivation for buying a club.³⁵⁵ One described this motivation as *'rooted in football, community, and turnarounds rather than financial return.'*³⁵⁶ Another explained: *'our job is to provide what is commensurate with what the city needs. The primary ownership mission has been more community-driven.'*³⁵⁷

For 6 of 13 (46% of) those surveyed, in their opinion the club would have gone into administration without their initial purchase.³⁵⁸ One UHNWI investor described their motivation, saying, *'my motivation was to save my local football club. The club was 100+ years old and a big part of my community.'*³⁵⁹ Another said: *'I am a local boy and the football club is a huge part of my life and identity. The club is a community asset and we bought it to save the club.'*³⁶⁰

However, the additional investment in players required following promotion can create tension between sporting and financial incentives. A League Two club owner stated: *'the last thing I want is to get promoted, until the financial structure is fixed.'*³⁶¹ A League One owner similarly noted: *'what we need to do is ensure the integrity of promotion is maintained. We have discussions if it is better, or not, to get promoted in the next three years.'*³⁶²

Investor views on potential solutions

Owners and investors also provided a range of views on potential solutions or interventions. Not all investors gave opinions on the topics listed.

- **Cost controls:** 17 of 18 (94% of) of EFL club owners surveyed were in favour of more robust cost controls to minimise required external funding.³⁶³ As one investor put it, *'the single biggest issue is player wages'*.³⁶⁴
- **Redistribution:** Approximately 12 of 14 (86% of) of EFL owners interviewed agreed that any redistribution should be spent on productive, long-term infrastructure that supports revenue growth in the EFL, rather than on player wages and transfer fees.³⁶⁵ As one EFL owner explained, *'yes of course [we want more redistribution] but the main issue is it's likely to all go to player wage inflation in the current economic situation'*.³⁶⁶ 6 of 9 (67% of) Premier League owners surveyed were against redistribution, with one owner citing *'sending more money to the Championship as a deterrent to investment'*.³⁶⁷ All Premier League owners stated that, if redistribution were to occur, it should not be diverted to player cost inflation.³⁶⁸
- **Debt restrictions:** Most investors saw merit in safeguards on third-party debt, aligned with clubs' risk-return profiles, but did not consider these sufficient to address underlying profitability issues. As one investor explained, *'the discussion around restricting debt at the club level is often focused on a symptom rather than the root cause. The fundamental issue is a lack of trust in the ability of some club owners to manage their clubs.'*³⁶⁹ Among EFL owners surveyed, 13 of 22 (59% of) club owners surveyed considered restrictions on third-party debt beneficial, but believed debt used to fund asset development, such as stadia, should not be restricted.³⁷⁰
- **Liquidity requirements:** 17 of 21 (81% of) investors interviewed disagreed with implementing liquidity requirements, although 7 of 21 (33%) considered that targeted, club-specific requirements could be appropriate in certain circumstances.³⁷¹ Many felt that, without stronger cost controls, liquidity requirements could worsen investment conditions. One owner stated that, *'requiring clubs to post bonds would likely drive potential investors away.'*³⁷² An institutional investor was similarly definitive: *'Always a bad idea. If your cash is on the sidelines...it's on the sidelines.'*³⁷³ Investors also noted that liquidity requirements would not address the medium-term risk of funding being withdrawn from a non-self-sustaining business model. As one owner explained, *'it's not a short-term liquidity problem. It's a flawed business model where owners can unilaterally withdraw support.'*³⁷⁴
- **Robust owner and director testing:** All (32 of 32) investors that expressed views on the topic considered robust owner and director tests important in preventing unsuitable owners from entering the game.³⁷⁵ Some investors viewed existing league tests as insufficient. Investors considered that more robust testing could also improve overall governance. As one owner explained, *'a fit and proper owners test means we get better alignment of interests in the league.'*³⁷⁶

Investing in a football club for financial return

For many investors, particularly in the Premier League and Championship, the prospect of a financial return is an important motivation for investing in a club and can make investment more attractive. However, investors also identified significant risks and potential downsides.

In this subsection, we assess the likelihood of an investor achieving a positive financial return by increasing the enterprise value of a club. For this to occur, the following must be true:

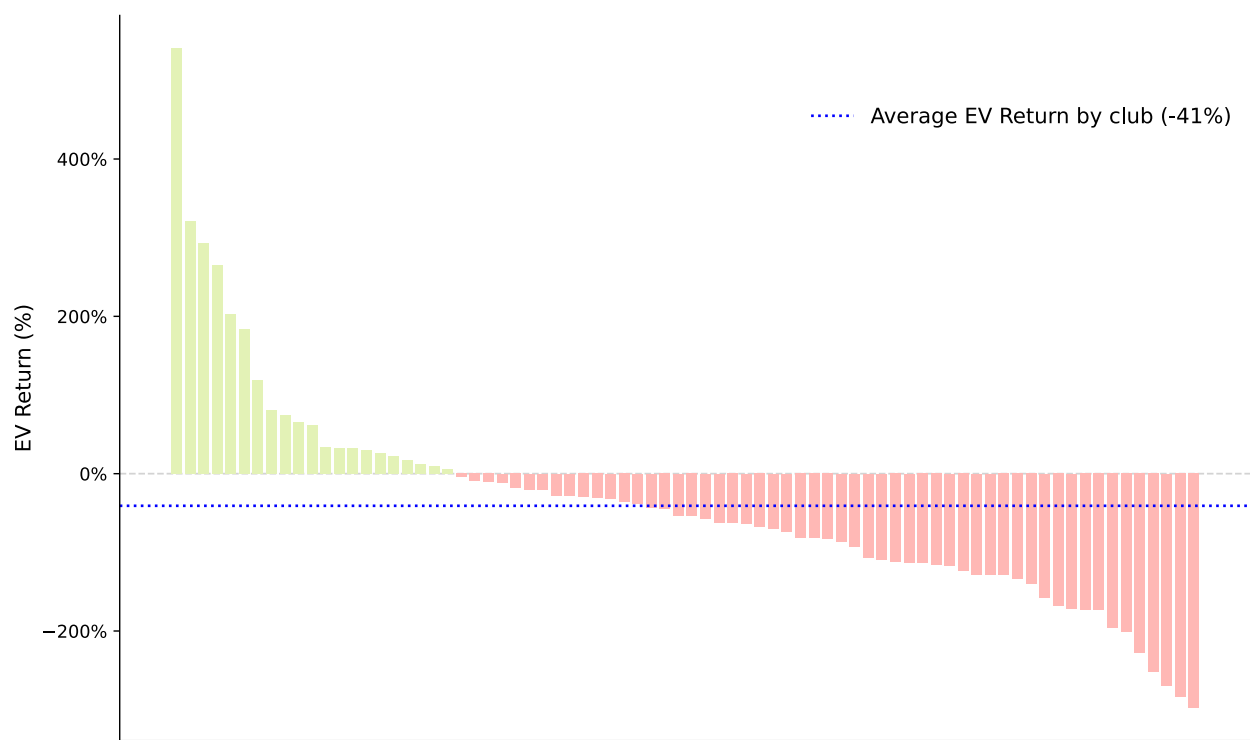
- **The enterprise value of the club must have grown.** This could result from an increase in the revenue multiple, but as multiples have typically remained relatively stable over time, growth is more likely to result from increased revenues, which are typically associated with promotion. Evidence prepared by EY Parthenon and submitted by the Premier League shows that, across 21 clubs with multiple transactions identified between 2000 and 2025,³⁷⁷ 15 had higher equity valuations at the latest transaction compared with the earliest. The analysis also suggests that, in some cases, revenue growth outpaced debt accumulation, increasing implied equity value over time.³⁷⁸
- **This growth must outweigh the ongoing costs of owning the club.** Any growth in enterprise value through increased revenues must outweigh the costs incurred by the investor during their ownership, including funding the club's losses. However, the evidence submitted by the Premier League does not directly evaluate the return on investment for owners and does not capture all capital provided by owners, including equity injections, operating support or owner-funded losses.³⁷⁹
- **There must be a buyer willing to purchase the club at that valuation.** A financially motivated investor must therefore believe there will be sufficient demand for the club if they seek to exit.

To assess the likelihood of an investor realising a financial return in this way, Chart 4.3.1 shows the distribution of indicative enterprise value returns for clubs in the top four tiers of English football between 2021/22 and 2025/26.³⁸⁰

Owing to data limitations, these estimates use changes in enterprise value as a proxy for changes in the market value of owners' equity and subtract accumulated losses as a proxy for the additional funding required from owners during the period.³⁸¹ It estimates the return an investor would have achieved by buying a club in 2021/22 and selling it at the end of the 2025/26 season, showing that:

- An average club yielded a return of -41% over the five-year period. In other words, an investor would have lost 41% of their original investment.
- A minority of clubs (21 of 76) generated a positive return.

Chart 4.3.1: Indicative enterprise value return by club, 2021/22 – 2025/26



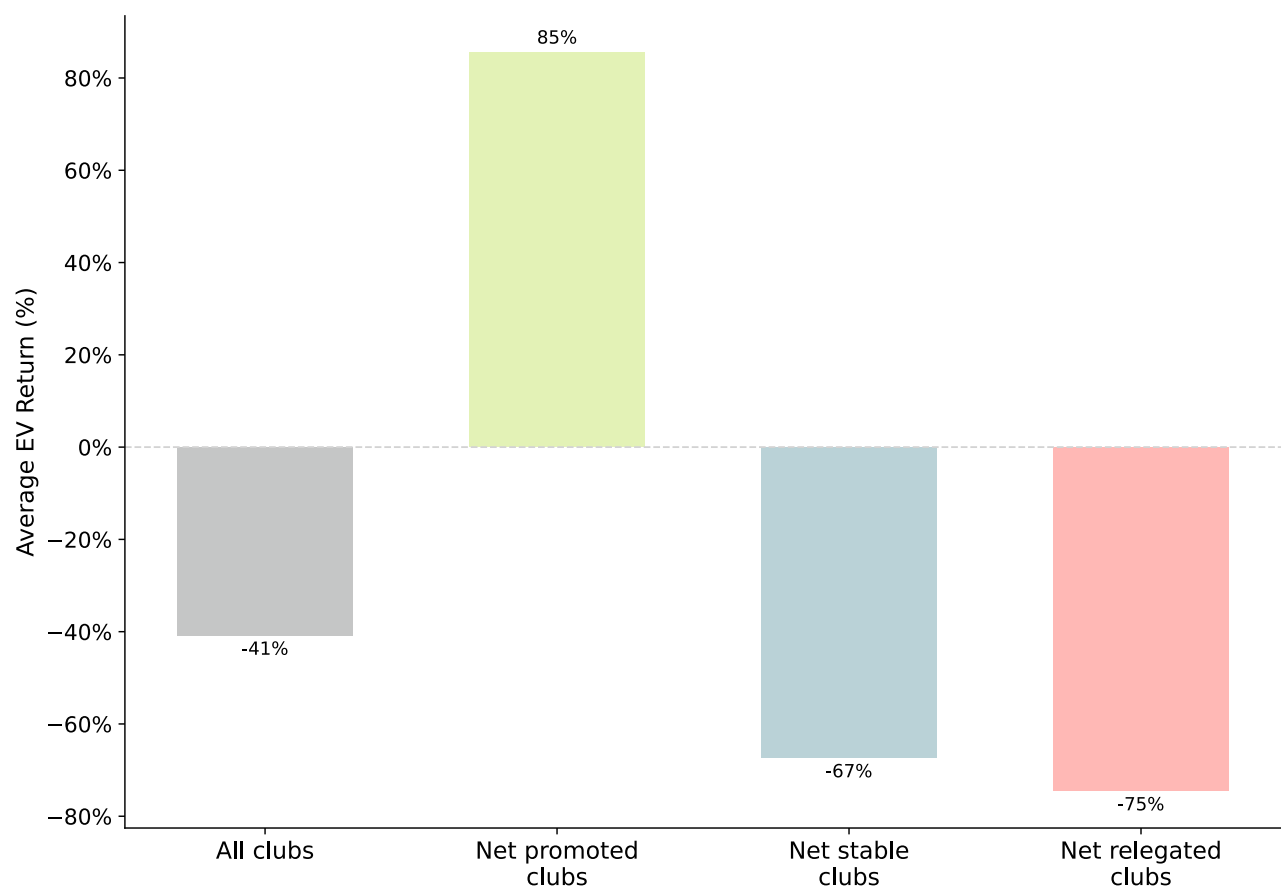
Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The column chart shows the indicative enterprise value (EV) return by club for the period 2021/22 to 2025/26. EV return is calculated by taking the change in EV between 2021/22 and 2025/26, subtracting accumulated losses during the period, and finally dividing by EV in 2021/22 to leave a % return. EV itself is calculated based on a 6x revenue multiple for big six clubs and a 2x revenue multiple for all other clubs. This analysis is based on 76 clubs where we have complete data across all five seasons.

Despite the negative average return, returns varied significantly depending on a club's sporting performance. Chart 4.3.2 shows the average enterprise value returns for clubs based on their promotion status between 2021/22 and 2025/26:

- For clubs that were promoted during the period and ended it in a higher league, the average return was 85%.
- For clubs that stayed in the same league or were relegated, the average returns were -67% and -75% respectively.

Chart 4.3.2: Average enterprise value return by promotion/relegation status, 2021/22–2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart shows the indicative average enterprise value (EV) return by promotion/ relegation status for the period 2021/22 to 2025/26. EV return is calculated by taking the change in EV between 2021/22 and 2025/26, subtracting accumulated losses during the period, and finally dividing by EV in 2021/22 to leave a % return. EV itself is calculated based on a 6x revenue multiple for big six clubs and a 2x revenue multiple for all other clubs.

However, returns from promotion are not consistent across leagues. Chart 4.3.3 shows the average enterprise value return between 2021/22 and 2025/26, split by the league in which each club started the period and its promotion/relegation status. It shows that:

- For clubs that started in the Premier League and remained there, the average enterprise return was 13%. By contrast, clubs that were relegated had an average return of -101%.

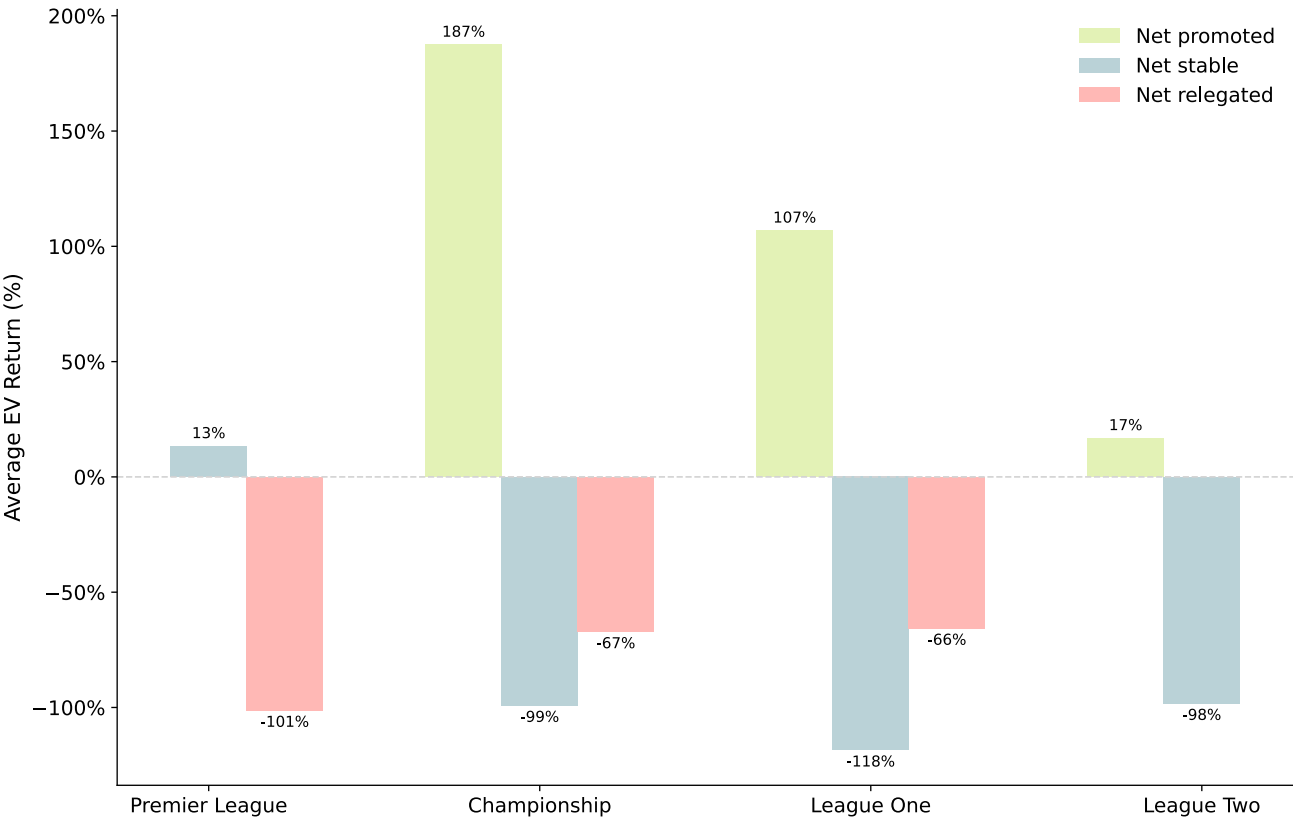
- For clubs that started in the Championship, were promoted during the period and remained in the Premier League until the 2025/26 season, the average enterprise value return was 187%. These clubs significantly increased their broadcast revenues through promotion, alongside a corresponding increase in enterprise value.
- For clubs that started in League One and League Two and were promoted, the average returns were 107% and 17% respectively.

Over the same period in which the average indicative enterprise value return was -41%, an investor in the FTSE 100 stock market index would have made over 36%.

Although this analysis covers a relatively short period, it supports the views of many investors that investing in football clubs for a financial return is risky compared with alternatives.

Overall, while some investors can achieve positive financial returns, particularly through promotion from the Championship to the Premier League, returns vary significantly across all clubs.

Chart 4.3.3: Average enterprise value return by league and promotion/relegation status, 2021/22–2025/26



Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.

Note: The chart shows the indicative average enterprise value (EV) return by league and promotion/ relegation status for the period 2021/22 to 2025/26. League represents the division that the club competed in during the 2021/22 season. EV return is calculated by taking the change in EV between 2021/22 and 2025/26, subtracting accumulated losses during the period, and finally dividing by EV in 2021/22 to leave a % return. EV itself is calculated based on a 6x revenue multiple for big six clubs and a 2x revenue multiple for all other clubs.

Summary

Persistent loss-making means that the English football pyramid requires continuous owner funding investment. This, in turn, requires a pool of investors willing and able to invest in football clubs. Recent ownership trends suggest that such a pool currently exists, with investors motivated by a range of factors, including personal fulfilment, community mission, enhanced profile, financial returns and the pursuit of sporting success.

However, English football could become less attractive to investors because of increasing losses.³⁸²

- Affordability constraints could reduce the pool of investors able to invest.
- Growing annual losses could reduce the incentive to invest where the costs are perceived to outweigh the non-financial returns.
- Growing annual losses could reduce the prospect of achieving a financial return, further weakening incentives to invest.

This presents a systemic risk to English football. Football clubs have traditionally relied on owner funding but this reliance has increased in recent years. As such, if owners and investors are no longer willing or able to provide that funding, this would threaten the short-term viability and longer-term sustainability of clubs.

Owners themselves appear to recognise this risk. Of those interviewed, 17 of 18 (94%) of EFL club owners interviewed were in favour of more robust cost controls to minimise required external funding.³⁸³

4.4 Future Broadcast Landscape

Chapter at a glance

This chapter considers the future uncertainty around the broadcast landscape and its impact on clubs.

- Given the multi-year nature of competition organisers' broadcast deals, broadcast revenues are secured until at least 2028, but the value of the next round of deals is uncertain.
- Although football remains one of the world's most popular sports, competition organisers may face challenges when they next go to market. The domestic market is maturing, with limited scope to increase the number of matches broadcast. Traditional broadcasters are also increasingly focused on profitability, while streaming platforms' demand for live sports remains uncertain.
- Broadcast revenues are a significant source of club income. Any reduction could require them to absorb greater losses, reduce costs or sell assets. Slower growth in broadcast revenues could also reduce the attractiveness of football to potential investors.

Introduction

The Premier League, EFL and National League have successfully grown the appeal of English football and associated broadcast revenues. Given the multi-year nature of competition organisers' broadcast deals, these revenues are secured until at least 2027/28. Premier League international deals run until 2027/28 and domestic deals until 2028/29,³⁸⁴ EFL until 2028/29³⁸⁵ and National League until 2030/31.³⁸⁶ However, the value of the next round of broadcast deals is uncertain, presenting a potential systemic risk to English football.

Future uncertainty around broadcast revenues

Football remains one of the most popular sports in the world and an attractive product for broadcasters and streaming services. However, competition organisers may face a number of challenges when they next go to market:

- **The UK market appears to be maturing.** Given current levels of fandom, it may be difficult to further increase fan numbers and grow the value of sports rights. In recent years, competition organisers have expanded the volume of games available to broadcast. The Premier League's 2025 to 2029 domestic rights cycle saw a 34% increase in the number of live matches,³⁸⁷ while the EFL's most recent deal increased the number of live matches by 300%.³⁸⁸ There is a limit to how many additional games competition organisers can broadcast, and further domestic growth may depend on the future of the Saturday 3pm blackout.
- **Traditional broadcasters are increasingly focused on cost control and profitability.** Global Pay TV revenue has declined by 1% per year since 2019.³⁸⁹ In addition, the market has seen significant consolidation, including Comcast's acquisition of Sky in 2018,³⁹⁰ and the Warner Bros Discovery - BT joint venture that created TNT Sports in 2022,³⁹¹ as well as the currently proposed Paramount - Warner Bros merger.³⁹² It remains unclear how these companies' strategies will evolve and what they will be willing to pay for future broadcast rights.
- **Streaming platform revenues have grown by 22% per year since 2019,**³⁹³ and the Premier League is exploring direct-to-consumer streaming.³⁹⁴ However, it is unclear what appetite streaming platforms will have for football broadcast rights. Their business models differ from traditional Pay-TV, with lower subscription prices, higher churn rates, lower average revenue per user and more fragmented markets.³⁹⁵
- **Competition organisers' revenues are concentrated among a small number of broadcasters.** Over 70% of Premier League media revenues come from five media companies with Comcast (NBC/Sky) accounting for a significant proportion.³⁹⁶ Similarly, the majority of EFL rights by Comcast³⁹⁷ and National League rights by DAZN.³⁹⁸ As a result, changes in these broadcasters' strategies or financial positions could have a significant impact on future broadcast revenues.
- **Given the importance of international revenues, particularly for the Premier League,**³⁹⁹ currency fluctuations and other macroeconomic factors could play a key role in future broadcast revenues.⁴⁰⁰
- **Although the Premier League currently attracts the highest media rights spending in global football,**⁴⁰¹ it continues to compete for audiences and scheduling with UEFA club competitions, domestic football leagues and other sports, particularly in countries where football is not the most popular sport, such as in North America and parts of Asia and Oceania.
- **The expansion of digital distribution has changed the nature of piracy,** with fans able to access illegal streams through social media, piracy aggregation websites and modified streaming devices. Our survey analysis found that 20% of fans say they watch football via pirated or illegal means at least once a month.⁴⁰² Although competition organisers are working with partners, digital platforms and government organisations to tackle piracy, it continues to undermine the value of broadcast rights.

Systemic risks

This uncertainty gives rise to two key systemic risks.

In-deal revenue reduction: As demonstrated by the EFL’s deal with ITV Digital in the early 2000s,⁴⁰³ the Premier League’s deal with Setanta in 2009⁴⁰⁴ and Ligue 1’s recent deal with DAZN,⁴⁰⁵ there is a risk that a broadcast partner becomes unable or unwilling to meet its contractual obligations during the term of an agreement.⁴⁰⁶

Next-deal revenue reduction: For the reasons outlined above, the value of the next round of broadcast deals may decrease for one or more competition organisers.

In either case, the impact on clubs will depend on the scale of the reduction and how far in advance they become aware of it. Clubs may need to adjust their business plans to absorb the reduction in revenues by:

- cutting costs, for instance by reducing the wage bill
- increasing their reliance on external funding
- selling assets, such as players

The more time clubs have to make these adjustments, the more manageable they are likely to be.

Table 4.4.1 shows how a 15%, 25% and 50% reduction in broadcast revenues would affect different clubs, assuming costs remain constant. Clubs that are more reliant on broadcast revenues would be more significantly affected.

A 50% reduction in broadcast revenues would increase average losses by £79 million for Premier League clubs outside the big six and by £27 million for clubs receiving parachute payments.

In the absence of higher revenues elsewhere, these additional losses would typically need to be covered through increased owner funding or cost reductions.

Furthermore, if broadcast revenues do not continue to grow, investors’ ability to achieve a financial return may be reduced. Investors typically realise a return where:

- i. revenue growth increases the club’s enterprise value, which is typically valued at 2x revenues, and
- ii. that increase offsets the cumulative losses funded by owner

Table 4.4.1: Impact on average losses before tax from changes to broadcast revenues

Additional loss before tax £m (% of revenue)				
League/ category	Average loss before tax in 2025/26 £m (% of revenue)	After a 15% drop in broadcast revenues	After a 25% drop in broadcast revenues	After a 50% drop in broadcast revenues
PL – Big six	62 (9%)	+41 (6%)	+68 (10%)	+135 (19%)
PL – Other	37 (16%)	+24 (10%)	+39 (17%)	+79 (34%)
CH – Parachute	31 (33%)	+8.2 (9%)	+14 (15%)	+27 (30%)
CH – Other	20 (64%)	+1.8 (6%)	+3.0 (10%)	+5.9 (20%)
L1	7.5 (67%)	+0.7 (4%)	+1.1 (7%)	+2.2 (14%)
L2	2.7 (43%)	+0.3 (5%)	+0.4 (8%)	+0.9 (15%)
NL	1.5 (57%)	+0.1 (2%)	+0.1 (3%)	+0.2 (6%)

Source: IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.

Summary

While broadcast revenues are secured until at least 2028, the outlook beyond current rights cycles is uncertain. Football remains a highly attractive content proposition, but changes in broadcaster strategies, the evolution of streaming, increasing competition for audiences and wider economic factors create uncertainty over future broadcast revenues. Given their central role in English football’s financial model, any material reduction could have significant implications for clubs’ finances, investment and business models. In such circumstances, the IFR’s financial resilience and soundness objectives would be affected.

4.5 Transfer debt and financing

Chapter at a glance

This chapter considers the scale of transfer debt across English football and the increasing use of transfer financing, including the risks associated with future payment obligations and growing interconnectedness between clubs.

- English clubs reported £4.8 billion of transfer payables and £1.5 billion of transfer receivables, and net transfer debt of approximately £3.4 billion in 2025/26 (rounded figures).⁴⁰⁷ This creates substantial future net cash outflows that clubs will need to fund.
- Transfer factoring has increased significantly, from £55 million in 2020/21 to £779 million in 2024/25. In total, around £1.2 billion of transfer receivables have been monetised through transfer factoring arrangements.
- The transfer factoring market is relatively concentrated: only 12 lenders were identified, with **five lenders accounting for 93.6% of transfer financing** activity since 2020/21. Changes in lenders' risk appetite, lending strategies or exposure limits could reduce the availability of transfer financing and create short-term liquidity pressures for some clubs.
- Transfer debt, deferred transfer payments and transfer financing create financial links between clubs, owners and lenders, increasing the potential for financial stress to spread across the game.

Net transfer debt

Transfer fees are often paid in instalments over several years rather than upfront. Unpaid instalments owed to other clubs are recorded as transfer payables, while amounts due from player sales are recorded as transfer receivables. Paying in instalments can reduce the immediate liquidity impact of transfer spending but can also create substantial future payment obligations.

Net transfer debt is the difference between transfer payables and transfer receivables. A positive balance indicates that amounts owed for player acquisitions exceed amounts due from player sales, implying a net future cash outflow that must ultimately be funded through operating cash flow, player sales, shareholder support or other financing.

In 2025/26, English clubs reported approximately **£4.8 billion in transfer payables and £1.5 billion in transfer receivables, resulting in aggregate net transfer debt of around £3.4 billion** and significant future cash outflows for clubs.⁴⁰⁸ It has been reported that Premier League clubs broke their all-time summer transfer record spend in the summer of 2026, which suggests this trend will continue.⁴⁰⁹

Net transfer debt is highly concentrated in the top two divisions. **Premier League clubs reported approximately £3.1 billion of net transfer debt in 2025/26, compared with £316 million in the Championship.**⁴¹⁰

By contrast, League One, League Two and National League clubs had a net transfer surplus in aggregate, with transfer receivables exceeding transfer payables.

Transfer payables exceed receivables in the Premier League and Championship, while the lower leagues have a net transfer surplus.

Chart 4.5.1: Transfer payables and receivables, 2025/26, £m



Source: EY Parthenon analysis on behalf of the IFR based on data received from clubs in response to IFR requests for information.

Transfer financing

Transfer financing allows clubs to convert future transfer receivables into immediate cash. The most common form is transfer factoring, where future receivables are sold or financed through a third-party lender. This can help clubs manage the mismatch between transfer fees received in instalments and short-term funding requirements.

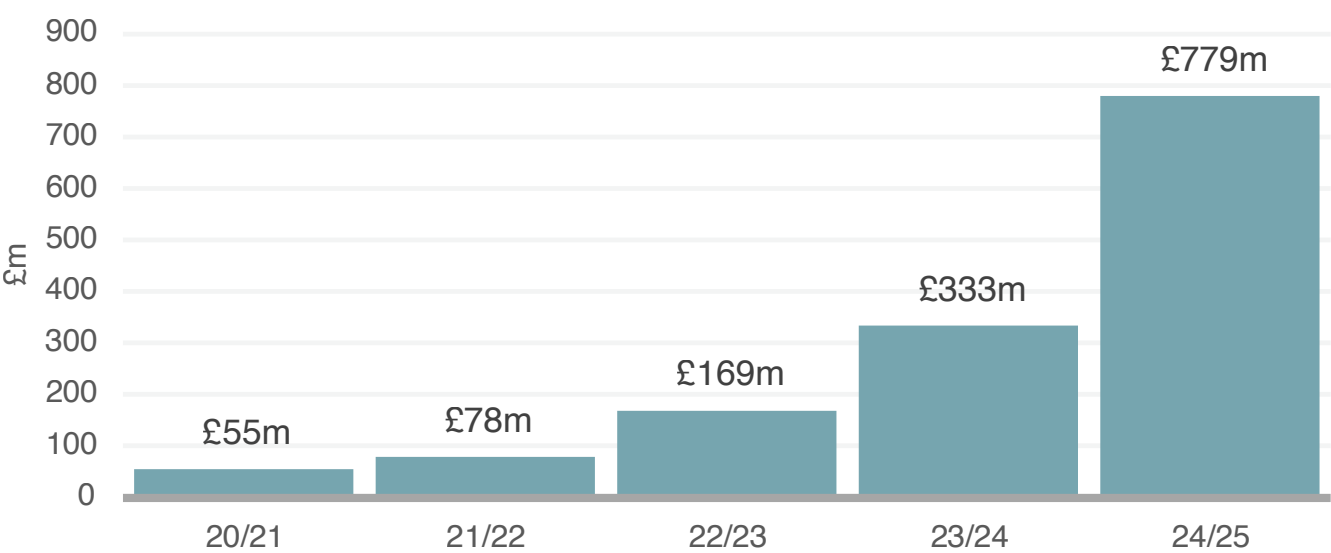
Transfer financing has become an increasingly important source of liquidity for clubs. **Annual transfer financing increased from £55 million in 2020/21 to £779 million in 2024/25, a more than fourteen-fold increase.** This shows that clubs are increasingly accelerating future transfer receipts rather than waiting for instalments to fall due.

Example: How transfer factoring works

Club X sells a player to Club Y, with the transfer fee payable in instalments. Rather than waiting to receive each instalment, Club X receives most of the future transfer receivable upfront from a lender, which then collects the instalments from Club Y. This provides Club X with immediate liquidity while allowing Club Y to continue paying in instalments.

Clubs' use of transfer financing has significantly increased since 2020/21.

Chart 4.5.2: Transfer Financing executed in-year, £m



Source: EY Parthenon analysis on behalf of the IFR based on data received from clubs in response to IFR requests for information.

Relationship between transfer debt and transfer financing

Transfer factoring contributes to the build-up of net transfer debt. When a selling club factors a future transfer receivable, it receives the cash up front and the receivable is removed from its balance sheet, while the purchasing club’s corresponding transfer payable remains outstanding to the lender. This reduces the receivables available to offset future transfer payables across the football system, increasing reported net transfer debt.

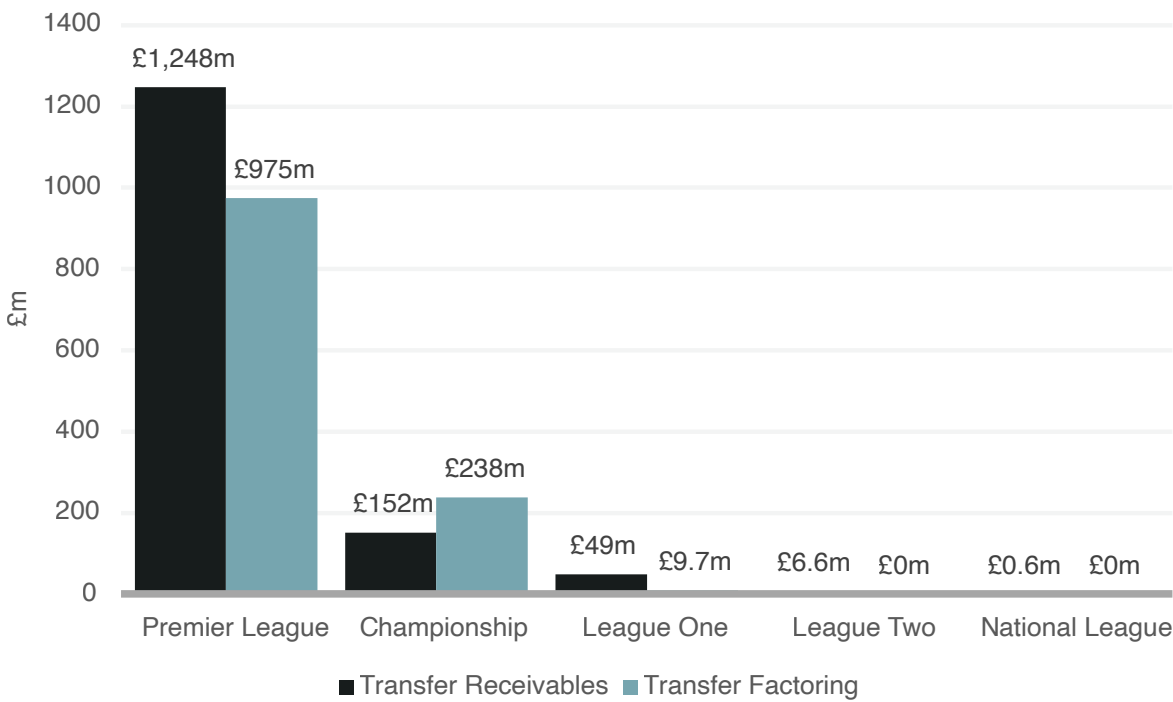
Chart 4.5.3 compares the transfer receivables remaining on club balance sheets with those already monetised through transfer financing. In 2025/26, **aggregate receivables remaining on balance sheets are approximately £1.5 billion, compared with around £1.2 billion already monetised through transfer financing.** This indicates that a substantial proportion of future transfer receivables have already been brought forward to provide immediate liquidity and that **of the £3.4 billion net transfer debt,⁴¹¹ around £1.2 billion of this is likely to be associated with transfer financing.**

Transfer financing is concentrated in the top two leagues. In 2025/26:

- Premier League clubs reported approximately **£1.25 billion of transfer receivables and £975 million of transfer factoring, equivalent to 78% of remaining receivables.**
- In the Championship, **£238 million of transfer receivables have been monetised through factoring, compared with £152 million remaining on club balance sheets.** Championship clubs have therefore already monetised more transfer receivables than they are currently due to receive.

Transfer financing is concentrated in the Premier League and Championship, with limited use across the lower leagues.

Chart 4.5.3: Transfer receivables vs transfer financing levels, 2025/26 (£m)



Source: EY Parthenon analysis on behalf of the IFR based on data received from clubs in response to IFR requests for information.

Risks associated with net transfer debt and transfer factoring

Implications for future finances

Although these obligations fall due over a number of years, the level of net transfer debt creates significant future liquidity pressures.

Across English football, transfer payables are around 3.3 times transfer receivables,⁴¹² meaning clubs will need to fund the resulting net cash outflows through operating cashflow, future player sales, additional borrowing or shareholder funding. These pressures are concentrated in the Premier League and Championship, where average net transfer debt is approximately £155.3 million and £13.2 million per club respectively.⁴¹³

These pressures are exacerbated by the increasing use of transfer factoring. While factoring improves short-term liquidity by bringing forward future transfer receipts, it can create a cash flow/timing mismatch between future transfer payables and transfer receivables. As shown in Chart 4.5.3, a substantial proportion of future transfer receivables has already been monetised, reducing the liquidity available to clubs in future periods.

Dependence on a concentrated lender market

The transfer financing market is relatively concentrated. Only 12 lenders have participated in transfer financing arrangements since 2020/21, with five lenders accounting for 93.6% of activity and one lender accounting for 43%.⁴¹⁴

This concentration creates a risk for clubs that rely on transfer financing for liquidity. Changes in lenders' risk appetite, lending strategies, exposure limits or regulatory or market conditions, could reduce the availability of transfer financing. Clubs reliant on this funding could therefore face short-term liquidity pressures and may need to seek alternative financing at short notice.

Financial interconnectedness and contagion risk

Paying transfer fees in instalments creates financial links between clubs, as selling clubs rely on buying clubs to meet future payment obligations. Financial difficulties at one club can therefore create liquidity pressures for others through the network of transfer payables and receivables.

English clubs reported approximately £1.5 billion of transfer receivables in 2025/26,⁴¹⁵ representing future instalments owed by other clubs.⁴¹⁶ This illustrates the scale of financial interdependence created by deferred transfer payments.

The financial interlinkages created by transfer instalments can be amplified by transfer factoring, as it introduces an additional financial counterparty and brings future cash flows into the present.

In addition to the £1.5 billion of transfer receivables owed to clubs, English clubs reported approximately £1.2 billion of outstanding transfer factoring.⁴¹⁸ The value of transfer receivables already monetised through factoring is therefore equivalent to approximately 84% of the transfer receivables remaining on clubs' balance sheets.⁴¹⁹ Transfer factoring has grown significantly, with annual activity increasing fourteen-fold between 2020/21 and 2024/25.⁴²⁰

This indicates that transfer financing has become increasingly embedded within transfer payment structures, increasing the number and scale of financial relationships between clubs and lenders. In addition, by bringing forward future transfer receipts, factoring can reduce the liquidity available to clubs in future periods. As a result, financial stress at one club may be more likely to occur and may affect a wider group of clubs and lenders than under a traditional transfer instalment structure.

The football creditor rule provides some protection against the spread of losses within the football system by requiring certain football-related creditors to be paid ahead of other creditors in an insolvency. This reduces the risk of losses being directly transferred to other clubs through unpaid football debts. However, the rule does not remove transfer debt, eliminate exposures to transfer financing providers or prevent financial stress from being transmitted through financing arrangements.

**Example:
How financial stress can spread between clubs**

Club A sells a player to Club B, with the transfer fee payable in instalments. Club A then uses the expected receipts to fund a player acquisition from Club C, creating its own future payment obligations. If Club B experiences financial difficulties and fails to make an instalment payment, Club A may face a liquidity shortfall that affects its ability to meet obligations to Club C. **Financial stress at Club B can therefore transmit through Club A to Club C.**

**Example:
How transfer factoring can increase financial interconnectedness**

Club A sells a player to Club B, with the transfer fee payable in instalments over several years. Rather than waiting for those payments, Club A factors the receivable with Lender X, which provides immediate cash to Club A and gives Lender X the right to collect future instalments from Club B. Club A may then use the proceeds to acquire a player from Club C. This creates a chain of dependencies. If Club B experiences financial difficulties and fails to make a payment, Lender X may incur a loss or, under a recourse arrangement,⁴¹⁷ seek reimbursement from Club A. This could create an unexpected liquidity shortfall for Club A and affect its ability to make payments to Club C.

Summary

Taken together, this analysis shows:

- **English clubs have £3.4 billion of net transfer debt**, creating significant future payment obligations that will need to be funded through operating cash flow, player sales, shareholder support or additional borrowing.
- The increasing use of transfer factoring provides short-term liquidity by bringing forward future transfer receipts but reduces liquidity available in future periods. **Around £1.2 billion of future transfer income has already been monetised through financing arrangements.**
- **Transfer financing is concentrated among a small number of providers, with five lenders accounting for 93.6% of activity.** A reduction in lender appetite could therefore create liquidity pressures for clubs reliant on this source of funding.
- **The use of transfer instalments and financing create financial interconnections between clubs and lenders**, increasing the potential for financial stress to spread through transfer payment and financing arrangements.

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that net transfer debt is increasing and transfer financing has become an important source of liquidity in English football, particularly in the Premier League and Championship. This can reduce future liquidity, increase reliance on external finance and add to financial interconnectedness across the football system.

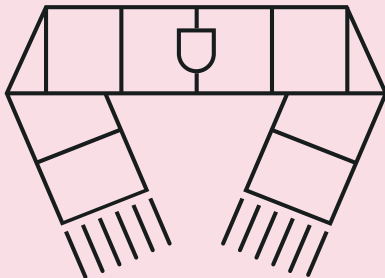
4.6 Conclusions

Overall, our assessment identifies six key issues affecting the systemic resilience of the English football pyramid:

- The growth of Premier League revenues coupled with the current distribution arrangements creates a significant financial cliff-edge between the Premier League and Championship, and within the Championship. While parachute payments reduce the financial risk associated with relegation, they also create imbalances which, alongside the financial rewards of promotion, can incentivise clubs to overspend. **Any new distribution arrangements must address this issue.**
- Although recent trends show that there is a pool of investors willing to invest in English football and provide continuous owner funding, English football could become less attractive because of persistent, increasing losses. This presents a systemic risk to English football. **If owners and investors are no longer willing or able to continue to provide funding, this would threaten the short-term viability and longer-term sustainability of clubs.**
- Given the importance of broadcast revenues to the pyramid, uncertainty over the future of the broadcast market presents a systemic risk. While football remains one of the world's most popular sports, competition organisers may face a range of challenges when rights are next sold. **Any reduction in broadcast revenues would require clubs to adjust their business plans, while slower growth could weaken investment conditions in English football.**
- Net transfer debt is increasing and transfer financing has become an important source of liquidity in English football, particularly in the Premier League and Championship. This presents a number of systemic risks:
 - It creates significant future financial pressures as transfer payables are around 3.3 times transfer receivables. This means clubs will need to fund the resulting net cash outflows through operating cashflow, future player sales, additional borrowing or shareholder funding.
- The transfer-financing market is relatively concentrated. Changes in lenders' risk appetite, lending strategies or exposure limits could reduce the availability of transfer financing. This would put short-term liquidity pressures on certain clubs.
- More broadly, transfer debt, deferred transfer payments and transfer financing create financial links between clubs, owners and lenders, increasing the potential for financial stress to spread across the game if one or more clubs fail to meet their obligations.

Non-financial issues

05



5.1 Introduction

This section focusses on non-financial issues, including football governance, fan engagement, club governance and EDI.

In Chapter 5.2 we consider issues relating to football governance – i.e. leagues and governing bodies – and the potential impact on the IFR’s objectives.

In Chapter 5.3 we focus on fan engagement. This relates to the IFR’s statutory objective to safeguard the heritage of English football.⁴²¹ This chapter considers:

- current approaches to fan engagement
- the motivations and challenges involved
- overall satisfaction with fan engagement
- the importance of club heritage

In Chapter 5.4 we focus on club governance and EDI. Effective governance is critical for clubs to manage risks appropriately. Clubs have requirements under the Act, such as to operate with appropriate non-financial resources and to publish a corporate governance statement explaining how it applies the IFR’s Club Code. Within this corporate governance statement, clubs are required to explain how the actions they are taking to improve EDI. This chapter considers:

- the existing regulatory landscape as it relates to corporate governance and EDI
- survey evidence of existing corporate governance practices
- wider levels of representation across the game

5.2 Football Governance Landscape

Chapter at a glance

- This chapter provides an overview of the key stakeholders in English football and their changing roles, before assessing governance issues within and across competition organisers.
- The roles of the EFL, Premier League and UEFA have changed since 1992. Alongside growing the commercial value of their competitions on behalf of member clubs, all three now have a substantial regulatory role following the introduction and development of financial controls.
 - Competition organisers have faced challenges in introducing and enforcing financial rules, including legal challenges from clubs and the PFA.
 - An increasingly litigious environment has contributed to greater uncertainty and higher central costs. Between 2015/16 and 2024/25, Premier League administrative expenses increased from £45 million to £212 million, a 370% increase. EFL administrative expenses have risen from £22 million to £35 million over the same period.
 - Conflicts between both domestic and international competition organisers have also increased, including disputes over regulation, revenue distribution and an increasingly congested fixture calendar.

Introduction

Until the creation of the IFR, football in England has been self-regulated, primarily through contractual membership arrangements between clubs, competition organisers and the FA. While English football has enjoyed unparalleled commercial success under this system, its governance structures and competition organisers' approach to regulation have also faced criticism.⁴²²

Although the IFR now has statutory responsibilities across areas of the game, competition organisers and the FA will continue to operate their own rules and regulations. This wider governance landscape, including the application and consequences of those rules, could affect the IFR's ability to advance its objectives.

Overview of key stakeholders in English football and their changing role

Domestic competition organisers

The Premier League, EFL and National League are responsible for organising and overseeing matches in their competitions. They also have an incentive to grow the long-term value of those competitions through scheduling fixtures, selling audiovisual rights, entering into commercial partnerships, distributing revenues to clubs and the wider game, and setting, monitoring and enforcing rules and regulations.

However, introducing or amending rules requires the approval of member clubs.

- **Premier League:** all rule changes and major proposals require a two-thirds majority of 14 clubs.⁴²³
- **EFL:** the Board can propose regulations, but these can only be approved or amended at a general meeting with the support of a majority of all clubs and a majority of Championship clubs.⁴²⁴
- **National League:** changes to the rules require a vote by member clubs at the AGM and approval from the FA.⁴²⁵

The regulatory role of domestic competition organisers has grown over the past 20 years. For much of the 1990s and 2000s, English football had no financial rules and competition organisers were primarily focused on growing the commercial value of the leagues. As financial rules have been introduced and built upon, competition organisers have developed a dual commercial and regulatory role.

- In 2003/04, the EFL introduced Salary Cost Management Protocol (SCMP) rules in League Two, extending them to League One in 2011/12.⁴²⁶ Although definitions and limits have changed over time, SCMP limits the proportion of ‘relevant turnover’ that can be spent on ‘player-related expenditure’.
- In 2013/14, the Premier League introduced its Profit and Sustainability Rules, limiting the losses clubs could incur.⁴²⁷
- In 2016/17, the EFL introduced Profit and Sustainability Rules in the Championship, limiting the losses clubs could incur.⁴²⁸
- In November 2025, the Premier League voted to introduce its ‘New Financial System’ for the 2026/27 season.⁴²⁹ This includes a squad-cost ratio (SCR), which limits the proportion of relevant revenues that can be committed to squad costs, and ‘Sustainability and Systemic Resilience’ rules, which include tests relating to positive equity, liquidity and working capital.
- In May 2026, the EFL announced that Championship clubs had approved new squad-cost ratio rules for the 2026/27 season. These will limit spending on player- and manager-related costs, including transfer fees, to a set percentage of club income, alongside a level of owner funding.⁴³⁰

To enforce their financial rules, competition organisers typically establish commissions or panels independent of the clubs and the executive.⁴³¹

Alongside the domestic competition organisers for the men’s game, WSL Football runs the top divisions of women’s professional football, WSL and WSL2. Like the men’s competition organisers, WSL Football seeks to grow the value of the women’s game and introduces, monitors and enforces its rules. However, unlike the Premier League and EFL, women’s professional football has no dedicated representation on the FA Board.

Governing bodies: the FA, UEFA and FIFA

In addition to domestic competition organisers, three governing bodies oversee domestic and international football while also organising their own competitions: the Football Association (FA), UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) and FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association).

The FA oversees the domestic game, and professional and amateur clubs competing in recognised leagues and competitions must be affiliated with it. As well as setting the rules of the game and overseeing disciplinary matters, the FA seeks to grow the grassroots game, supporting a healthy elite game and strengthening its competitions and England teams. This generates interest and value that can be reinvested in projects and facilities to support further growth.

UEFA is the governing body for football in Europe and the umbrella organisation for its 55 member national associations, including the FA.⁴³² It organises the UEFA Champions League, UEFA Europa League, UEFA Conference League, and UEFA Super Cup, as well as the UEFA European Championship for national teams. Participating clubs must meet UEFA financial and licensing regulations.

Like domestic competition organisers, UEFA's regulatory role has grown with the introduction and evolution of its own financial rules.

- In 2011/12, UEFA introduced Financial Fair Play (FFP) regulations.⁴³³ Initially, clubs qualifying for UEFA competitions had to demonstrate that they had no overdue payables to other clubs, players or tax authorities. From 2013, clubs were also assessed against break-even requirements, which required them to balance spending with revenues and restricted the accumulation of debt.⁴³⁴
- In 2022, UEFA replaced FFP with its 'Financial Sustainability Regulations'.⁴³⁵ These have three pillars:⁴³⁶
 - solvency, relating to clubs' outstanding payables.
 - stability, limiting the losses clubs can incur.
 - cost control, limiting squad costs to a proportion of revenues. This proportion was 90% in 2023/24, falling to 80% in 2024/25 and 70% from 2025/26.

FIFA is the international governing body of football, comprising over 200 member associations, including the FA, and six confederations (of which UEFA is one).⁴³⁷ It sets the rules governing how football is played worldwide and organises international competitions, including the FIFA World Cup and FIFA Club World Cup. Its regulations on international player transfers, agent activity and club ownership directly affect English clubs, as does its organisation of competitions involving clubs and players playing in the English leagues.

Other relevant organisations

- **PFA:** The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) is the trade union for current and former footballers in England and Wales, representing 5,000 current members and nearly 50,000 former members. It protects players' rights, represents their views and provides educational, financial and wellbeing support.⁴³⁸ The PFA also has four representatives on the Professional Football Negotiating and Consultative Committee (PFNCC), alongside two each from the EFL and Premier League, and one from the FA. The PFNCC considers matters relating to players' employment and the rules and regulations affecting them in the Premier League and EFL.⁴³⁹
- **European Football Clubs (EFC):** EFC represents the collective interests of over 850 European football clubs,⁴⁴⁰ including 20 English clubs with men's teams in the Premier League and the EFL.⁴⁴¹ It works with UEFA, FIFA and other bodies to represent clubs on issues including competition access and development, international match calendars, financial regulation and the transfer system.⁴⁴² EFC plays a significant role on the UEFA Club Competitions Committee, including powers relating to its composition and a veto over changes to UEFA club competitions and their regulations.⁴⁴³ EFC and UEFA have also established UC3, a joint venture that manages the commercial rights of UEFA club competitions.⁴⁴⁴
- **Campaign groups:** A range of campaign groups operate across football, including the Football Supporters' Association (FSA),⁴⁴⁵ the national representative body for football supporters, Kick It Out,⁴⁴⁶ which tackles discrimination and promotes equality and inclusion in football, and Level Playing Field,⁴⁴⁷ which works to ensure disabled fans can freely access and enjoy sport.

Governance issues within competition organisers

Within each competition organiser, member clubs vote on rule changes. This can create conflicts where individual clubs’ interests diverge from those of other clubs, or from the competition as a whole. Clubs will assess the impact of proposed rule changes on their own business model and relative competitiveness, and vote accordingly.

Diverging interests and incentives across clubs have made it more difficult to introduce, amend and enforce financial rules, contributing to inconsistent rules across leagues, creative compliance by clubs, higher operating costs and increased litigation. Diverging ownership and business models within the Premier League have further increased conflicting incentives among clubs, particularly between the big six and others.

Difficulties in introducing financial rules

In recent years, competition organisers have faced difficulties in introducing effective financial rules, both in securing support from member clubs and in responding to opposition from the PFA, which has opposed the adoption of rules that could limit spending on player salaries without its agreement.

- **In 2020, the PFA successfully challenged salary caps adopted by EFL clubs in League One and League Two.** The caps limited annual spending on player salaries and had been approved by clubs in both leagues. However, following a PFA challenge alleging that they were ‘unlawful and unenforceable’, primarily because of the process followed in approving them, the caps were withdrawn after an independent arbitration panel upheld the challenge.⁴⁴⁸
- **In 2025, alongside its SCR and SSR rules, the Premier League sought to introduce a Top-to-Bottom Anchor (TBA) rule, linking each club’s squad costs to a multiple of the lowest forecast central distribution to Premier League clubs.** According to analysis submitted by the Premier League, the rule was intended to mitigate the risk that large financial disparities between clubs undermine competitive balance and, in turn, diminish the value of the Premier League proposition for clubs, fans and other stakeholders. However, the proposal faced public opposition from the PFA and did not secure sufficient support from Premier League clubs.⁴⁴⁹
- **In 2026, League Two clubs voted against proposed changes to the SCMP rules that would have reduced the proportion of equity injections clubs could spend on wages to 50%.** According to the EFL, the proposals were ‘designed to further strengthen financial control’ and would have been ‘another important step towards helping Clubs to operate on a more sustainable basis’.⁴⁵⁰
- The same changes were approved by League One clubs. The EFL said the changes, were ‘intended to encourage investment into other areas of Club operations, such as infrastructure and youth development’.⁴⁵¹ **However, the PFA has since issued High Court proceedings challenging the introduction of the new rules.**⁴⁵²

Creative compliance As competition organisers have developed and sought to ensure compliance with their financial rules, clubs have found creative ways to comply with those rules.	• Clubs including Derby County,⁴⁵³ Sheffield Wednesday⁴⁵⁴ and Birmingham City⁴⁵⁵ sold their stadia within their corporate structures to help comply with financial rules. The EFL subsequently changed its rules to close this loophole. • In 2024, Chelsea sold the Millenium and Copthorne hotels at Stamford Bridge for £76.5 million, reducing the club’s losses and helping it comply with Premier League PSR.⁴⁵⁶ The hotels were transferred from Chelsea FC Holdings Ltd to BlueCo 22 Properties Ltd, both under the control of the Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital.⁴⁵⁷ • In 2025, Chelsea sold its women’s team to its parent company BlueCo, for £198.7 million.⁴⁵⁸ Aston Villa similarly agreed to sell its women’s team to V Sports, the club’s holding company.⁴⁵⁹ In both cases, these arrangements appear to have helped the clubs comply with PSR. PSR also incentivised the sale of academy players because, where little or no transfer fee was originally paid, most of the sale price can be recorded as profit.

Increasing cost of regulation and litigious environment

Competition organisers’ growing regulatory role has increased the need to monitor and enforce financial rules. The Premier League has taken disciplinary action against several clubs, such as those actions resulting in public outcomes against Everton in 2023⁴⁶⁰ and 2024,⁴⁶¹ Nottingham Forest in 2024⁴⁶² and Leicester City in 2026 (each for breaches of the applicable profitability and sustainability rules).⁴⁶³ In addition, in the proceedings between the Premier League and Manchester City, a recent decision by an Independent Commission established under the Premier League’s rules found that Manchester City had breached Premier League financial rules.⁴⁶⁴

The process remains ongoing and subject to an appeal. The Premier League has also entered into a settlement agreement with Chelsea for breaches of related rules.⁴⁶⁵

The EFL has separately sanctioned five clubs for breaching Championship PSR rules: Birmingham City (2018/19),⁴⁶⁶ Sheffield Wednesday⁴⁶⁷ and Reading (2020/21)⁴⁶⁸ and Derby County (2021/22),⁴⁶⁹ as well as imposing the recommended sanction on Leicester City for P&S Rule non-compliance (2025/26).

This, in turn, has increased competition organisers’ operating costs, which are borne by clubs. Between 2015/16 and 2024/25, Premier League administrative expenses increased from £45 million to £212 million, a 369% increase, as set out in Chart 5.2.1. Over the same period, EFL operating costs increased from £22 million to £35 million, a 58% increase. The Premier League’s significant cost increase in the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25 relates in part to some of these exceptional disciplinary cases.⁴⁷⁰

Alongside rising regulatory costs, litigation involving clubs and competition organisers has increased in recent years.

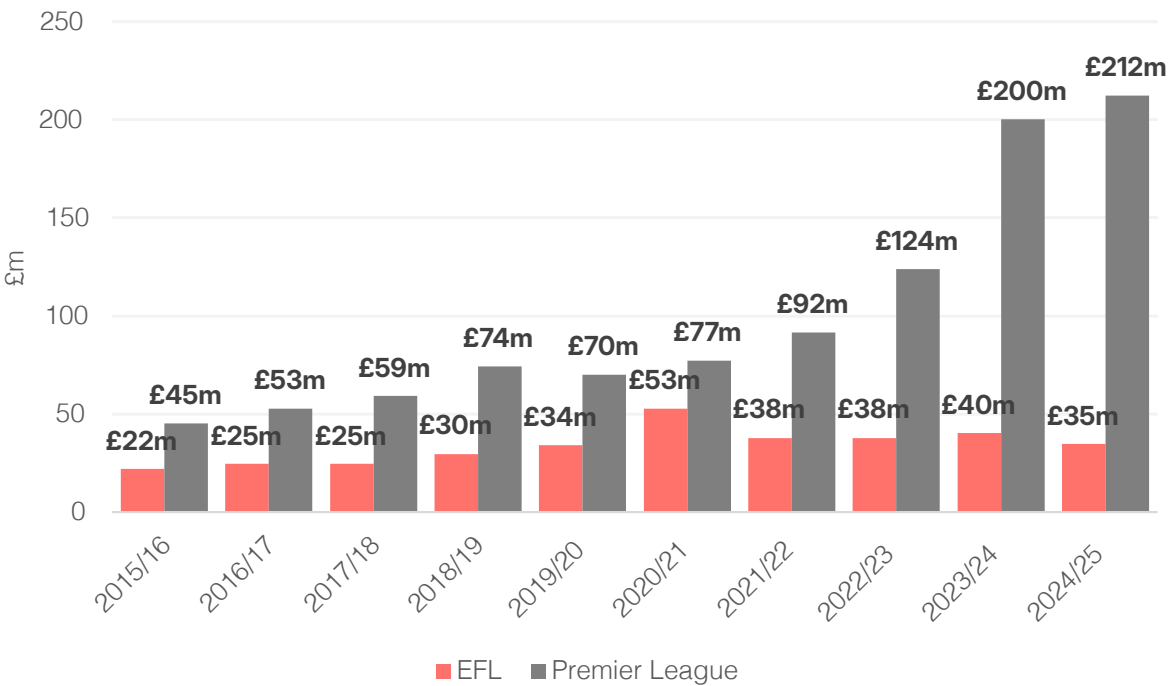
Example:
Recent litigation involving clubs and competition organisers

1. In 2024, Manchester City successfully challenged aspects of the Premier League’s associated-party transactions (APT) rules on competition law grounds. The dispute arose from the Premier League’s determination that several transactions negotiated by Manchester City were not at fair market value and therefore required adjustment for financial reporting purposes.⁴⁷¹
2. In 2025, Manchester City brought a further challenge to the Premier League’s revised APT rules, arguing that they were ‘unlawful and void’. The parties subsequently settled the dispute, with Manchester City accepting that the current APT Rules are valid and binding.⁴⁷²
3. Following Everton’s PSR breach in 2021/22, Burnley sought compensation, arguing that the breach had affected its chances of remaining in the Premier League. In 2026, a Premier League commission ordered Everton to pay Burnley £35 million, although Everton is appealing the decision.⁴⁷³

The increasing willingness of clubs to pursue litigation, including seeking damages from one another following enforcement action by competition organisers, is increasing costs and has created greater uncertainty for clubs and fans.

Premier League administrative expenses have risen more than four-fold since 2015/16. EFL administrative expenses have risen from £22 million to £35 million over the same period.

Chart 5.2.1: Premier League and EFL administrative expenses, £m (2015/16 – 2024/25)



Source: IFR analysis of publicly available Premier League and EFL accounts obtained from Companies House. Administrative expenses shown for the EFL are equal to the sum of staff costs and other operating charges.

This analysis also shows that competition organisers have different budgets. In 2024/25, the National League incurred average central administrative costs of only £15,000 per club, compared with £483,000 in the EFL and £10.6 million in the Premier League.⁴⁷⁴

Increasingly conflicting incentives within the Premier League

Conflicting incentives within the Premier League have become more pronounced as the big six increasingly derive more revenue from UEFA competitions and other sources than other Premier League clubs, which are more reliant on Premier League revenues. The big six also typically compete directly with other leading European clubs, four of which generate more revenue than each of the big six.⁴⁷⁵

These differing incentives have contributed to the big six supporting fundamental reforms to Premier League governance, including proposals such as Project Big Picture and the European Super League, which would likely have secured greater revenues for the big six.⁴⁷⁶

Governance issues between competition organisers

Although competitions are linked, each competition organiser is primarily responsible for managing and growing its own competition. This can create governance challenges where the interests of one competition organiser do not align with those of other competition organisers or governing bodies. These challenges arise particularly where there is misalignment of rules and regulations, revenue distributions and fixture scheduling.

Alignment of rules and regulations

Clubs competing in multiple competitions may face different regulatory requirements, increasing administrative and compliance burdens. For example, Premier League clubs competing in UEFA competitions must comply with both Premier League and UEFA rules. In 2025/26, nine Premier League clubs participated in UEFA competitions, while other clubs may seek to comply pre-emptively in case they qualify. Clubs may therefore effectively operate under two similar but different regulatory regimes.⁴⁷⁷

Competition organisers may also introduce rules to support their own objectives but which do not align with those of other competition organisers or stakeholders.

Example: Misalignment of objectives

- **GBE:** The FA seeks to support the development of the national game and improve the performance of England teams. Alongside wider immigration considerations, overseas players must satisfy points-based criteria to receive a ‘Governing Body Endorsement’ from the FA.⁴⁷⁸ While intended to increase development opportunities for English players, the system can limit English clubs’ access to foreign players earlier in their careers.
- **3-Up:** Currently, two teams per season are promoted from the National League to League Two. The National League has pushed for a third promotion place but has faced resistance from the EFL, whose approval is required.⁴⁷⁹

Impact of revenue growth and distributions

Each competition organiser has an incentive to grow its own revenues and distribute them in a way that supports its competition. However, their interests may not align when determining how revenues should be distributed across leagues. In particular, the EFL and Premier League have been unable to agree a new distribution arrangement since 2019. However, in the last few months, the IFR has facilitated discussions between the Premier League and the EFL but remained neutral as they seek to reach a new revenue distribution arrangement.

Distribution decisions can also create disparities within and between leagues. For example, Premier League clubs qualifying for UEFA and FIFA club competitions will receive additional revenues, while Championship and National League clubs receiving parachute payments receive more than other clubs in their respective leagues. The impact of these distribution arrangements is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.2.

Fixture Scheduling

Competition organisers seek to schedule fixtures in ways that maximise audience interest and commercial value. However, multiple competitions compete for space within a finite football calendar, creating tensions between domestic and international competitions.

Further expansion of UEFA and FIFA club competitions into the English domestic season or domestic broadcast slots, particularly weekends, could pose a significant risk to the value of domestic media rights. In turn, this could reduce broadcast revenues received by clubs across the pyramid.

Example:
Fixture scheduling conflicts

- **FA Cup replays:** Although the FA stated that all parties accepted that FA Cup replays could not continue, the EFL urged the FA to reconsider its approach and stated there was no agreement or formal consultation.⁴⁸⁰
- **Women’s football:** Women’s fixtures are typically scheduled around existing men’s broadcast slots and cannot be broadcast during the Article 48 3pm blackout. Although Recommendation 5 of the *Raise the Bar* (Karen Carney) Report called for greater cooperation, stating that ‘the FA, Premier League, English Football League and broadcasters should work together to carve out a new dedicated broadcast slot for women’s football’, this has not happened yet.
- **UEFA club competitions:** As part of the recent expansion of UEFA club competitions, UEFA proposed 10 match rounds for the Champions League, up from six, before settling on eight following resistance from domestic leagues.⁴⁸¹
- **FIFA Club World Cup:** In 2025, FIFA hosted an expanded Club World Cup in the United States, involving two English clubs and 30 other teams. Ahead of the tournament, FIFPRO Europe member unions challenged the legality of FIFA’s decisions on the international match calendar, including the decision to create and schedule the FIFA Club World Cup 2025.⁴⁸² FIFA has since announced its intention to host the next tournament in 2029, with more teams and matches,⁴⁸³ and there has also been speculation that it could move from a four-year to a two-year cycle. The EFC has also announced ongoing work between FIFA and the EFC ‘to develop a joint venture formalising our work together on the growth of international club football, including men’s and women’s FIFA Club World Cups,’ which could result in more Premier League clubs entering the competition.⁴⁸⁴

Summary

The roles of the EFL, Premier League and UEFA have evolved significantly since 1992. All three now perform both commercial and regulatory roles, with a significant focus on introducing, monitoring and enforcing financial regulation. This more interventionalist approach has brought greater scrutiny of the legality of rules, increased litigation following enforcement action and, in some cases, financial damages claims between clubs. It has also contributed to increased bureaucracy, and central costs. At the same time, increasingly diverging incentives within and across competitions have created greater conflict among organisers and between organisers and their clubs.

This presents **systemic risks for football**.

- Difficulties in introducing financial rules can limit the ability of competition organisers to reduce costs across football, which in turn **affects the financial soundness of clubs**.
- Increased enforcement and litigation increase costs for football but can also **reduce the attractiveness of investing into English football**.
- Fixture scheduling conflicts could **reduce broadcast revenues**, which represent a significant revenue stream for clubs across the pyramid.

5.3 Fan engagement and club heritage

Chapter at a glance

This chapter considers the existing approaches to fan engagement, as well as the motivations to engage and the challenges faced.

- Fans are generally satisfied with opportunities to engage but are less convinced that clubs listen to and act on supporter views. Supporter groups are similarly less positive about their influence: only 39% are satisfied with how fan views are considered in club decision-making and 37% with communication and transparency around those decisions.
- 84% of surveyed clubs state that fan engagement has helped strengthen trust with supporters and improve the quality of decision-making.
- Lower-league clubs are more likely to face staff capacity and resource constraints, while Premier League clubs more commonly cite confidentiality as a challenge. Supporter groups highlight concerns about transparency and uncertainty over whether supporter views influence club decisions.
- Club heritage is highly valued by fans, clubs and supporter groups, with fan engagement seen as an important means of protecting and preserving club identity, traditions and community connections.

Introduction

Fan engagement is a key feature of the IFR’s regulatory framework for clubs. The legislation recognises that clubs occupy a unique position within their communities and that supporters have a legitimate interest in decisions that affect their clubs. As part of the licensing regime, clubs will be required to demonstrate that they have adequate and effective arrangements for consulting supporters on relevant matters, that supporter views are taken into account in decision-making, and that they report annually on their engagement activities.⁴⁸⁵ The introduction of these requirements represents a significant development in the formalisation of supporter engagement across the game.

Approaches to fan engagement vary considerably across English football, reflecting differences in club size, resources, supporter structures and local circumstances. This chapter therefore aims to establish a baseline understanding of existing approaches, drawing on evidence from clubs, supporter groups and fans. As the licensing regime develops, there will be an ongoing need to understand not only the structures and methods clubs adopt, but also the extent to which those arrangements meet the IFR’s requirements to allow fan views to be taken into account in club decision-making.

In this chapter, we first set out the survey evidence underpinning our analysis before examining:

- current approaches to fan engagement including existing requirements on clubs
- the motivations for clubs, supporter groups and fans to engage
- the challenges they face in engagement
- overall satisfaction with current approaches to fan engagement
- the importance of club heritage

Survey evidence

In this chapter, we draw on three sources of evidence: the IFR survey of clubs, the IFR survey of supporter groups and market research of football fans conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the IFR. Together, these provide perspectives from clubs, supporter groups and fans.

- **Club survey:** A survey of clubs in the top five divisions focused on engagement approaches, outcomes and challenges. Of the 116 clubs contacted, 100 responded (86% response rate).⁴⁸⁶
- **Supporter group survey:** A survey of supporter groups and fan advisory boards across the top five divisions focused on satisfaction with and challenges around fan engagement. The Football Supporters’ Association (FSA) administered this survey on behalf of the IFR, with responses from 89 supporter groups.
- **Fan survey:** We commissioned Ipsos to conduct qualitative and quantitative market research. The quantitative survey of almost 2,000 fans of English men’s professional football explored how fans engage with clubs, their views of club heritage and loyalty, and what matters most to fans.⁴⁸⁷ The qualitative research involved 12 focus groups with approximately 100 fans across the top five divisions and explored similar themes.⁴⁸⁸

Current approaches to fan engagement

Existing fan engagement requirements on clubs

Both the Premier League and EFL have established fan engagement requirements for their clubs. Table 5.3.1 summarises these requirements.^{489 490} There are currently no equivalent requirements in the National League. Full requirements are set out in the relevant league handbooks.

Table 5.3.1: Summary of Premier League and EFL fan engagement requirements

Aspect	Premier League clubs must:	EFL clubs must:
Method for engagement	Establish a Fan Advisory Board.	Hold at least two meetings or fan forums per season, with representation from the club’s owner, board directors or other senior executives. Where meetings are not open to all supporters, representatives must be elected, selected or invited in line with basic democratic principles.
Oversight and accountability	Nominate a board-level official to oversee fan engagement and be accountable for the Fan Advisory Board and other engagement activity.	Nominate a senior official to oversee fan engagement activity.
Reporting	Publish a Fan Engagement Plan before each season, setting out planned activity, roles and responsibilities, and the structure of the Fan Advisory Board. Also publish an overview of the previous season’s engagement, key issues raised and how they were addressed.	Publish a Fan Engagement Plan before each season, setting out planned activity, and provide an end-of-season summary of delivery against the previous season.
Guiding framework	Comply with the Premier League Fan Engagement Standard, which sets out core commitments across five fan engagement themes.	

Formal approaches to fan engagement

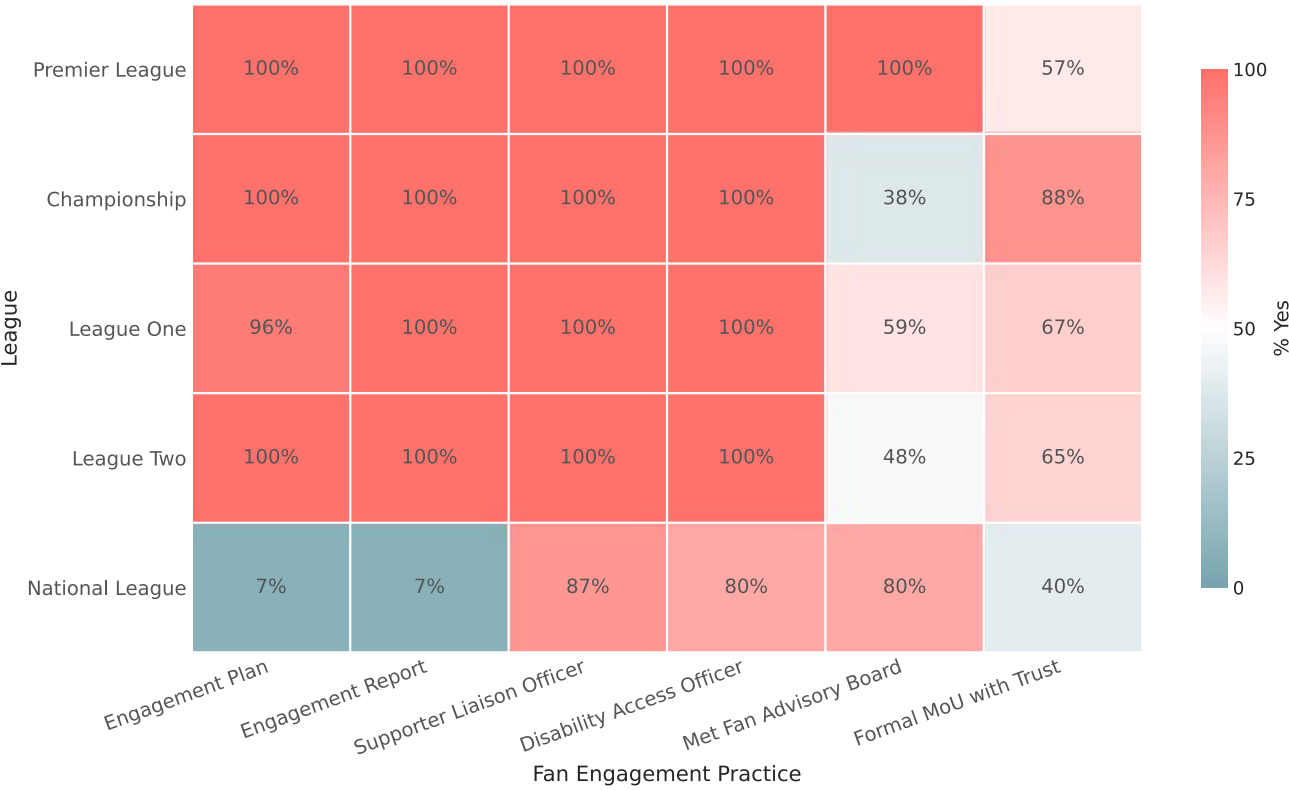
In terms of formal engagement, almost all surveyed clubs in the top four divisions publish a Fan Engagement Plan and Report, have a supporter liaison officer and a disability access officer. In line with Premier League requirements, all Premier League clubs surveyed report meeting with a fan advisory board.

This is less common among EFL clubs, where it is not required by EFL rules.

National League clubs are generally less likely to report having formal engagement structures and processes. However, **80% of those surveyed report meeting with a fan advisory board.**

Formal fan engagement practices are widespread in the top four divisions but less consistent in the National League.

Chart 5.3.1: Adoption of formal fan engagement practices across leagues



Source: IFR, Fan Engagement Club Survey, December 2025.

Note: The heatmap shows the percentage of responding clubs in each league that reported using each fan engagement practice in 2024/25 in response to the question 'What approaches to fan engagement did the club take in the 2024/25 season? Please select all that apply?'. Teal indicates lower adoption and coral higher adoption. Results should be considered alongside the league sample sizes shown below. MoU = Memorandum of Understanding.

Informal approaches to engagement

In addition to the formal engagement structures shown in Chart 5.3.1, clubs reported a wide range of engagement activities in open-text survey responses.⁴⁹¹ Several described these activities as important as formal structures for developing supporter relationships.

These included:

- fan forums
- matchday surveys and feedback mechanisms
- fan and community events and the establishment of fan zones
- junior supporter programmes
- open training sessions and meet-the-player and meet-the-manager events
- initiatives for families and first-time attendees
- digital engagement through websites, apps and social media

Targeted approaches to engagement

Clubs also reported in open-text responses targeted engagement with specific supporter groups, including junior fan forums and youth advisory groups, disabled supporters' associations, LGBTQ+ supporter groups, women's football initiatives, and ethnic minority and faith-based communities.⁴⁹² Supporter groups similarly emphasised that engagement structures should reflect the diversity of modern supporter bases and give under-represented groups a voice, highlighting initiatives relating to accessibility, anti-discrimination, LGBT+ groups, women's football, mental health and community outreach.⁴⁹³

How fans engage with clubs

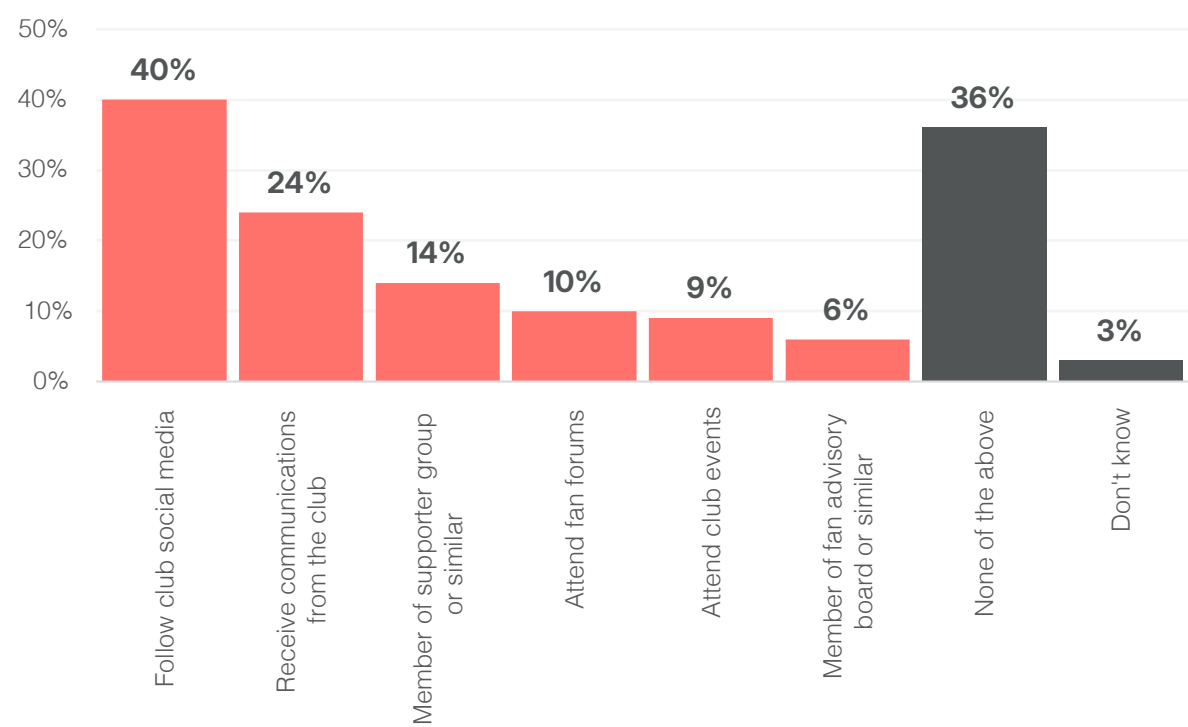
Chart 5.3.2 shows how fans in the wider population engage with their clubs. Social media was the most common way for surveyed fans to engage with their clubs (40%), followed by other club communications such as newsletters and emails (24%). Fans described social media as important for following their club and valued updates on matches, offers and other developments, although ‘unofficial’ supporter-led channels also played an important role.⁴⁹⁴

More formal forms of engagement were less common among these fans: 14% of surveyed fans were members of a supporters’ group or similar organisation, 10% attended fan forums, 9% attended other community events organised by the club and 6% were members of a fan advisory board or similar body. However, fans who attend fan forums and club events valued hearing directly from senior figures and the opportunity to provide feedback, seeing these forums as evidence that clubs listen to them.⁴⁹⁵

Overall, clubs use a combination of formal, informal and targeted approaches to fan engagement. While fans most commonly engage with their clubs through social media, some also participate through fan forums, club events and supporter groups.

Social media is the most common way fans engage with their club.

Chart 5.3.2: How fans engage with their club



Source: Ipsos, ‘State of the Game research’, prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 27.

Note: The chart shows responses to the question: ‘Outside of attending or watching the team’s games, which of the following ways, if any, do you currently interact with your club? Please only include official club platforms/communications and affiliated supporter groups, not unofficial or non-affiliated sources.’ Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales, online, 10-14 April 2026.

Motivations for fan engagement

Clubs, fans and supporter groups have different motivations for engaging with one another.

Motivations for clubs to engage with fans

Building and maintaining positive relationships with supporters is the most important driver of engagement activity across clubs in all divisions, followed by gaining supporter perspectives to inform decision-making. Meeting governance or league requirements, increasing attendance and revenue, and strengthening the club's brand and reputation are generally considered less important.

Some clubs also emphasised through open-text responses that **fan engagement is most effective when embedded in organisational culture**, describing it as a means of building trust, strengthening relationships and improving communication with supporters.⁴⁹⁶

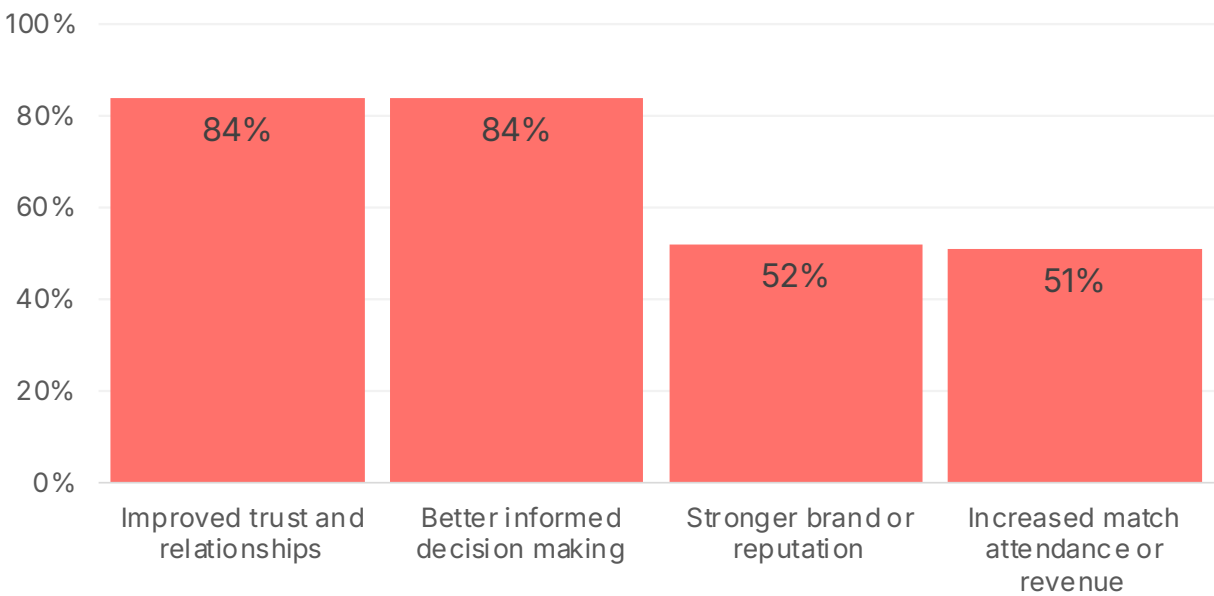
There are some differences across divisions. Premier League and Championship clubs place greater importance on building and maintaining positive relationships with fans, while lower-divisions clubs place greater relative importance on increasing attendance and revenue.

Outcomes of fan engagement for clubs

The majority of clubs reported that fan engagement delivers a range of benefits. **More than eight in ten clubs stated that fan engagement had helped strengthen trust with supporters and improve the quality of decision-making at the club (both 84%)**. Around half also reported wider benefits, including improved brand perception (52%) and increased attendance or revenue (51%).

Over 80% of clubs reported positive outcomes from fan engagement.

Chart 5.3.3: Club outcomes from fan engagement



Source: IFR, Fan Engagement Club Survey, December 2025.

Note: The chart shows the percentage of responding clubs that reported each fan engagement outcome in response to the question 'Which of the following outcomes has your club experienced through fan engagement? Please select all that apply.' Base: 93 clubs.

In open-text survey responses, clubs identified several factors that contribute to successful fan engagement and positive outcomes.⁴⁹⁷

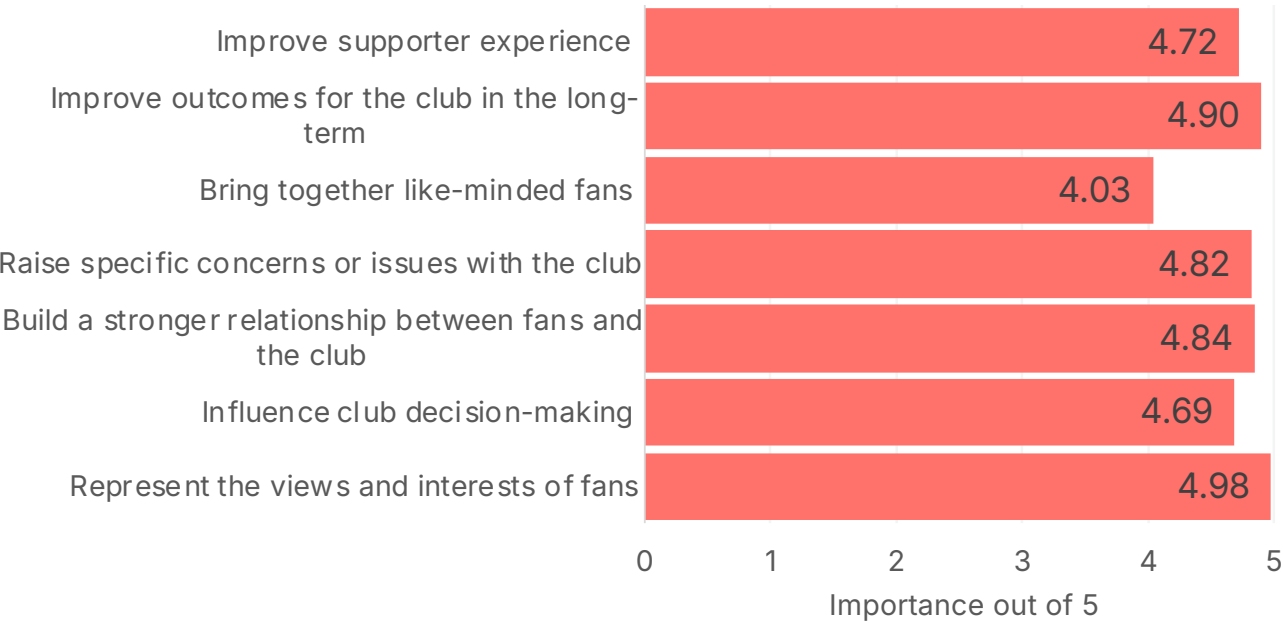
- **Senior leadership involvement:** Some clubs highlighted the importance of active participation by owners, chief executives, board members and other senior executives in fan engagement activities.
- **Transparency and open communication:** Some clubs emphasised the value of providing supporters with relevant and timely information through accessible communications, such as meeting minutes, supporter reports, surveys and regular updates. Clubs noted that transparency should be balanced against the need to protect commercially sensitive and confidential information, and that open communication was particularly important during periods of ownership change, financial uncertainty or organisational restructuring.
- **Clear expectations and roles:** Some clubs stressed the importance of ensuring supporters understand that consultation does not necessarily give them a veto over club decisions. Effective engagement was seen as balancing supporter input with a club's ability to operate and make decisions.

Motivations for supporter groups to engage with their clubs

Supporter groups engage with clubs for a range of reasons, all of which were rated as important. As shown in Chart 5.3.4, the main motivations include representing supporter interests, improving long-term club outcomes, building stronger relationships with the club, improving supporter experience and influencing senior decision making.

Supporter groups have a range of motivations for engaging with their club, the most important being to represent the interests of fans.

Chart 5.3.4: Motivations for supporter groups to engage with their club



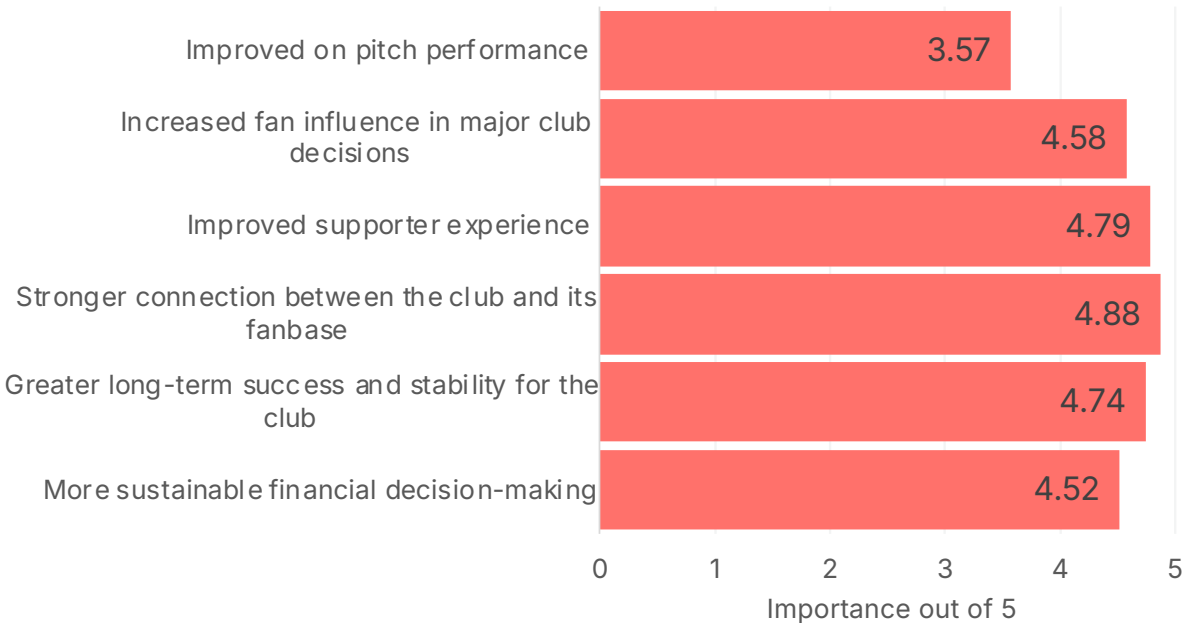
Source: IFR, Fan Engagement Supporter Group Survey, March 2026.

Note: The Chart shows the average importance rating given by supporter groups to each motivation for engaging with their club on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important) in response to the question 'How important are each of the following motivations for your group when engaging with the club?'. Base: 89 Supporter Groups.

These motivations are reflected in the outcomes that supporter groups seek to achieve through engagement. In particular, supporter groups aim to strengthen the connection between fans and the club, improve supporter experience, support greater long-term success and stability, increase fan influence over major club decisions and promote more sustainable decision-making. Improved on-pitch performance was generally considered less important than wider objectives (Chart 5.3.5).

Supporter groups seek to achieve a range of outcomes from engaging with their club, the most important being to foster a strong connection between fans and the club.

Chart 5.3.5: Outcomes supporter groups seek from engagement



Source: IFR, Fan Engagement Supporter Group Survey, March 2026.

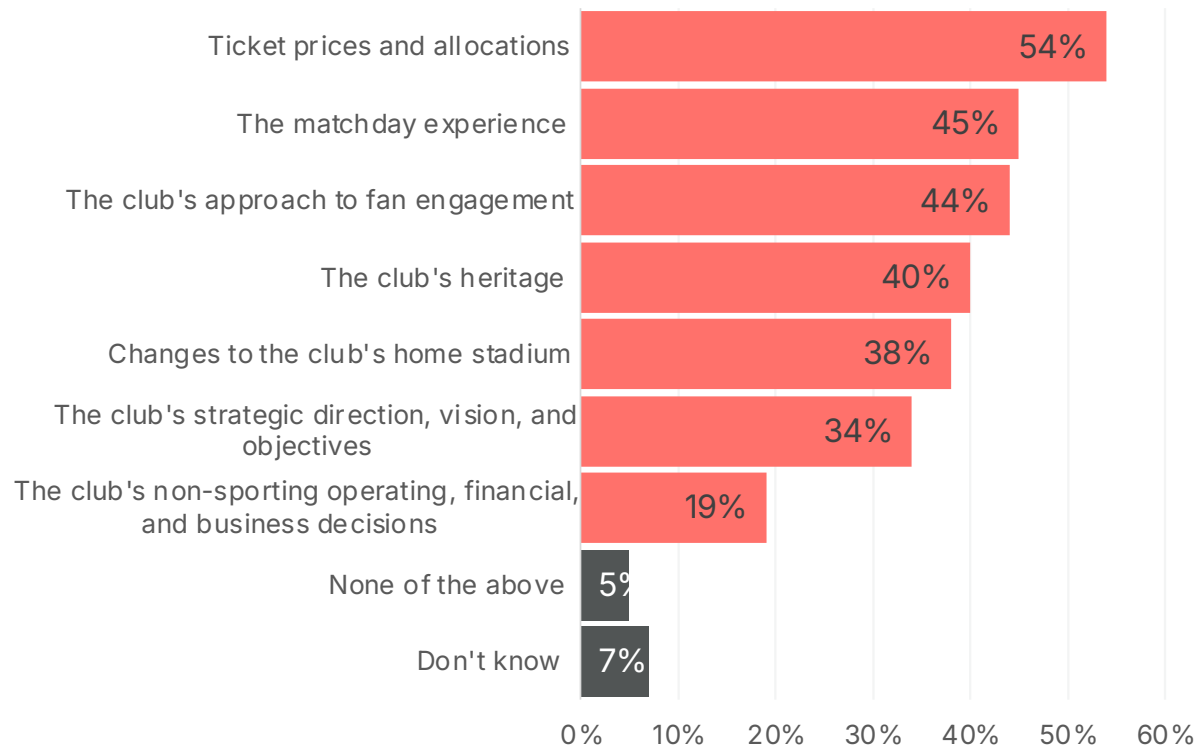
Note: The chart shows the average importance rating given by supporter groups to each outcome they seek to achieve through engagement, on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important) in response to the question 'How important are the following outcomes for your group to influence through its engagement with the club?'. Base: 89 supporter groups.

Motivations for fans to engage with their club

Fans in the wider population consider ticket prices and allocations (54%), the matchday experience (45%) and the club's overall approach to fan engagement (44%) the most important topics for engagement.

Fans place greatest importance on having a say on ticket prices and allocations, the matchday experience, and clubs' approach to fan engagement.

Chart 5.3.6: Topics fans want to engage on



Source: Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 33.

Note: The chart shows responses to the question: 'Thinking about the team you support, which of the following topics do you think it is important that fans have a say on through fan engagement?'. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales, online, 10-14 April 2026.

Affordability and accessibility of matches emerged as important themes in the qualitative research, with fans concerned that rising costs may affect who can attend matches and, in turn, the atmosphere within stadia.⁴⁹⁸

Fans also attached importance to club heritage. Around two in five supporters felt that fans should have a say in changes to club heritage including club names, crests and colours (40%) and clubs' home stadia (38%).

Overall, clubs, supporter groups and fans engage for a range of different reasons, but common themes emerge. Fan engagement is valued for strengthening club-supporter relationships, improving supporter experience, incorporating fans' views and supporting better-informed decision-making.

Challenges relating to fan engagement

Both clubs and supporter groups reported challenges that can affect the effectiveness of fan engagement.

Challenges for clubs

Chart 5.3.7 shows that staff capacity is the main challenge outside the Premier League. This is particularly pronounced in the lower leagues, where clubs frequently highlighted resource constraints. Several clubs noted that responsibility for fan engagement often sits alongside other roles and that funding dedicated staff can be challenging.

In contrast, Premier League clubs were more likely to identify confidentiality and commercial sensitivities as a key challenge, reflecting the need to balance transparency with commercial and business considerations.

National League clubs were also more likely to report low levels of fan participation in engagement activities, which may reflect their smaller supporter bases.

Staff capacity is the most significant challenge for clubs outside the Premier League, while confidentiality and information sharing are the main challenges for Premier League clubs.

Chart 5.3.7: Club challenges associated with fan engagement



Source: IFR, Fan Engagement Club Survey, December 2025.

Note: The heatmap shows the average challenge score out of 5 reported by clubs for key barriers to fan engagement in response to the question 'How challenging, if at all, does your club find the following areas of fan engagement?'. Higher values indicate greater challenge; an asterisk (*) marks the highest-rated challenge within each league.

	Our club survey also highlights substantial variation in the resources devoted to fan engagement across divisions. Premier League and Championship clubs report significantly higher spending, with 75% of Premier League clubs and 47% of Championship clubs spending more than £80,000 on fan engagement per season. In contrast, 44% of League One clubs, 47% of League Two clubs and 78% of National League clubs spend less than £10,000 per season on fan engagement.⁴⁹⁹ The number of staff dedicated to fan engagement also varies substantially across the football pyramid, with a clear divide between the Premier League and Championship and the rest of the football pyramid. • Premier League: All clubs reported some dedicated full-time staff capacity for fan engagement. 58% employed three or more full-time staff and 42% employed more than five. 29% also employed more than five part-time staff. • Championship: Most clubs reported dedicated fan engagement staff. 79% employed at least one full-time member of staff and 100% employed some part-time resource. • League One, League Two, and National League: Clubs generally reported more limited staffing resources. The majority had no dedicated full-time fan engagement staff and were more likely to rely on small part-time teams, typically of one or two staff members.	

Challenges for supporter groups

Supporter groups identified a range of challenges associated with engagement. Around 90% reported differences in priorities and values between the group and the club as a challenge, **with a similar proportion uncertain whether their input was reflected in club decisions.**

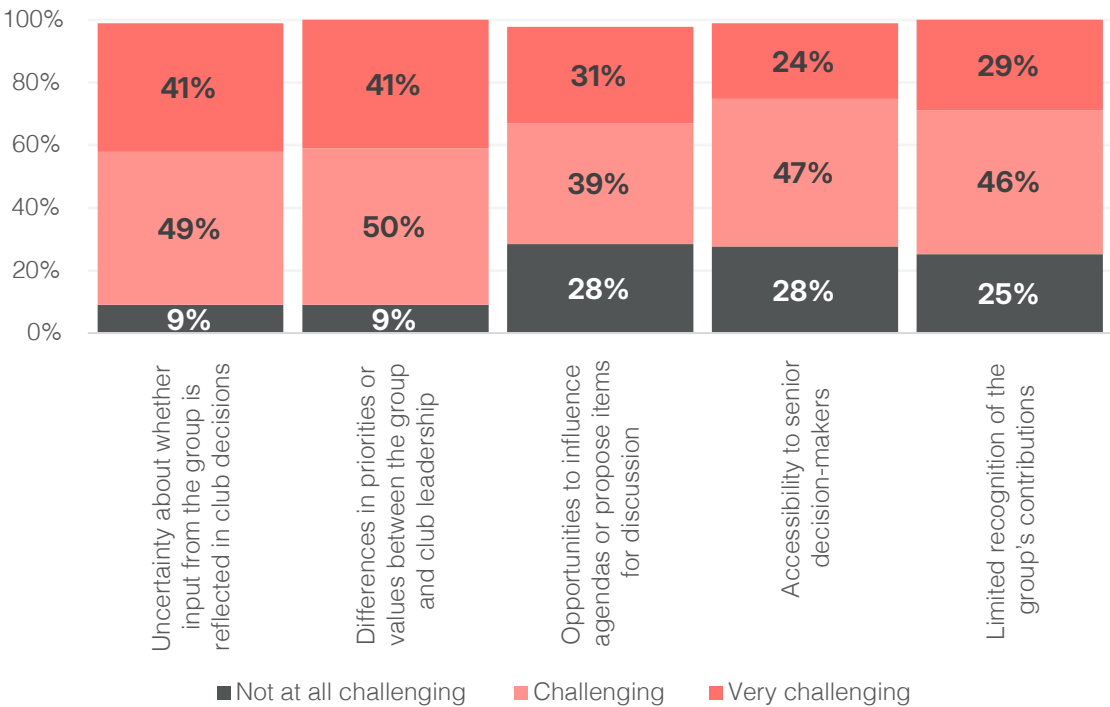
Between 70% and 75% also identified limited opportunities to influence agendas, difficulties accessing senior decision-makers and limited recognition of their contributions.

Qualitative responses highlighted several recurring themes:

- **Limited influence on decisions:** Some supporter groups felt engagement could become a 'tick-box exercise', with groups informed of decisions only after they had been made.
- **Transparency and information sharing:** Some groups reported difficulties obtaining timely and meaningful information to support engagement, including information being withheld on grounds of commercial sensitivity, delays in publishing meeting minutes and limited feedback on issues raised.
- **Access to senior decision-makers:** Some groups reported limited or no access to owners, boards and senior executives.
- **Limited recognition of supporter groups:** Some groups reported challenges raising awareness of their activities, with supporters often unaware of their work.
- **Resource and capacity constraints:** Many supporter representatives undertake these roles voluntarily. Some highlighted increasing demands on their time and the need for additional administrative support, training and resources.

Supporter groups most commonly identify uncertainty about whether their input is reflected in club decisions and differences in priorities with the club as challenges to engagement.

Chart 5.3.8: Supporter group challenges experience when engaging with clubs



Source: IFR, Fan Engagement Supporter Group Survey, March 2026.

Note: The chart presents responses to the question 'To what extent, if at all, have the following been challenges for your group when engaging with the club?'. Responses of 'Don't know' are not shown in the chart. Base: 88 Supporter Groups.

Overall, fan engagement delivers positive outcomes but also presents challenges.

Clubs, particularly in the lower leagues, face staff capacity constraints, while Premier League clubs report challenges around sharing confidential information. Supporter groups highlight differences in priorities and uncertainty, about whether input is reflected in club decisions.

Fan and supporter group satisfaction with engagement

The fan and supporter group surveys present a mixed picture of satisfaction with club engagement. While many fans report positive experiences and are satisfied with their club's overall approach, concerns remain about the extent to which clubs listen to and act on supporter views.

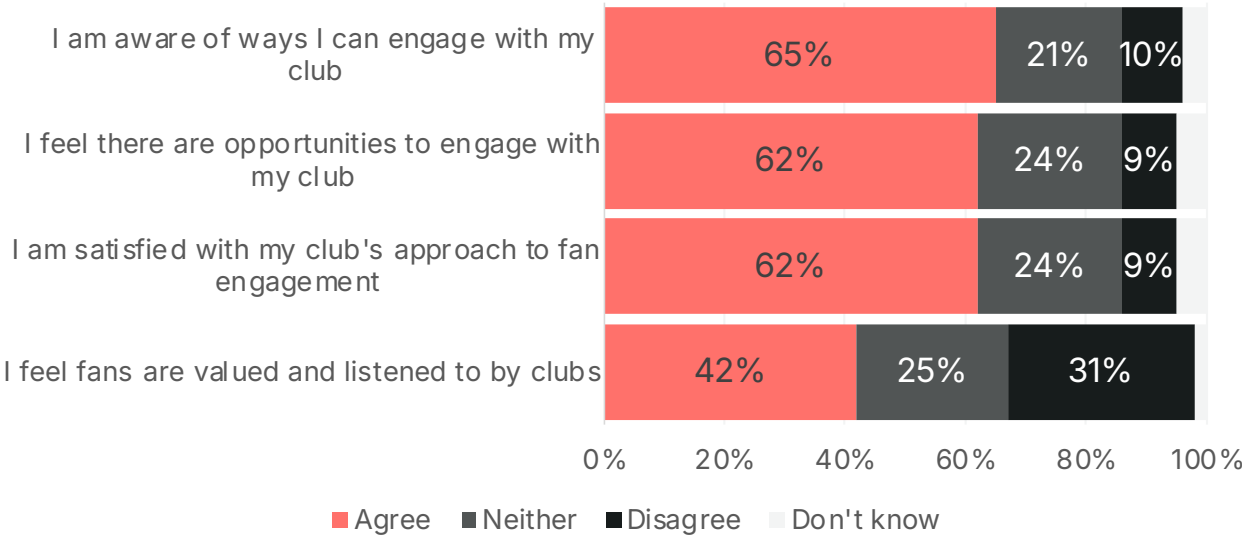
Fan satisfaction with engagement

Around two-thirds of fans in the wider population know how to engage with their club (65%), feel they have opportunities to do so (62%), and are satisfied with their club's overall approach to engagement (62%) (Chart 5.3.9). Only around one in ten disagree with these statements.

However, fans were less positive when asked whether they are valued and listened to by their clubs. While 42% agreed that clubs listen to and value fans, 31% disagreed. Similar views emerged in the focus groups, where many fans expressed scepticism about the extent to which clubs genuinely listen to supporters and take their views into account.⁵⁰⁰

Fans are broadly satisfied with opportunities to engage but are less positive about whether clubs value and listen to them.

Chart 5.3.9: Fan views on engagement



Source: Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 30-31.

Note: The chart shows responses to the question: 'Thinking of men's clubs in the top five divisions in England and Wales (Premier League to National League Step 1) and giving your overall view, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?' Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales, online, 10-14 April 2026.

Supporter group satisfaction with fan engagement

Supporter groups expressed divided views on existing fan engagement requirements. Among Premier League and EFL supporter groups, 53% considered their league's requirements sufficient (somewhat or very sufficient), compared with 43% who considered them insufficient (somewhat or very insufficient) (Chart 5.3.10).

Views on oversight and enforcement were less positive (Chart 5.3.11) particularly among EFL supporter groups: 34% considered this sufficient and 43% insufficient. Among Premier League supporter groups, 48% considered oversight and enforcement sufficient, compared with 43% insufficient.

Supporter groups expressed mixed views on the adequacy and oversight of existing fan engagement requirements.

Chart 5.3.10: Supporter group views on the sufficiency of league fan engagement requirements

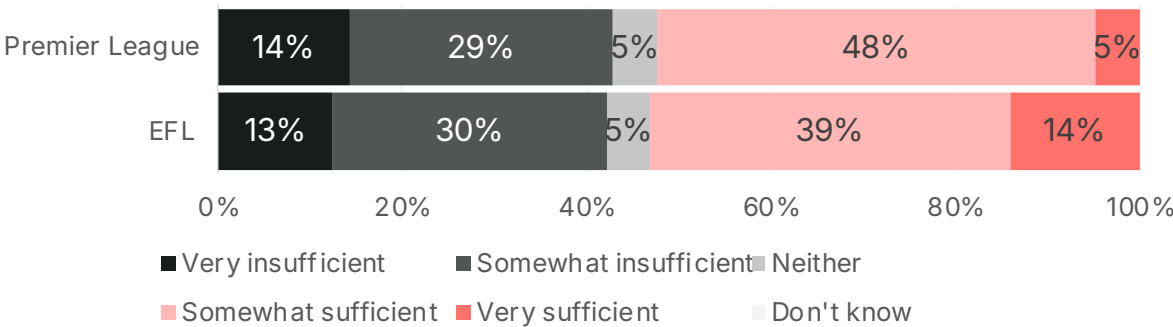
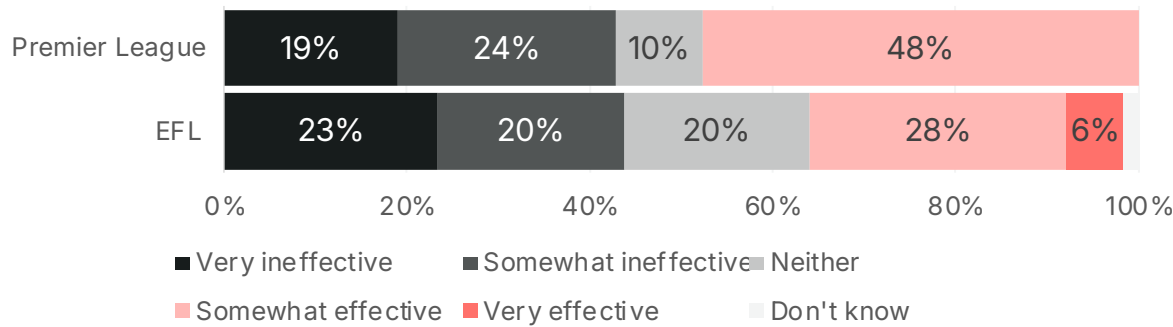


Chart 5.3.11: Supporter group views on the effectiveness of oversight and enforcement on fan engagement requirements



Source: IFR, Fan Engagement Supporter Group Survey, March 2026.

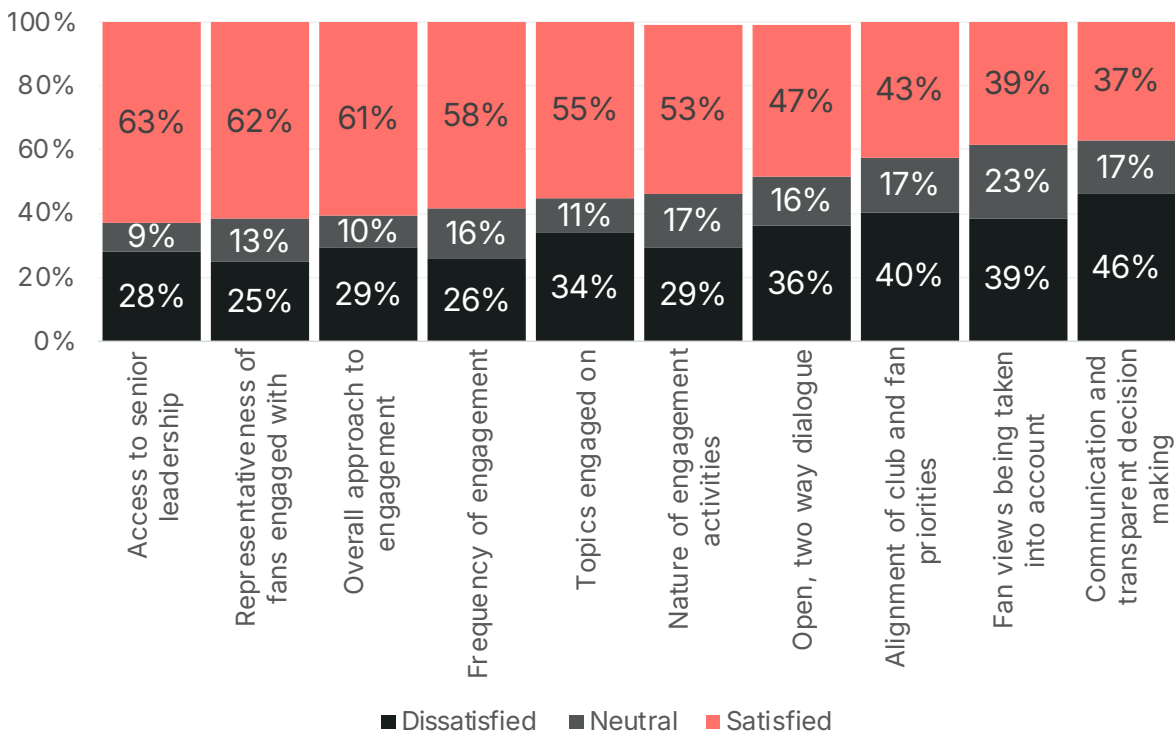
Note: The charts show responses to the questions 'Overall, how sufficient do you consider the [Premier League's/EFL's] current league rules and requirements for fan engagement to be?' and 'To what extent do you feel that current rules and regulations around fan engagement in the [Premier League/EFL] are being effectively overseen and upheld in practice?'. The charts show the responses of Premier League supporter groups when asked about Premier League requirements and EFL supporter groups when asked about EFL requirements. Respondents were provided with a summary of the of the relevant league requirements and links to supporting documentation. Base: 21 Premier League Supporter Groups, 64 EFL Supporter groups.

Supporter groups were more positive about their engagement arrangements with clubs, although satisfaction varied across different aspects (Chart 5.3.12). Around 60% were satisfied with access to senior club leadership, the frequency of engagement, the range of supporters engaged and their club's overall approach to fan engagement. Around 55% were satisfied with the topics clubs discussed and the nature of engagement.

- Satisfaction was lower for aspects relating to influence and decision-making:
- 47% were satisfied with open and inclusive dialogue
 - 43% with the alignment between club and supporter priorities and values
 - 39% with how fan views were considered in club decision-making
 - 37% with communication and transparency around club decision-making

Supporter groups are more satisfied with access to and the frequency of engagement than with their influence on club decision-making.

Chart 5.3.12: Supporter group satisfaction with engagement



Source: IFR, Fan Engagement Supporter Group Survey, December 2025.

Note: The chart shows responses to the question 'How satisfied are you with your club's approach to fan engagement across the following areas?'. Base: 89 Supporter Groups.

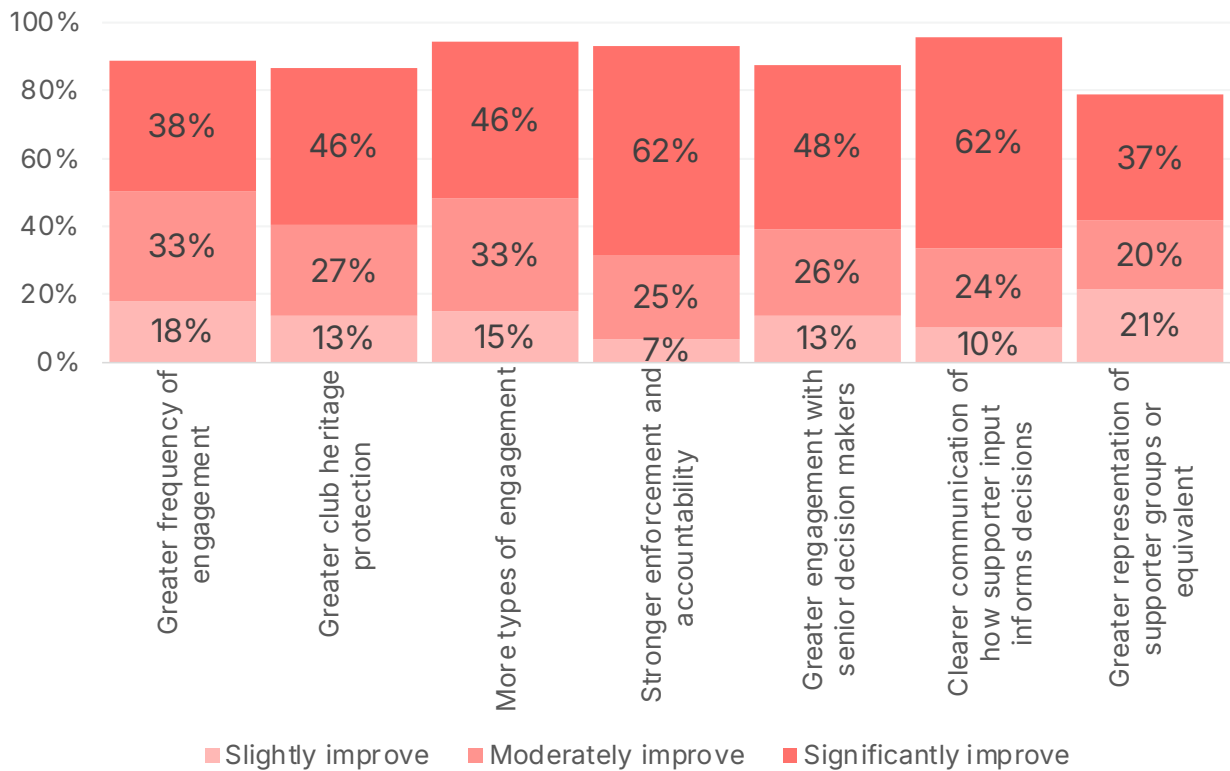
Supporter group views on improving fan engagement

Supporter groups supported a range of measures to improve fan engagement (Chart 5.3.13), in particular:

- **Stronger enforcement and accountability mechanisms:** 62% believed these would significantly improve engagement, with a further 25% saying they would moderately improve it.
- **Clearer communication on how supporter input informs decisions:** 62% believed this would significantly improve engagement, with a further 24% saying it would moderately improve it.

Supporter groups believe stronger enforcement and accountability mechanisms and clear communication of how their input informs decisions would most improve engagement.

Chart 5.3.13: Supporter group views on measures to improve engagement



Source: IFR, Fan Engagement Supporter Group Survey, March 2026.

Note: The chart shows responses to the question ‘To what extent, if at all, would each of the following improve fan engagement for your club?’. Base: 89 Supporter Groups.

Supporter groups also provided additional detail through open-text responses.⁵⁰¹ While specific suggestions varied, common themes pointed to a desire for earlier, more transparent and more influential engagement:

- **Earlier engagement in decision-making:** Engagement should take place earlier in clubs’ decision-making processes, before key decisions are finalised.
- **Clearer evidence of impact:** Supporter groups wanted clearer evidence of how views had informed decisions, including through ‘You said, we did’ reporting.
- **Stronger supporter representation:** Wider use of fan advisory boards across the EFL, democratic election of supporter representatives and safeguards against clubs selecting or excluding representatives.
- **Direct engagement with senior leaders:** Greater participation by senior decision-makers rather than engagement being conducted solely through intermediaries or other staff.
- **Improved access to information:** Access to sufficient and relevant information to help supporters understand the implications of proposed decisions and contribute meaningfully to discussions.
- **Greater transparency and communication:** Faster publication of meeting minutes, better use of club communication channels and greater publicity for engagement activities.

Overall, the findings present a mixed picture of satisfaction with current engagement arrangements. Fans in the wider population are generally aware of how to engage with their club and are broadly satisfied with clubs’ approaches but are less convinced that clubs value and listen to supporter views.

Supporter groups were similarly mixed. While many were positive about their engagement arrangements, satisfaction was lower when considering whether engagement was meaningful, influential and reflected in club decision-making.

Club heritage

Club heritage is closely linked to fan engagement and is an important and distinct aspect of football club culture and governance. Supporters see heritage as an important link between clubs and their communities and often view themselves as custodians of their club’s identity and traditions.⁵⁰²

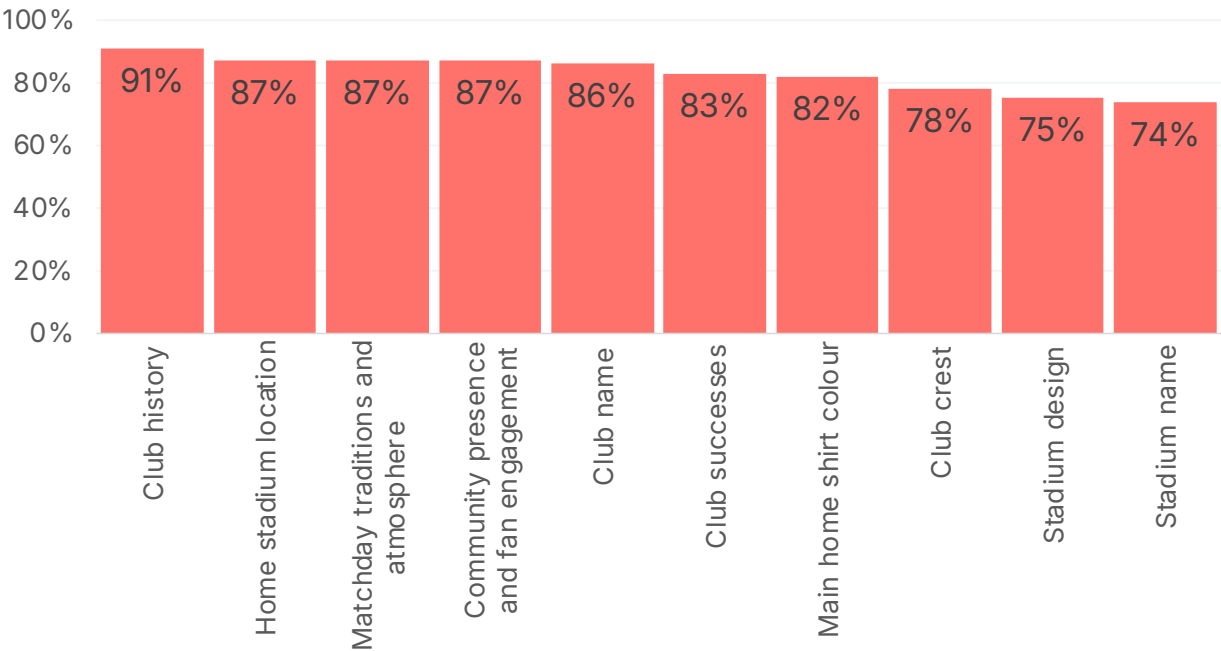
Fans attach importance to a wide range of heritage-related features (Chart 5.3.14):

- **Club history** was rated most important, with 91% of fans considering it important to them personally.
- **Formal aspects of heritage** were also highly valued, including stadium location (87%), club name (86%), main home shirt colours (82%), club crest design (78%) and the design and name of the home stadium (around three-quarters).
- **Other aspects of heritage were similarly important**, including community presence and matchday traditions and atmosphere (87%), historic players and managers (83%), recent success and achievements (82%).

When asked about the extent to which club heritage is well protected, fan views were positive overall. Six in ten (59%) fans agreed that club heritage was well protected, compared with 17% who disagreed.⁵⁰³

At least three-quarters of fans considered all aspects of club heritage to be important.

Chart 5.3.14: Importance of different aspects of club heritage to fans



Source: Ipsos, ‘State of the Game research’, prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 47.

Note: The chart shows responses to the question: ‘How important to you personally, if at all, are the following aspects of your club’s heritage?’ Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales, online, 10-14 April 2026.

The importance attached to club heritage was also reflected in the views of clubs and supporter groups in open-text responses. Some clubs emphasised the role of preserving and celebrating heritage in reinforcing local identity and strengthening community connections.⁵⁰⁴ Examples included anniversary celebrations, supporter involvement in heritage projects, consultation on club crests and branding, stadium history initiatives and community storytelling.

Supporter groups similarly linked fan engagement with protecting club identity, values, traditions, stadia and supporter culture. Groups emphasised the importance of preserving club heritage and raised concerns that some commercial decisions by clubs could alter clubs' character or weaken connections with traditional supporters and local communities.⁵⁰⁵

Summary

There are a range of approaches to fan engagement across English football, supported by competition organiser requirements and various club- and supporter-led mechanisms. Clubs value engagement as a means of strengthening relationships with supporters and improving decision-making, while supporter groups see it as a way of representing fans' interests and influencing their clubs' future.

However, both clubs and supporter groups face challenges. Staff capacity is a particular issue for clubs outside the Premier League, while Premier League clubs highlighted confidentiality and information sharing. Supporter groups reported differences in priorities and uncertainty about whether their input influences club decisions.

Fans and supporter groups expressed mixed levels of satisfaction with engagement. While many were positive about their club's overall approach, they were less positive about whether clubs listen to supporters and whether engagement meaningfully influences decisions.

Fans, supporter groups and clubs also place considerable value on club heritage, including clubs' history, community connections, traditions, stadia, kit colours and badges. The findings highlight the close relationship between fan engagement and heritage protection, particularly the importance supporters place on having a voice in decisions affecting their club's identity and heritage.

By May 2030, the Football Governance Act requires clubs to meet the "Fan Engagement Threshold Requirement". Clubs will be required to consult fans before making decisions that affect them, explain their thinking, listen to feedback and take fan views into account before reaching decisions. The IFR's expectations will be proportionate to a club's fanbase and resources and will take league rules into account.

5.4 Corporate governance and EDI

Chapter at a glance

This chapter considers the existing regulatory landscape for corporate governance and EDI, before considering current corporate governance practices, including board-level approaches to EDI, and wider levels of representation across the game.

Limited survey evidence and publicly available information constrain the IFR's understanding of corporate governance and board-level approaches to EDI across English football. Greater transparency and better-quality information will therefore be important in supporting the IFR's objective of raising corporate governance standards.

- More broadly, although competition organisers have introduced rules and principles to strengthen EDI, our analysis of publicly available data indicates that several groups with protected characteristics remain underrepresented across football clubs, particularly in leadership roles.
 - On average, the proportion of football club employees who are white is 3.3 to 8.1 percentage points higher than the proportion of white people in the clubs' local communities.
 - Women are less represented across football clubs compared with the UK population, by an average of 22.2 to 23.5 percentage points.
 - People with a disability are underrepresented across football clubs compared with the UK population, by an average of 10.3 to 11.6 percentage points.

Introduction

Corporate governance is the framework of principles, practices and processes through which an organisation is directed and controlled. It shapes decision-making, supports accountability and promotes high standards of conduct. Although football clubs’ revenues have grown significantly over the past 30 years, there continue to be high-profile corporate governance failings, with poor corporate governance often contributing to financial distress. Effective corporate governance therefore plays a key role in supporting better decision-making and financial sustainability.

Improving EDI in club leadership can also strengthen decision-making. In turn, this can contribute to greater financial sustainability. Long-term studies of business performance indicate that the relationship between diversity in executive teams and the likelihood of financial outperformance has strengthened over time.⁵⁰⁶ Increasing representation in boardrooms and club executive teams is therefore an important part of the IFR’s work.

Regulatory landscape relating to corporate governance and EDI

Existing rules relating to corporate governance

Prior to the introduction of the IFR Football Club Corporate Governance Code, English clubs were not subject to a mandatory corporate governance code. However, certain requirements apply to larger clubs.

- **Companies Act:** As of the 2024/25 season, most Premier League clubs (19 of 20) and Championship clubs (14 of 24) are required to publish statements under Section 172 of the Companies Act 2006 and the Companies (Miscellaneous Reporting) Regulations 2018, explaining how directors fulfil their duties and engage with stakeholders.⁵⁰⁷ These statements do not, however, explain how the company is governed.
- **Competition organiser rules:** Premier League clubs must have ‘a Board consisting of at least two Directors, with one serving as Chair and another as Chief Executive.’ There are no formal corporate governance requirements for EFL or National League clubs, although the FA provides good governance guidance for National League clubs and large community clubs.⁵⁰⁸
- **Wates Principles:** Very large private companies are required to publish a corporate governance statement identifying which governance code, if any, they apply and how.⁵⁰⁹ The UK government recommends the Wates Principles for companies of this size. Although no Premier League clubs meet the relevant criteria, two apply the Wates Principles voluntarily (Tottenham Hotspur⁵¹⁰ and Liverpool⁵¹¹)

Existing competition organiser rules relating to EDI

The Premier League implements the Premier League Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Standard (PLEDIS), which aims to promote EDI across clubs.⁵¹² According to PLEDIS, the Premier League and its clubs commit to:

- being an equal opportunities employer
- promoting similar commitments across the game
- not tolerating discriminatory behaviour and taking appropriate action where it occurs

All Premier League clubs work towards the preliminary, intermediate and advanced PLEDIS levels, with some former Premier League clubs also participating. Across the pyramid, 27 clubs participate, with 18 rated advanced.⁵¹³

The EFL promotes its Equality Code of Practice (ECOP) and EFL Together strategy, including an accreditation scheme designed to encourage higher EDI standards.⁵¹⁴ Its objectives include:

- developing a workforce representative of the communities EFL Clubs represent
- increasing the diversity of supporters attending matches
- challenging discrimination and behaviour in stadia and on social media
- supporting clubs’ continual EDI development
- improving understanding of EDI across the game

Clubs can receive bronze, silver or gold accreditation. In 2025/26, 70 EFL clubs completed the assessment, while several participated in PLEDIS (having previously been Premier League clubs). As of August 2026, 8 clubs had achieved gold standard and 11 silver.⁵¹⁵

The IFR Football Club Corporate Governance Code

The Act requires the IFR to publish the Football Club Corporate Governance Code (‘the Club Code’).

The Club Code sets out five key principles for sound corporate governance.⁵¹⁶

1. **Board, purpose and strategy:** Clubs should have an effective board with collective responsibility for their sustainable success.
2. **Risk oversight and controls:** The board is responsible for identifying, monitoring and managing risks.
3. **Board composition and accountability:** The board’s size, composition and expertise should reflect the scale and complexity of the club’s activities.
4. **Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI):** The board should ensure the club’s EDI strategy and initiatives align with existing requirements, and that appointments to the board and senior management promote diversity, inclusion and equal opportunity.
5. **Stakeholder relationships and engagement:** The board should build effective stakeholder relationships in line with the club’s purpose, including considering the club’s contribution to the economic and social well-being of its local community.

Every licensed club will be required to publish a statement every two years explaining how it applies the Club Code in a way that is proportionate and appropriate to its circumstances.

Existing corporate governance practices at clubs

In late 2025, the IFR conducted a voluntary survey of clubs to understand current corporate governance practices. A total of 43 clubs responded, covering the 2025/26 football season: 11 Premier League clubs, 12 Championship clubs, eight League One clubs, six League Two clubs and six National League clubs.

The survey provides a useful baseline and overview, but it is not a comprehensive assessment of corporate governance practices.

- The response rate was 37% (43 of 116 clubs), meaning the results are not representative of all clubs in scope.
- Participation was voluntary, meaning the results may also be subject to selection bias, with clubs with more developed governance arrangements potentially more likely to respond.
- Responses were self-reported and reflect clubs’ own assessments of their governance arrangements.

The IFR has used this survey data alongside publicly available information to analyse existing corporate governance practices at clubs.

Club size and complexity

Clubs across the pyramid vary considerably in size and complexity, influencing which corporate governance practices are proportionate. Based on the IFR's analysis of publicly available financial accounts, Premier League clubs employed an average of 532 personnel, including playing staff, compared with 301 in the Championship, 233 in League One, 184 in League Two and 80 in the National League.⁵¹⁷

Boards, strategy and purpose

The Club Code states that every club should have an effective board that takes collective responsibility for the sustainable success of the club.⁵¹⁸ Most responding clubs (95%) had a formally constituted board of directors.⁵¹⁹ Boards generally met regularly, although frequency varied across the pyramid: Premier League and Championship boards most commonly met quarterly, while League One, League Two and National League boards were more likely to meet monthly or every two months.⁵²⁰

The Club Code states that boards should define the club's purpose, strategy and values.⁵²¹ Of responding clubs, 70% had a documented strategy or purpose and 53% published governance information on their website.⁵²² However, only one of the 43 responding clubs published board meeting minutes.⁵²³

Board size

The Club Code states that board size and composition should reflect the scale and complexity of the club's activities.⁵²⁴ Average board size was broadly consistent across the leagues, ranging from 4.7 members in League Two to 6.3 in the Premier League. Championship, League One and National League clubs averaged 4.8, 5.0 and 4.9 members, respectively.⁵²⁵ Further information on individual clubs' boards and activities is needed to assess whether their board size is appropriate.

Chair, CEO and non-executive directors

The Club Code calls for a clear distinction between boards' strategic oversight and executives' day-to-day management, and encourages clubs to 'consider the value of separating the roles of chair of the board and chief executive to ensure effective organisational checks and balances'.⁵²⁶ This was already common among responding clubs: 91% reported separate Chairs and Chief Executives, while 9% did not.⁵²⁷

The Club Code also states that clubs should consider appointing non-executive directors (NEDs) and that boards should 'have an appropriate degree of independent membership'.⁵²⁸ Of responding clubs, 59% reported having at least one NED, while 33% reported having at least one independent non-executive director (INED).⁵²⁹

However, clubs' interpretation of independence may differ from the Club Code. Under the Club Code, a director would not normally be considered independent if they:⁵³⁰

- have been an employee of the club or an affiliated entity within the past five years
- have a material business relationship with the club or an affiliated entity
- receive remuneration from the club or an affiliated entity other than directors' fees
- have close family ties with owners, directors or senior executives
- hold cross-directorships or significant links with other board members
- represent a significant shareholder, or
- have served on the board or an affiliate board for more than nine years

The IFR reviewed responding clubs' board composition against these criteria and found that at least 11 of the 33 directors reported as independent would not meet the Club Code's definition of independence.⁵³¹

Training and feedback

Survey responses suggest that board development and evaluation practices are less well established across the game:

- 30% of responding clubs provided training for new board members and 47% provided periodic training for the board as a whole, typically annually.⁵³²
- 40% undertook periodic reviews of board composition, including the board’s skills, experience, independence and diversity.⁵³³
- Only 23% conducted periodic evaluations of board performance, while 40% reviewed individual director performance and 40% reviewed sub-committee performance.⁵³⁴

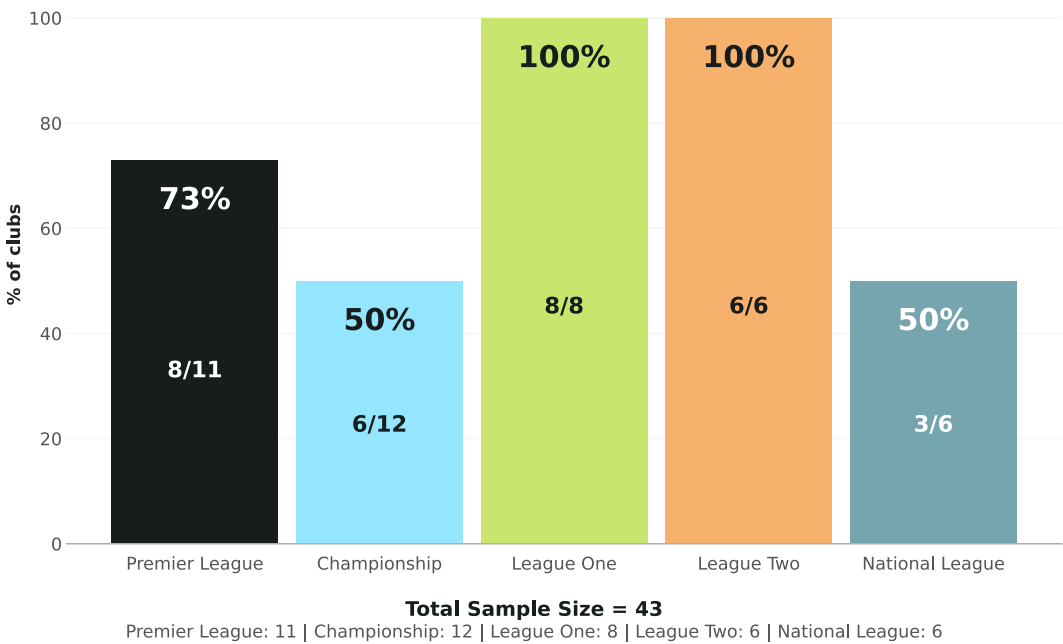
Sub-committees and oversight of EDI

Many clubs supplement board oversight through sub-committees focused on specific areas of governance. Of responding clubs, 58% had one or more board sub-committees, with those clubs having around four sub-committees each on average.⁵³⁵ The most common areas of focus were: finance, audit or risk, and EDI and safeguarding, with 35% of responding clubs having a sub-committee covering each of these areas.⁵³⁶

For EDI, 72% of responding clubs had an individual board member with oversight responsibility⁵³⁷ although this varied across leagues, as illustrated in Chart 5.4.1. In addition, 77% of responding clubs periodically evaluated the club’s EDI strategy and initiatives.⁵³⁸

Among responding clubs, EDI oversight was often allocated to an individual board member.

Chart 5.4.1: Proportion of responding clubs with an individual board member responsible for EDI



Source: IFR, Corporate Governance Survey, January 2026.

Note: The chart shows responses to the question: ‘Is there a board member with oversight responsibilities for the following area? Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion’. Labels within bars show the number of clubs with an individual board member responsible for EDI oversight as a proportion of responding clubs in each league. Results should be treated with caution given the small sample sizes and may not be representative.

Current level of diversity in English football

Alongside the competition organisers’ EDI initiatives, the FA introduced ‘Rule N’ in 2024, requiring all 92 Premier League and EFL clubs to publish off-pitch diversity data every two years across protected characteristics, including breakdowns for coaching, leadership and senior roles. The first mandatory window was completed in June 2025. As only one year of data is available, trends over time cannot yet be assessed.

The data also has some limitations:

- **Disclosure is voluntary for individual employees.** On average, 86% of clubs’ workforces responded to the EDI data collection.
- **For multiple clubs, high levels of ‘prefer not to say’ responses and/or low response rates across some characteristics limit the completeness of the data and our ability to draw robust conclusions, particularly in relation to ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.**
- **Many clubs do not report data for groups with fewer than 10 respondents** or report ‘<10%’ rather than exact figures to protect individuals’ anonymity, limiting comparisons with the wider population.
- **EFL clubs provided less detailed data than Premier League clubs,** so breakdowns by coaching, leadership and senior roles are not available for all clubs. Not all Premier League clubs reported leadership diversity data.
- **Rule N does not apply to National League clubs,** so the analysis covers Premier League and EFL clubs only.

This section analyses clubs’ published data on ethnicity, sex, LGBTQ+ and disability. Where data is available, representation is compared with local communities; otherwise, comparisons are made with the UK population.

The percentages presented are unweighted averages of reported club-level representation, as opposed to the exact proportion of employees across all clubs. For instance, a larger club may have 1,000 employees and 80% representation of a particular characteristic, while a smaller club may have 100 employees and 40% representation. This analysis treats this as two observations, one of 80% and one of 40%, averaging at 60%. However, if absolute values are used, the exact proportion of employees across all clubs would be 76% (with representation standing at 840 out of a total of 1,100). Future data collection and analysis will delve deeper into the underlying data and absolute numbers.

Ethnicity

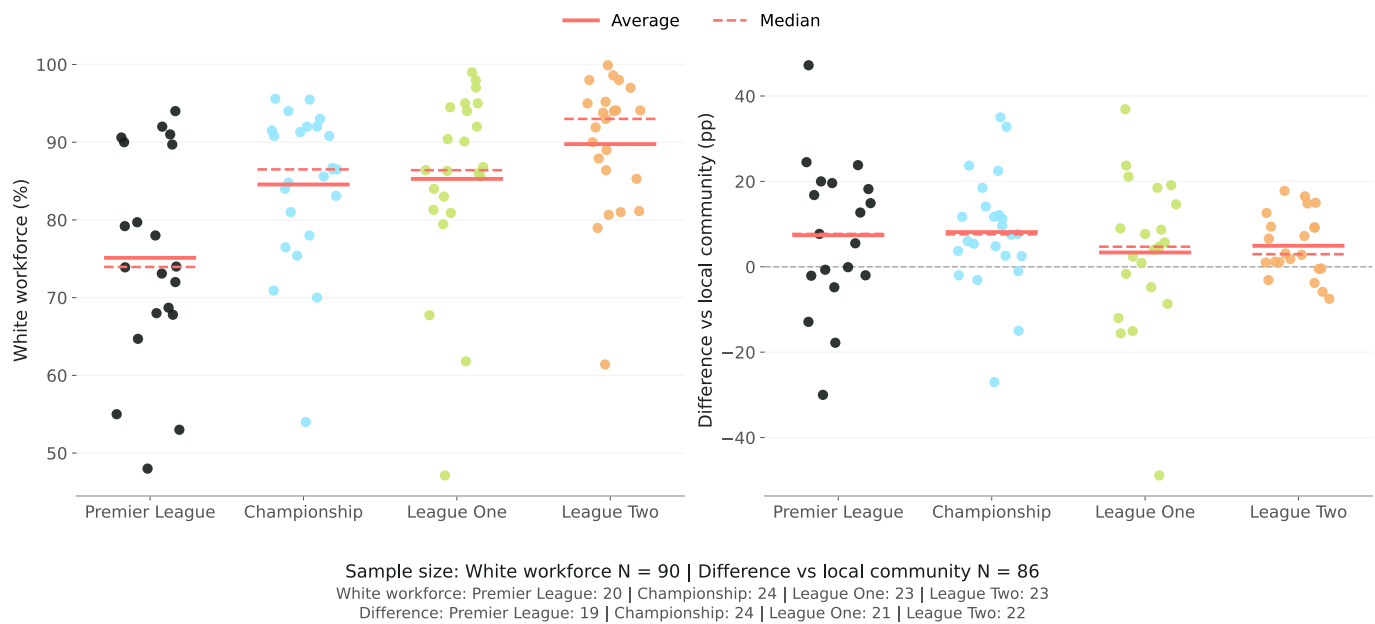
Clubs typically report the ethnicity of their workforce alongside that of the local community. Chart 5.4.2 shows the proportion of each club's workforce that is white and the percentage-point difference compared with its local community.

These figures are unweighted averages of reported club-level representation across the league.

- **Premier League:** On average, 76% of club employees are white, 7.4 percentage points higher than the average of their local communities. Among clubs that published data, 6% of leadership roles were held by people from ethnic minority backgrounds, falling to 0% for senior coaching roles.
- **Championship:** On average, 85% of club employees are white, 8.1 percentage points higher than the average of their local communities.
- **League One:** On average, 85% of club employees are white, 3.3 percentage points higher than the average of their local communities.
- **League Two:** On average, 90% of club employees are white, 4.9 percentage points higher than the average of their local communities.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds are underrepresented in club workforces compared with local communities across the Premier League and EFL.

Chart 5.4.2: White representation in club workforces compared with local communities



Source: IFR analysis of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) workforce and local community data published by clubs in accordance with FA Rule N reporting requirements and compiled and submitted to the IFR by Kick It Out, 2024/25 season.

Note: Dots represent individual clubs. The solid line shows the division average and the dashed line the division median. The right-hand chart shows the percentage-point difference between the proportion of each workforce that is white and the corresponding proportion in its local community. Positive values indicate higher representation in the club workforce; negative values indicate lower representation.

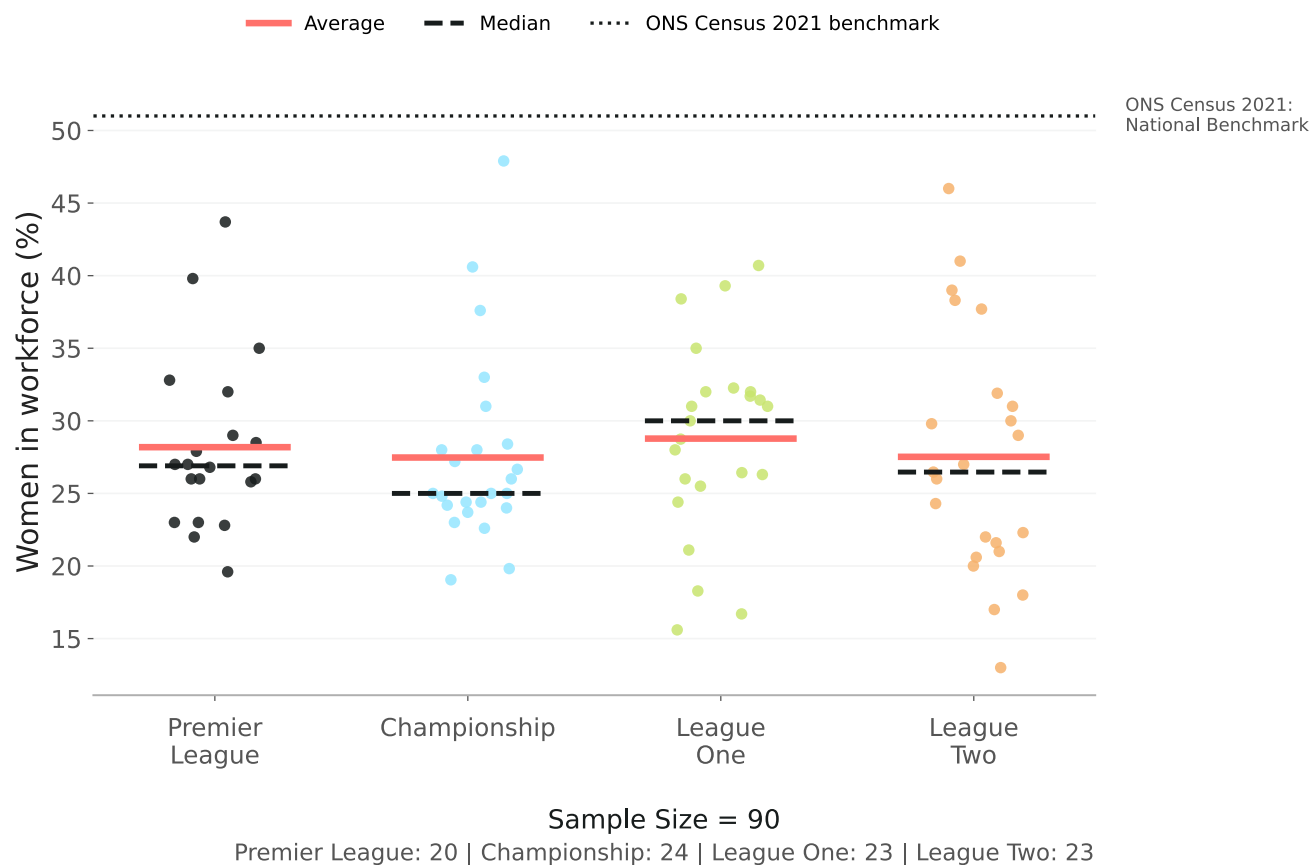
Women's representation in the workforce

Clubs report the proportion of women in their workforce, which can be compared with ONS 2021 Census data showing that women represent 51% of the UK population. These figures are unweighted averages of reported club-level representation across the league.

- **Premier League:** Women represented 28% of clubs' workforces, 22.8 percentage points lower than the UK population. Among clubs that published data, women held 24% of leadership roles and 4% of coaching roles, falling to less than 1% of senior coaching roles.
- **Championship:** Women represented 27.5% of clubs' workforces, 23.5 percentage points lower than the UK population.
- **League One:** Women represented 29% of clubs' workforces, 22.2 percentage points lower than the UK population.
- **League Two:** Women represented 27.5% of clubs' workforces, 23.5 percentage points lower than the UK population.

Overall, this suggests that women are underrepresented in the workforces of Premier League and EFL clubs.

Chart 5.4.3: Women's representation in club workforces compared with the UK population



Source: IFR analysis of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) workforce and local community data published by clubs in accordance with FA Rule N reporting requirements and compiled and submitted to the IFR by Kick It Out, 2024/25 season.

Note: Dots represent individual clubs. The solid line shows the division average and the dashed line the division median. The dotted line shows the ONS Census benchmark for women in the UK population.

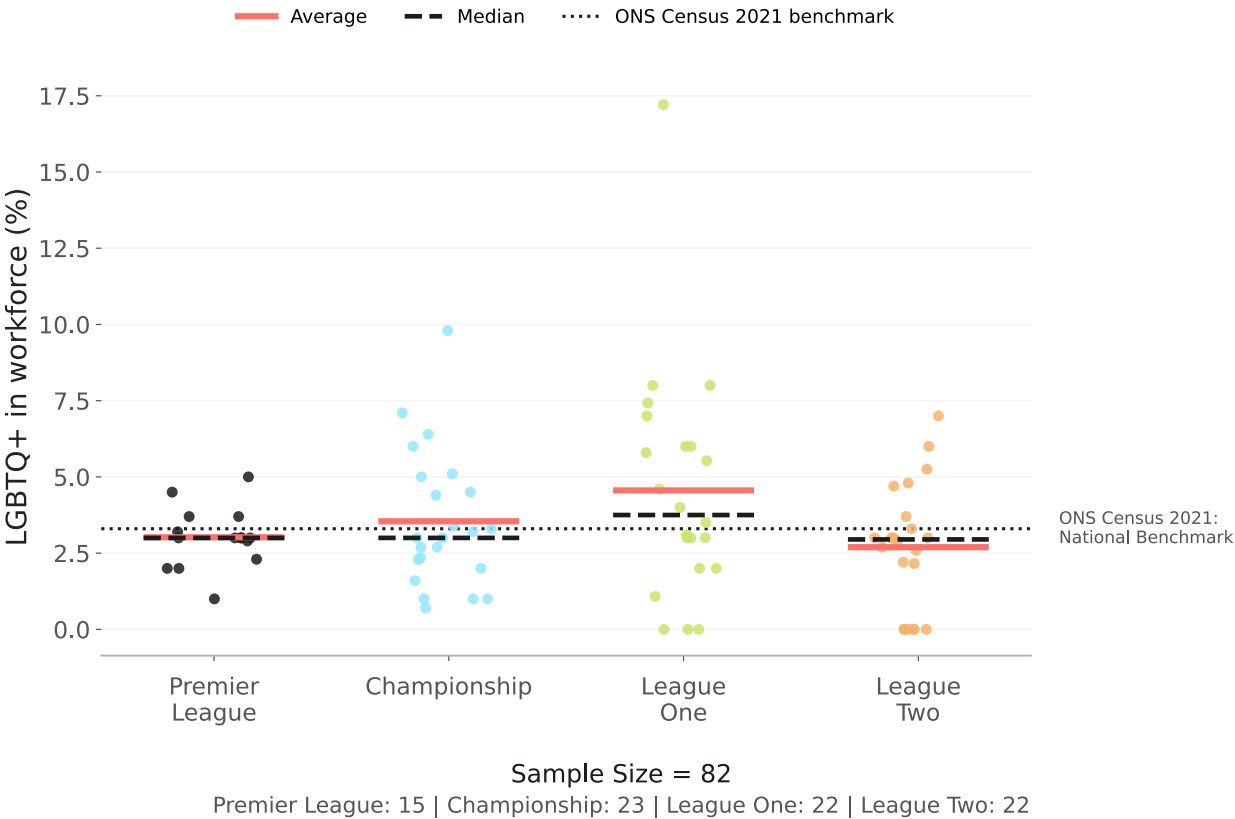
Sexual orientation

Clubs also report on the sexual orientation of their workforce. ONS 2021 Census data show that 3.3% of the UK population identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another non-heterosexual orientation (LGB+). The club data uses the broader LGBTQ+ category, so comparisons with the Census are indicative rather than direct. These figures are unweighted averages of reported club-level representation across the league.

- **Premier League:** LGBTQ+ staff represented 3.0% of club workforces, 0.3 percentage points lower than LGB+ representation in the UK population. However, reported LGBTQ+ representation declines in senior roles. Among clubs that published data, LGBTQ+ staff represented 1% of leadership roles and 0.5% of coaching and senior coaching roles, with many clubs reporting no LGBTQ+ representation in these roles.
- **Championship:** LGBTQ+ staff represented 3.5% of club workforces, 0.2 percentage points higher than LGB+ representation in the UK population.
- **League One:** LGBTQ+ staff represented 4.6% of club workforces, 1.3 percentage points higher than LGB+ representation in the UK population.
- **League Two:** LGBTQ+ staff represented 2.7% of club workforces, 0.6 percentage points lower than LGB+ representation in the UK population.

Overall, reported LGBTQ+ representation in club workforces is broadly comparable with LGB+ representation in the UK population, although representation varies considerably between clubs and appears lower in senior roles where data are available. These comparisons should be treated with caution given differences in the categories used, and the high proportion of 'prefer not to say' responses and the lower response rate for these questions.

Chart 5.4.4: LGBTQ+ representation in club workforces compared with the UK population



Source: IFR analysis of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) workforce and local community data published by clubs in accordance with FA Rule N reporting requirements and compiled and submitted to the IFR by Kick It Out, 2024/25 season,

Note: Dots represent individual clubs. The solid line shows the division average and the dashed line the division median. The dotted line shows the ONS benchmark for LGB+ in the UK population

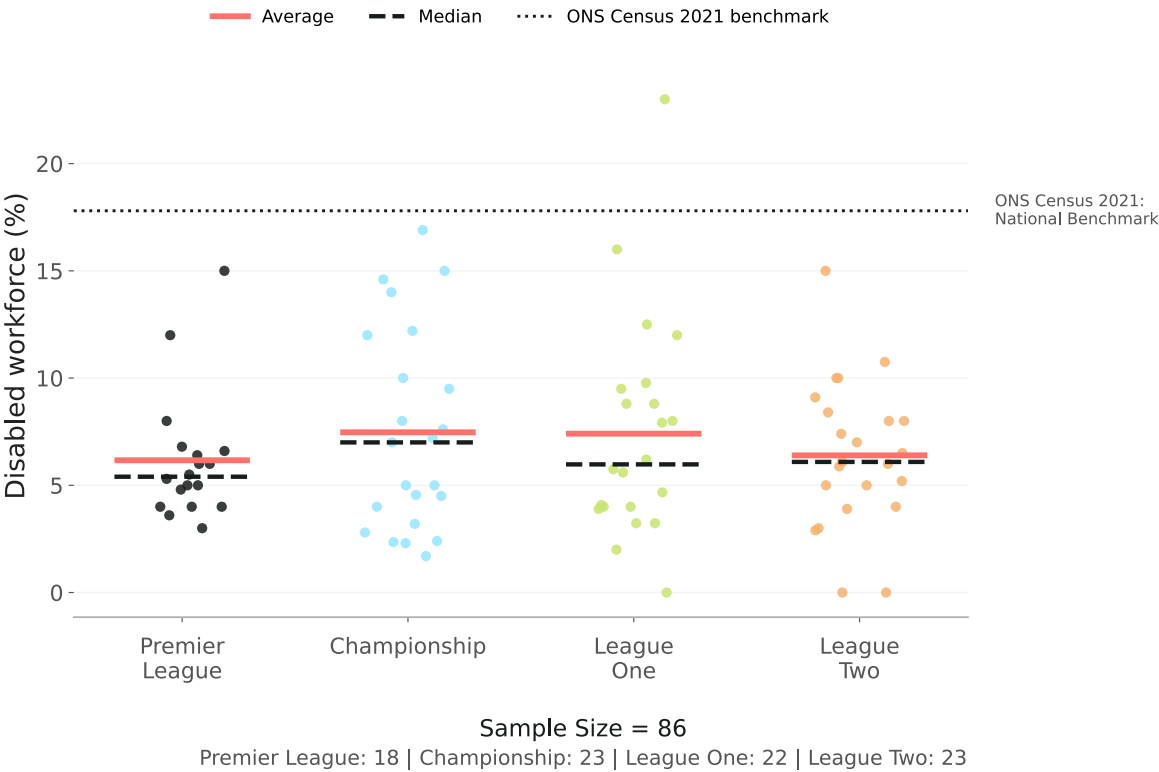
Disability

Clubs also report the proportion of their workforce reporting a disability, which we compare with ONS 2021 census data, showing that 17.8% of the UK population reported a disability. These figures are unweighted averages of reported club-level representation across the league.

- **Premier League:** 6.2% of club workforces reported a disability, 11.6 percentage points lower than the UK population. Among clubs that published data, representation was 2% in both leadership and coaching roles, falling to 0% in senior coaching roles. For many clubs, representation across these roles was also 0%.
- **Championship:** 7.5% of club workforces reported a disability, 10.3 percentage points lower than the UK population.
- **League One:** 7.4% of club workforces reported a disability, 10.4 percentage points lower than the UK population.
- **League Two:** 6.4% of club workforces reported a disability, 11.4 percentage points lower than the UK population.

Overall, people reporting a disability are underrepresented in the workforces of Premier League and EFL clubs. However, the high proportion of ‘prefer not to say’ responses and the lower response rate for these questions limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the data.

Chart 5.4.5: Disability representation in club workforces compared with the UK population



Source: IFR analysis of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) workforce and local community data published by clubs in accordance with FA Rule N reporting requirements and compiled and submitted to the IFR by Kick It Out, 2024/25 season.

Note: Dots show individual clubs. The solid line shows the division average and the dashed line the division median. The dotted line shows ONS Census benchmark for the proportion of the population in England and Wales disabled under the Equality Act definition. The dotted line shows ONS Census benchmark for the proportion of the population in England and Wales classified as disabled under the Equality Act definition.

Summary

Given the limitations of the survey evidence and publicly available information, the IFR’s understanding of corporate governance and board-level approaches to EDI across English football remains limited. Improving transparency and the quality of available information will be important to support the IFR’s objective of raising corporate governance standards.

Available evidence, including the survey findings and recent governance failures at clubs, indicates room for improvement in the application of the Club Code’s principles and recommended practices.

To address this, the IFR’s Mandatory Licence Conditions will require all clubs in scope to publish a corporate governance statement from October 2027, explaining how they are applying the Club Code, including actions they have taken to improve EDI. Together with the IFR’s ongoing supervisory engagement, these statements will provide a richer evidence base to improve our understanding of governance arrangements across clubs. The IFR will publish its first corporate governance report in October 2028.

Finally, although competition organisers have introduced rules and principles to strengthen EDI across their clubs, the available data indicates that women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people with a disability are underrepresented in club workforces compared with the relevant UK or local population benchmarks, with particularly low representation in some leadership and senior roles.

5.5 Conclusions

Overall, our assessment of non-financial issues finds that:

- **Football Governance:** The roles of the EFL, Premier League and UEFA have all changed since 1992. Their original focus was on growing the commercial value of their competitions on behalf of their member clubs, but all three have become far more committed to a dual commercial and regulatory role. This, combined with diverging incentives between clubs and leagues, has led to inconsistent regulation across divisions. There have also been difficulties introducing and enforcing financial rules, with legal challenges from clubs and the PFA. Overall, this has led to a more litigious atmosphere and an increase in central costs. **This in turn presents systemic risks for football as:**
 - it can reduce the ability of competition organisers to introduce financial rules that reduce costs.
 - increased enforcement and litigation increases costs for football and can reduce the attractiveness of investing into English football.
- There are increasing conflicts between domestic and international competition organisers, partly over regulations and revenue distribution but also over the increasingly congested fixture calendar. **This presents a systemic risk as:**
 - **Fixture scheduling conflicts could reduce broadcast revenues, which represent a significant revenue stream for clubs across the pyramid. Further expansion of UEFA and FIFA club competitions into the English domestic calendar could pose a significant risk to the value of domestic media rights.**
- **Fan engagement:** Although there are a range of fan engagement practices across English football and help drive a number of positive outcomes, challenges remain for both clubs and supporter groups. While fans are generally satisfied with opportunities to engage, they are less convinced that clubs listen to and act on supporter views.
- **Corporate governance and EDI:** Limited information is available on corporate governance practices across the pyramid, but the available evidence indicates that there is room for improvement. More broadly, although competition organisers have initiatives in place to strengthen EDI, our analysis indicates that many groups with protected characteristics are underrepresented in club workforces.

Endnotes

- 1 Under s10 of the Act
- 2 For further information please see Annex A – Financial information.
- 3 UEFA, '[UEFA Champions League 1992/93](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 4 Premier League, '[Which Premier League clubs have qualified for Europe?](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 5 Analysis based on publicly available accounts obtained from Companies House.
- 6 Analysis based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 7 Non-interest bearing shareholder loans are not included in the assessment of gross debt.
- 8 Figures do not sum due to rounding.
- 9 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR.
- 10 Ipsos interviewed a representative sample of 4,092 adults aged 16+ across England and Wales, including 1,904 who described themselves as supporting at least one men's team in the top five divisions of men's English and Welsh Football (53%). Polling was conducted online between 10-14 April 2026. Data are weighted to match the profile of the population. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 10.
- 11 The FA, '[A Thriving Grassroots Game - The FA Grassroots Football Strategy 2024-2028](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 12 England Football, '[Leagues & Clubs](#)', accessed 1 October 2026. This includes the leagues and clubs with teams playing in the Men's National League System steps 1 to 6, the Women's National League tiers 3 and 4, and the grassroots game in England.
- 13 IFR analysis of publicly available attendance figures for 2025/26 obtained from Transfermarkt.co.uk.
- 14 The Football Governance Act states that 'English football is sustainable if it continues to serve the interests of fans of regulated clubs, and continues to contribute to the economic and social well-being of the local communities with which regulated clubs are associated'. [Football Governance Act 2025 \(UK\)](#), Part 1 (3)(a) and (3)(b).
- 15 Survey respondents were asked 'how important, if at all, is football to the national culture and identity, a sense of community in local towns and cities, who you are as a person'. Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 16.
- 16 Survey respondents were asked 'if your club was dissolved and ceased to exist, how much emotional distress, if any at all, do you think you would feel? Please answer on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is No distress at all and 10 is Extreme emotional distress.' A high level of distress is defined as 8-10 out of 10 for emotional distress. Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 50.
- 17 Survey respondents were asked how they would describe themselves as a men's football fan and were given five options. Highly engaged fans are defined as someone who described themselves as 'a die-hard fan: football is a central part of my life and identity' or 'a committed fan: I follow football closely and am closely engaged'. Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 11.
- 18 Survey respondents were asked 'if the team you support was dissolved and ceased to exist, which of the following would you be most likely to do?'. Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 52.
- 19 Survey respondents were asked 'if the team you support was dissolved and ceased to exist, which of the following would you be most likely to do?'. Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 52.
- 20 Survey respondents were asked 'Several men's football clubs have been dissolved following financial difficulties, such as Macclesfield Town in 2020 and Bury FC in 2023. If your club faced financial difficulties and the threat of being dissolved, which of the following actions would you consider doing, if any?'. Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 51.
- 21 The Dons Trust, '[About the Trust](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 22 Exeter City Supporters' Trust, '[Our Story](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 23 Bury Football Club Supporters' Society, '[Bury FC are coming back](#)', 1 May 2022, accessed 1 October 2026. Bury Football Club Supporters Society, '[ADMINISTRATION OF FOOTBALL CLUBS WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMITTED BY BARRY ROTH ON BEHALF OF BURY FOOTBALL CLUB SUPPORTERS SOCIETY LIMITED, FOREVER BURY](#)', September 2019.
- 24 Bees Unites, '[How Matthew Benham came to own the Bees](#)', 23 June 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 25 Portsmouth Football Club, '[Pompey celebrate community ownership 10 years on](#)', 22 April 2023, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 26 Premier League, '[Premier League Economic and social impact](#)', July 2026, p. 6.
- 27 EFL, '[EFL in the Community: Our Impact](#)', accessed 1 October 2026. This includes local, regional, and national spending by EFL club and their charities including spending multipliers and excludes player-related expenditure.
- 28 Premier League, '[Premier League Foundation Overview](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 29 EFL, '[EFL in the Community: Our Impact](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 30 Data received from the Premier League, 9 September 2026. The £116m contribution also includes the amount contributed via the Premier League Charitable Fund discussed above.
- 31 Sky news, '[Top women's clubs approve £20m Premier League loan](#)', 8 February 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 32 Premier League, '[Support for wider football](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 33 Premier League, '[Support for wider football](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 34 Premier League, '[Support for wider football](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 35 Data received from the Football Foundation on 16 September 2026.
- 36 Data received from the Football Foundation on 16 September 2026.
- 37 IFR analysis of publicly available accounts obtained from Companies House. The National League is not shown due to data availability.
- 38 IFR analysis of ONS, '[Gross Domestic Product index: Current price: Seasonally adjusted](#)', 13 August 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 39 In League One, the percentage increase drops from 509% to 470%. In League Two, it drops from 557% to 507%. IFR analysis of publicly available accounts obtained from Companies House and data received from the EFL in response to IFR request for information.
- 40 The 'no single buyer rule' stems from the European Commission's 2006 Commitments decision following a competition law investigation into the Premier League's sale of broadcasting media rights [Case COMP/C-2/38.173](#) (the 'Commitments'). Under the Commitments, the Premier League agreed to split the sale of its live TV rights into multiple balanced packages and not to sell the entirety of its live domestic television broadcasting packages to a single media company. The Commitments expired in 2012/13 and the Premier League has maintained the 'no single buyer rule' irrespective. In 2014 Ofcom found that the Premier League had built on the Commitments by increasing the number of matches available in subsequent auctions for TV rights. Ofcom, '[Competition Act investigation into the sale of live UK audio-visual media rights to Premier League matches](#)', 18 November 2014, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 41 Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem – Background and Technical Annexes', prepared by Keystone.

- 42 The EFL (then the Football League) attempted to recoup £131.9m in unpaid broadcast fees from ITV Digital's owners (Carlton and Granada) who the Court ruled were under no legal obligation to honour their collapsed subsidiary's debts. Carlton Communications plc and Granada Media plc v The Football League Ltd [2002] EWHC 1650 (Comm), [Judgment of Mr Justice Langley](#), 1 August 2002. For more information see BBC News, '[League loses football cash battle](#)', 1 August 2002, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 43 EFL, '[EFL announces landmark broadcasting deal with Sky Sports](#)', 5 May 2023, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 44 IFR analysis based on data received from EFL on 6 March 2026.
- 45 IFR analysis based on data received from EFL on 19 February 2026.
- 46 IFR analysis based on data received from National League on 19 December 2026.
- 47 DAZN, '[DAZN secures English domestic football with acquisition of exclusive broadcast rights to the National League](#)', 30 July 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 48 The Premier League is the most attended top-flight football division globally, and the EFL is Europe's most popular lower-division competition. Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem', prepared by Keystone.
- 49 Calculated as 40,459 average match attendance multiplied by 380 games per season. Premier League, '[Premier League Annual Report 2024/25](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 50 Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem', prepared by Keystone.
- 51 Transfermarkt.co.uk, '[National League - Attendance figures for 2024/25](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 52 Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem', prepared by Keystone.
- 53 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 54 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'Investment in the English Football Pyramid', prepared by EY Parthenon. This is based on transactions from independent transaction analytics provider, Mergermarket.
- 55 High net worth individuals are generally defined as individuals with substantial liquid financial resources of over £1m. Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 56 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 57 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 58 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 59 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 60 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 61 See Chart 1.4.1 on the volume and value of transactions involving English clubs 2015-2025.
- 62 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report.
- 63 IFR analysis based on UEFA, '[Country coefficients](#)', accessed 1 October 2026. UEFA coefficients measure clubs' performance in European competitions over the previous five seasons. A lower value reflects a higher position as 1st = 1, 2nd = 2, 3rd = 3 and so on.
- 64 Premier League, '[Premier League Economic and social impact](#)', July 2026, p. 7.
- 65 Premier League, '[The numbers that show this has been a season like no other](#)', 19 May 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 66 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL on 6 March 2026.
- 67 Deloitte, '[Deloitte Football Money League 2026 - Driving home advantage](#)', 22 January 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 68 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem', prepared by Keystone.
- 69 IFR analysis of Transfermarkt.co.uk, '[Squad market valuations](#)', data as of May 2026. For benchmarking purposes, the IFR has used Spain, Germany, Italy and France as comparator countries.
- 70 IFR analysis of Transfermarkt.co.uk, '[Squad market valuations](#)', data as of May 2026. For the 2025/26 season, the Premier League generated 123 fixtures with a combined squad value of €1bn or more, which is significantly more than La Liga (37), the Bundesliga (17), Ligue 1 (17) and Serie A (6).
- 71 IFR analysis of Transfermarkt.co.uk, '[Squad market valuations](#)', data as of April 2026.
- 72 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR.
- 73 Although there are fewer games played in the Bundesliga. Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem', prepared by Keystone.
- 74 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem', prepared by Keystone.
- 75 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and obtained from Company filings, Calcio e Finanza, Deloitte, CNBC, Forbes, and BBC Sport.
- 76 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and obtained from Company filings, Calcio e Finanza, Deloitte, CNBC, Forbes, and BBC Sport.
- 77 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'Premier League and Championship Competition Analysis: A benchmark analysis of quality, competitive balance and mobility', prepared by Twenty First Group.
- 78 IFR analysis of publicly available matchday data sourced from [FBref \(Sports Reference\)](#).
- 79 IFR analysis of publicly available matchday data sourced from [FBref \(Sports Reference\)](#).
- 80 A higher number shows that a larger number of different clubs have played in that league, indicating that it is not the same clubs that repeatedly play in each league each season. League names have changed over time, with current equivalent league names used for consistency. IFR analysis of publicly available league table data up to 2025/26 published by the [Premier League](#), the [English Football League \(EFL\)](#), and the [National League](#).
- 81 See Chart 1.6.1.
- 82 Deloitte, '[Deloitte Football Money League 2026](#)', 22 January 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 83 Publicly available financial accounts obtained from [Companies House](#).
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- 85 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR request for information.
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- 87 Publicly available financial accounts obtained from [Companies House](#).
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- 91 Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, '[RAISING THE BAR - Reframing the opportunity in women's football](#)', 13 July 2023.
- 92 Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, '[RAISING THE BAR - Reframing the opportunity in women's football](#)', 13 July 2023.
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- 95 WSL Football submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'WSL Football'.
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- 103 Deloitte, '[Annual Review of Football Finance 2026](#)', July 2026.
- 104 Deloitte, '[Annual Review of Football Finance 2026](#)', July 2026.
- 105 UEFA, '[UEFA Financial report 2024/25](#)'.
- 106 UEFA, '[2025/26 UEFA Women's Champions League and new UEFA Women's Europa Cup: Dates, access list, full guide](#)', 11 September 2025, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 107 UEFA, '[UEFA Financial report 2024/25](#)'.
- 108 Data received from WSL on 16 July 2026.
- 109 Brighton and Hove Albion, '[Built For Her: Albion confirm plans for first purpose built women's stadium in UK and Europe](#)', 28 April 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 110 The Friedkin Group, '[Goodison Park To Become Permanent Home Of Everton Women - The Friedkin Group](#)', 13 May 2025, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 111 Deloitte, '[Annual Review of Football Finance 2026](#)', July 2026, p.37.
- 112 Neilson and Pepsico, '[Undervalued and Unstoppable](#)', 17 June 2025.
- 113 WSL Football submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'WSL Football'.
- 114 Deloitte, '[Annual Review of Football Finance 2026](#)', July 2026.
- 115 WSL Football, '[Financial Sustainability Regulation](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 116 Annex C - Revenues contains detailed supporting evidence for the points made in this overview, including analysis on the drivers of revenues and the distribution of different types of revenues across, and within, leagues.
- 117 Survey respondents were asked: 'Thinking now about the men's team in England and Wales that you would describe yourself as supporting the most. Which of the following best describes the reasons why you chose to support your football team. Please select the top three reasons.' Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', June 2026, p. 13.
- 118 Survey respondents were asked: 'How important, if at all, are the following factors in determining the number of football matches you attend in person in a typical season?' Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', June 2026, p. 36.
- 119 Survey respondents were asked: 'How important, if at all, are the following factors in determining the number of football matches you watch on television (or another device) in a typical season?' Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026. Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', June 2026, p. 40. Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem', prepared by Keystone. Viewership data received from the Premier League.
- 120 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 121 IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 122 IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 123 IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 124 IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 125 Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'Understanding performance drivers across English football', prepared by Machine Football.
- 126 Twenty First Group, 'The cost of competition' in BDO, '[BDO's Annual Survey of Football Finance Directors 2025](#)', January 2026, p. 17-19.
- 127 Although some academics argue that sporting success is a diminishing function of wage expenditure. Review of academic literature on sporting success and spending prepared by Oxera Consulting on behalf of the IFR, 'State of the Game literature review', p. 16.
- 128 In the matter of a claim for compensation under rule W.51.5 of the Premier League rules before the Premier League independent disciplinary commission between Burnley Football & Athletic Company Limited and Everton Football Club Company Limited, [Decision, PLJP 2023/3](#), Causation: Conclusion, para 166.
- 129 On 11 November 2025, the experts produced a Joint Expert Report, which recorded agreement on this matter. In the matter of a Premier League Commission between the Premier League Board and Leicester City Football Club, [Decision, Para 104.7](#).
- 130 There are a number of different ways to measure sporting success and levels of player-spend, as well as different methods to analyse the link between them. We have set out the results of a number of these different approaches in technical annex E – Player spending and sporting success. Whilst it is not possible to formally establish causation in this analysis because clubs that have typically been more successful earn greater revenues and can therefore spend more on players, the findings suggest that there is a positive association between player-spend and sporting success.
- 131 IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and the EFL, and from National League clubs in response to IFR requests for information.
- 132 IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and the EFL, and from National League clubs in response to IFR requests for information.
- 133 IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 134 IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 135 IFR analysis of data published by the FA, '[Football Agent fees and transactions for 2025-26 reporting periods published](#)' and '[FA Agent Transactions](#)'.
- 136 Taken as a proportion of agent fees plus amortisation. IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 137 As measured by net player trading cash flow. IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 138 IFR analysis of data received from Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 139 IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 140 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR.
- 141 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 142 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 143 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and data obtained from club websites.
- 144 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR.
- 145 IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 146 IFR analysis of data received from the

	Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.				EFL, and National League, and clubs in response to IFR requests for information.
147	Annex G – Profitability and external financing contains detailed supporting evidence for the points made in this overview, including detailed analysis of profitability and external financing across leagues and over time.	165	EFL, ' EFL Regulations 2025/26 ', 2026.	182	Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League, and clubs in response to IFR requests for information.
148	Note that there can be different approaches to calculating EBIT. For the purposes of this report EBIT is calculated by deducting all depreciation, amortisation and impairment of intangible assets from EBITDA. EBIT does not include profit/loss on player sales or other assets.	166	EFL, ' EFL Regulations 2025/26 ', 2025.	183	Security can include property assets, such as stadia, training grounds and other real estate, contracted revenues, including broadcasting income, sponsorship agreements and matchday or transfer receipts, and equity interests, such as shares in operating companies, holding companies or special purpose vehicles.
149	Other measures of underlying profitability, such as EBITDA, are considered further in Section 3, which assesses clubs' financial soundness in more detail.	167	EFL, ' EFL Regulations 2026/27 ', 2026.	184	Explanatory notes to the Football Governance Act, paragraph 128. Football Governance Act 2025 - Explanatory Notes
150	IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.	168	EFL, ' EFL Regulations 2026/27 ', 2026.	185	It does not include player transfer incomings or outgoings, corporation tax, interest or investments.
151	IFR analysis of data received from the EFL and National League in response to IFR requests for information.	169	National League, ' National League Financial Reporting Initiative '.	186	Quick ratio is current assets minus stock taken as a ratio against current liabilities. For our calculation we further subtract prepayments and amounts due from group companies from current assets, and subtract both deferred income and shareholder loans from current liabilities. This removes the owner financing element and also common operational assets and liabilities to ensure a focus on short-term financial health independent of owner support.
152	External financing is calculated as cash inflows from owner loans, bank loans and equity injections, less any dividends or loan repayments. The components of external financing in each league are explored further in Section 3 on club financial soundness.	170	Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information. Non-interest bearing shareholder loans are not included in the assessment of gross debt.	187	IFR, Licensing Guidance, 1 July 2026, p. 18, paragraph 2.31: DLC guidance V4.docx .
153	IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.	171	The aggregate debt to revenue ratio for English football as a whole has fallen from 0.55 times revenue in 2021/22 to 0.5 times revenue in 2024/25. Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.	188	Premier League, ' New Premier League financial system explained ', 21 July 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
154	IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.	172	In League One, debt has increased from 0.57 times revenue in 2021/22 to 1.04 times revenue in 2024/25. In League Two, debt has increased from 0.29 times revenue in 2021/22 to 0.63 times revenue in 2024/25. Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.	189	Excluding National League clubs, for which squad market value data is not available.
155	IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League in response to IFR requests for information.	173	Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR based on data received from clubs in response to IFR requests for information.	190	Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information. Non-interest bearing shareholder loans are not included in the assessment of debt.
156	IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League in response to IFR requests for information.	174	Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League, and clubs in response to IFR requests for information.	191	Fry and Binner, ' Quantifying speculative-bubble effects in major European soccer leagues ', 2025.
157	IFR analysis of data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.	175	Non-interest bearing shareholder loans are not included in the assessment of gross debt.	192	Premier League, ' New Premier League financial system explained ', 21 July 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
158	See Box 5.1 of EFL, ' Championship and League One Clubs approve changes to financial control rules ', 15 May 2026, accessed 1 October 2026, for more detail on League One SCMP rules.	176	Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League, and clubs in response to IFR requests for information. Non-interest bearing shareholder loans are not included in the assessment of interest costs and the implied cost of debt.	193	IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
159	The League One SCMP rules for 2026/27 will allow 50% of all equity injections to be spent on wages. As an example, this means that if an owner invests £500k into a club, a maximum of £250k (in addition to that already permitted as a percentage of turnover) can be spent on wages. EFL, ' Championship and League One Clubs approve changes to financial control rules ', 15 May 2026, accessed 1 October 2026, for more detail on League One SCMP rules.	177	Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League, and clubs in response to IFR requests for information.	194	Football net debt is calculated as gross debt minus cash plus transfer debt. Transfer debt is calculated as transfer fees payable minus transfer fees receivable.
160	UEFA, ' UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Sustainability Regulations ', 2025.	178	SONIA denotes the Daily Sterling Overnight Index Average as at 30 June each financial year. It measures the risk-free benchmark interest rate for British pounds.	195	Which is often negative as demonstrated in the net assets metric.
161	Premier League, ' Premier League Handbook 26/27 ', July 2026.	179	Covenants tend to be tailored to the club's specific circumstances and risk profile, such as requirements on net worth, loan-to-net-worth ratios, EBITDA, net debt-to-EBITDA ratios, net football creditors, interest cover and wage cover.	196	For example, EFL clubs are subject to number of measures (e.g. transfer embargoes and fee restrictions) should they fail to meet certain financial obligations such as paying transfer fees, player wages or amounts due to HMRC. EFL, ' Embargoes and Fee Restrictions ', accessed 1 October 2026.
162	Premier League, ' Premier League Handbook 26/27 ', July 2026.	180	Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League, and clubs in response to IFR requests for information.	197	Legislation.gov.uk, ' Insolvency Act 1986 ' UK.
163	EFL, ' EFL Regulations 2025/26 ', 2025.	181	Analysis by EY Parthenon on behalf of the IFR data received from the Premier League,		
164	EFL, ' EFL Regulations 2026/27 ', 2026.				

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- 199 Legislation.gov.uk, '[Insolvency Act 1986](#)', UK.
- 200 House of Commons, '[Culture, Media and Sport Committee: Written evidence submitted by R3, the insolvency trade body](#)', July 2012.
- 201 GOV.UK, '[Liquidate your limited company](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 202 Of the 71 insolvency events in English football since 1992, the vast majority occurred in the mid-to-lower tiers of the pyramid. Only one Premier League club, Portsmouth in 2010, entered insolvency, with 86% of insolvency events occurring in tiers 2 to 4.
- 203 BBC News, '[ITV Digital put into liquidation](#)', 18 October 2002, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 204 BBC News, '[Football League agrees £95m TV deal](#)', 5 July 2002, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 205 See the Growth in central broadcast revenues in Section 1 of this report.
- 206 Deloitte, '[Annual Review of Football Finance 2020](#)', June 2020.
- 207 Premier League, '[League secures approval in principle for renewals with UK broadcast partners](#)', 13 May 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 208 The Athletic, '[Barrow put players on furlough as EFL clubs take advantage of taxpayers' cash](#)', 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 209 Premier League, '[Premier League and EFL agree rescue package](#)', 3 December 2020, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 210 Premier League, '[PL announces new funding for EFL and National League clubs](#)', 18 November 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 211 IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information on instances and amounts of overdue payables reported to the leagues.
- 212 Publicly available reports on instances of overdue payables by specific clubs during the period, namely: BBC Sport, '[Oldham Athletic face High Court winding-up petition over unpaid taxes](#)', 28 February 2020; BBC Sport, '[Notts County: New Danish owners pay two months of overdue wages at Meadow Lane](#)', 29 July 2019; BBC Sport, '[Macclesfield Town FC wound up in High Court over debts exceeding £500,000](#)', 16 September 2020; all accessed 1 October 2026.
- 213 Including overdue payables in a definition of financial distress requires a level of judgement. To avoid insignificant cases, we have excluded instances where there is evidence that the overdue payables were less than 30 days in duration, involved very small sums (less than £50k) or that appeared, or were reported to be, related to administrative or communication errors.
- 214 A full review of the academic literature on the causes and pathways to financial distress is outlined in Annex I – Financial distress. Figure 3.4.2, and the common pathways described in this section, is based on IFR analysis of distress events and draws on Beech et al., '[Insolvency events among English football clubs](#)', 2010; Szymanski, '[Insolvency in English professional football: Irrational exuberance or negative shocks?](#)' 2012; and Evans, '[The S-Score of financial sustainability for professional football clubs](#)', 2024.
- 215 Sheffield Hallam University, '[English football clubs lost £1bn in revenue due to Covid-19](#)', 22 August 2022, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 216 DCMS, '[Fan-Led Review of Football Governance: securing the game's future](#)', 24 November 2021.
- 217 Examples of these issues are further explored in case studies of Derby County, Wigan and Bury later in this section.
- 218 Last season, 76 clubs in the English pyramid reported that they do not have a contingency plan if their owner pulled funding, and 71 clubs did not conduct any kind of downside scenario planning. IFR analysis of data received from clubs in response to IFR requests for information.
- 219 See Section 2.3 on the relationship between player-spend and sporting success
- 220 Taylor, on behalf of the EFL, '[The Bury FC Review](#)', 20 February 2020.
- 221 Taylor, on behalf of the EFL, '[The Bury FC Review](#)', 20 February 2020.
- 222 The Guardian, '[How Bury FC ended up guaranteeing 138% annual interest on a £1m loan](#)', 12 November 2014, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 223 Taylor, on behalf of the EFL, '[The Bury FC Review](#)', 20 February 2020.
- 224 Taylor, on behalf of the EFL, '[The Bury FC Review](#)', 20 February 2020.
- 225 Taylor, on behalf of the EFL, '[The Bury FC Review](#)', 20 February 2020.
- 226 Taylor, on behalf of the EFL, '[The Bury FC Review](#)', 20 February 2020.
- 227 The Times, '[Derby County: The inside story of how the club reached brink of extinction](#)', 2022, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 228 IFR analysis of Companies House data, '[DC REALISATIONS 1 LIMITED filing history](#)'.
- 229 IFR analysis of Companies House data, '[DC REALISATIONS 1 LIMITED filing history](#)'.
- 230 Sky Sports, '[Derby County enter administration amid ongoing financial problems](#)', 22 September 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 231 BBC Sport, '[Mel Morris: Derby County owner remains keen to attract new investment](#)', 20 March 2019, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 232 Kieran Maguire, '[Football Transfers and Creative Accounting](#)', 19 January 2020, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 233 EFL, '[Disciplinary Commission - Derby County sanction verdict and fixture list publication](#)', 23 June 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 234 The Guardian, '[Derby charged by EFL with breaching financial rules over sale of Pride Park](#)', 16 January 2020, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 235 BBC Sport, '[Derby County officially enter administration and are deducted 12 points](#)', 22 September 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 236 EFL, '[The Football League and Derby County Football Club: Agreed Decision](#)', 15 November 2021.
- 237 The Athletic, '[Derby County relegated from the Championship after QPR loss](#)', 18 April 2022, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 238 DCMS, '[Fan-Led Review of Football Governance: securing the game's future](#)', 24 November 2021.
- 239 BBC Sport, '[Mel Morris: Derby County owner apologises to fans and staff over administration](#)', 19 September 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 240 Reuters, '[Hong Kong consortium IEC completes Wigan takeover](#)', 7 November 2018, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 241 IFR analysis of Companies House data, '[LATICS REALISATIONS LIMITED filing history](#)'.
- 242 EFL, '[Decision of the League Arbitration Panel](#)', 2020.
- 243 EFL, '[Decision of the League Arbitration Panel](#)', 2020.
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- 245 EFL, '[Decision of the League Arbitration Panel](#)', 2020.
- 246 EFL, '[EFL update: Wigan Athletic](#)', 7 July 2020, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 247 EFL, '[Decision of the League Arbitration Panel](#)', 2020.
- 248 EFL, '[Decision of the League Arbitration Panel](#)', 2020.
- 249 Wigan Athletic, '[Phoenix 2021 Limited complete the acquisition of Wigan Athletic Football Club](#)', 30 March 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 250 IFR analysis of Companies House data, '[WIGAN ATHLETIC A.F.C. LIMITED filing history](#)'.
- 251 EFL, '[EFL Statement: Wigan Athletic](#)', 19 May 2023, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 252 EFL, '[EFL Statement: Wigan Athletic](#)', 19 May 2023, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 253 Wigan Athletic, '[Club Statement | A company backed by Mike Danson acquires Wigan Athletic Football Club](#)', 14 June 2023, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 254 IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR

- requests for information.
- 255 The 7 clubs that entered financial distress during this period were identified through Premier League and EFL data in response to IFR requests for information on the amounts and durations of overdue payables reported to the leagues. National League clubs were omitted from this analysis due to a lack of financial data for years prior to 2025/26. To avoid insignificant cases, we have excluded instances of overdue payables that were less than 30 days in duration, involved very small sums (e.g. less than £50k) or that appeared, or were reported, to be related to administrative errors.
- 256 See Section 2.5 on Profitability and External Financing
- 257 IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 258 The most notable of these limitations are the limited number of distress events observed in the data sample (7), and that the analysis primarily focuses on financial variables in the two years leading up to distress and does not capture many other factors that may influence the risk of distress, such as governance failures. These limitations are further outlined in Annex I – Financial distress.
- 259 Richard Evans, [‘The S-Score of financial sustainability for professional football clubs’](#), 2024.
- 260 Alaminos and Fernandez, [‘Why do football clubs fail financially? A financial distress prediction model for European professional football industry’](#), 2019.
- 261 Under section 6(b) of the [Football Governance Act 2025](#) (UK).
- 262 Explanatory notes to the [Football Governance Act 2025](#) (UK), paragraph 129. [Football Governance Act 2025 - Explanatory Notes](#).
- 263 IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information, and analysis of UEFA, [‘UEFA Financial Report 2024/25’](#), 2026.
- 264 UEFA, [‘UEFA Financial Report 2024/25’](#), 2026.
- 265 In 2025, Aston Villa and Crystal Palace qualified for the Europa League and Nottingham Forest qualified for the Conference League.
- 266 IFR Analysis of data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 267 Information received from the EFL on 11 September 2025
- 268 Data received from the Premier League on 13 October 2025. In the current distribution arrangement, parachute payments are calculated as a percentage of the Premier League’s clubs’ equal share of broadcast revenue (UK and International). A year one parachute payment is calculated as 55% of the equal share, year two as 45% and year three as 20% but a club only receives a year three payment if it has spent more than one consecutive season in the Premier League. A Championship club receives 30% of a year three parachute payment, a League One club receives 4.5% and a League Two club receives 3%.
- 269 IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, and of data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 270 The data for 2025/26 are forecasts as at March 2026. IFR analysis of data received from the Premier League, and of data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 271 The data for 2025/26 are forecasts as at March 2026. Data received from the Premier League on 10 August 2026.
- 272 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR request for information.
- 273 IFR analysis based on data received from the National League in response to IFR request for information, August 2026.
- 274 The data for 2025/26 are forecasts as at March 2026. Data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 275 Number has been rounded. IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR request for information.
- 276 Number has been rounded. IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR request for information.
- 277 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR request for information.
- 278 Number has been rounded. IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 279 IFR analysis based on data received from the Premier League. The data for 2025/26 are forecasts as at March 2026.
- 280 IFR analysis based on data received from the Premier League. The data for 2025/26 are forecasts as at March 2026.
- 281 IFR analysis based on data received from the Premier League. The data for 2025/26 are forecasts as at March 2026.
- 282 Part 6 of the Act contains the Distribution of Revenue resolution process. It contains a ‘backstop’ mechanism that can only be triggered by the Competition Organisers (the Premier League, EFL or National League). The IFR may decide to accept an application to trigger the backstop process only if it concludes that the requirements under s59(2) of the Act are met. One of those requirements is that the IFR has reasonable grounds to suspect that its ability to advance at least one of its objectives would be jeopardised if the resolution process were not triggered in relation to the question or questions for resolution.
- 283 See Chapter 2.3 on players and agents.
- 284 Szymanski, S., ‘The economic design of sporting contests’, 2003, *Journal of economic literature*, 41(4), 1137-1187.
- 285 For example, the NFL in the United States is a closed league and has introduced a minimum salary floor to guard against this. Furthermore, the lack of promotion and relegation combined with the draft system of allocating playing talent can create an incentive for tanking, the process of deliberately losing or reducing effort in matches in order to improve a team’s future squad quality. LawInSport, [‘An Introductory Guide to the NFL’s Salary Cap’](#), 11 March 2016, accessed 1 October 2026. Sports Illustrated, [‘The NBA’s Tanking Crisis Is Worse Than Ever. Here’s How to Fix It’](#), 10 February 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 286 Dietl, H. M., Franck, E., & Lang, M., ‘Overinvestment in team sports leagues: A contest theory model’, 2008, *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 55(3), 353-368.
- 287 See Chapter 2.3.
- 288 IFR analysis based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 289 IFR analysis based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 290 IFR analysis based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 291 IFR analysis based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 292 Since 2006/07, 27 of 51 completed spells resulted in promotion back to the Premier League during the payment window, a return rate of roughly 53%. The remaining 47% did not return within the parachute payment window, with clubs either remaining in the Championship or being relegated further down the pyramid before payments expired. A parachute payment spell begins when a club enters Year 1 of parachute payments. Clubs are tracked across the Year 1 to Year 4 (where applicable) payment window. A return is counted where the club is promoted from the Championship back to the Premier League during that period. The calculation includes completed payments spells only; active or incomplete spells are excluded so that ongoing cases are not

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- treated as failures.
- 293 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 294 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 295 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 296 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information
- 297 IFR analysis based on data received from the Premier League, EFL and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 298 IFR analysis based on data received from the EFL and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 299 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem', prepared by Keystone.
- 300 For further detail, please see the Premier League Handbook. Premier League, '[Premier League Handbook 26/27](#)', July 2026.
- 301 Analysis presented in bullets based on IFR analysis of data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 302 EFL, '[EFL Regulations 2025/26](#)', 2025.
- 303 EFL, '[EFL Regulations 2026/27](#)', 2026.
- 304 Excluding Sheffield Wednesday for which data is not currently available.
- 305 Analysis presented in bullets based on IFR analysis of data received from the EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 306 EFL, '[EFL Regulations 2025/26](#)', 2025.
- 307 Analysis presented in bullets based on IFR analysis of data received from EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 308 EFL, '[EFL Regulations 2025/26](#)', 2025.
- 309 Due to data limitations for National League clubs promoted to League Two in recent years, we are unable to assess the financial reward from promotion to League Two in the same way as for other leagues. However, we can analyse the average differences in finances between National League clubs and League Two clubs in the 2025/26 season to understand the potential financial impact of promotion.
- 310 Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'Understanding performance drivers across English football', prepared by Machine Football
- 311 IFR analysis of publicly available league table data sourced from the [Premier League](#)
- 312 Please see Chart 4.2.6.
- 313 Under Section 7 of the [Football Governance Act 2025](#) (UK).
- 314 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 315 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 316 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 317 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data.
- 318 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'Investment in the English Football Pyramid', prepared by EY Parthenon. English football club valuations are often related to revenue growth expectations rather than short-term profits or asset values like in other industries. In addition to this, traditional methods of valuing a business based on underlying financial fundamentals, such as profit multiples or a discounted cash flow of the club as a whole, are generally less reliable as football clubs are typically loss-making with negative cash flows - both of which will be volatile year-on-year.
- 319 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data. The three ownership transactions involving big six clubs between 2016 and 2025 recorded revenue multipliers of 5.0x or more (based on the transactions where sufficient data was available). Established Premier League clubs have experienced a strong upward trend in revenue multiples.
- 320 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 321 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on ownership and transaction data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information and publicly available data. For other Premier League clubs, median revenue multiples stood at 1.8x between 2016 and 2020 and 2.1x between 2021 and 2025. For EFL clubs, median revenue multiples have remained steady at 1.4x between 2016 and 2025. This excludes revenue multiples observed when clubs were in financial distress.
- 322 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor in a Premier League club in response to a question on how investors think about investment in clubs and their mental model when making budget decisions. Across all interviews, investor views were broadly aligned with this holistic way of thinking about investment, though some prioritised investment in certain streams over others.
- 323 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an international owner of an EFL club in response to a follow-up question about their concerns over cliff-edges in revenue between leagues and the lack of predictability this creates for club finances.
- 324 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 325 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 326 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League, EFL, and, National League in response to IFR requests for information.
- 327 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 328 High-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) are typically defined as having at least £1 million in liquid assets, while ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) are typically defined as having at least £30 million in liquid assets.
- 329 Home Office and HM Treasury, [National Risk Assessment of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing 2025](#), July 2025
- 330 FCA, [Sponsorship arrangements between football clubs and unauthorised firms](#), June 2026
- 331 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR Statement provided by a UHNWI investor.
- 332 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor in a discussion on the challenges of investing in English football clubs. The investor further explained that the jeopardy of relegation creates captivating TV and is part of the game that investors have to accept as a risk of investment. Other investors agreed that relegation risk is captured in the asset value of a club.
- 333 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football.
- 334 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a Premier League club during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football.
- 335 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion of the investment attractiveness of different sports and leagues. No contrasting views were expressed by other investors.
- 336 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Both statements provided by institutional investors during separate discussions of what attracts and deters investment in English football. No contrasting views were

	expressed by other investors.		EFL club during a discussion of differing motivations for club ownership in the EFL.		cost controls.
337	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor following a discussion on their motivations for investing in English football. No contrasting views were expressed by other investors.	349	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a Championship club during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football.	362	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a League One club during a discussion of annual losses in the EFL and the fact that these losses grow if a club is promoted up the leagues. This statement was mentioned in several interviews with other EFL owners. None of these other investors disagreed.
338	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a Premier League club during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football. Several other investors stated similar views on the gap in revenues between the Premier League and the Championship.	350	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a League Two club during a discussion of the spending motivations in the EFL. Several other owners also cited fan pressure as a driver of increasing spending in English football. No contrasting views were expressed by other investors. However, owners of several EFL clubs stressed the importance of budgeting effectively despite fan pressure.	363	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League, EFL, and National League in response to IFR requests for information.
339	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football. Similar views were stated by another institutional investor and an owner of a Championship club.	351	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by a HNWI owner of a League One club during a discussion of the need for cost controls in the EFL.	364	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a League Two club during a discussion of what deters investment in English football. Several other League One and League Two club owners also stated that player wages are the biggest challenge they face. Other investors stated that revenue cliff-edges are the biggest challenge they face.
340	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football. An owner of a League One club and an owner of a League Two club both stated similar views on the size of average losses in the Championship. Owners were however complimentary about the quality of the sporting product in the Championship.	352	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football. Several other investors expressed similar views.	365	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR.
341	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football.	353	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football. The owner went on to clarify that 'the value increase outweighs the cash burn... Some people just see it as a money pit... It doesn't need to be like that'.	366	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a League Two club during a discussion on redistribution and financial sustainability. 12 of 14 (86% of) EFL club owners that expressed a view on this believe that spending of any additional redistribution on player wages should be restricted.
342	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football.	354	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion of what attracts and deters investment in English football	367	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a Premier League club during a discussion on redistribution and financial sustainability. 12 of 14 EFL club owners that expressed a view on this believe that spending of any additional redistribution should be ringfenced.
343	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a non-big six Premier League club during a discussion on prioritisation of expenditure on players and infrastructure. Several owners stated that good club ownership should focus on long-term financial sustainability via infrastructure investment. However, several owners also acknowledged the high incentives to spend on players facing English clubs.	355	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. The remaining League One, League Two and National League club owners interviewed stated that their primary motivation was financial gain or sporting success.	368	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Opposition to redistribution expressed by these owners was on the basis (i) that this income was the result of freely made fan choices about where and how to spend their time; and (ii) that it would create a structural drag for the Premier League teams versus other top European sides, endangering the Premier League's position as the home of more top players than any other league.
344	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a non-big six Premier League club in response to a follow up questions on the best cost control solution.	356	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by a HNWI owner of an EFL club in response to a question on what motivated them to invest in an English football club.	369	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor in a Premier League club during a discussion on debt restrictions, investment and financial sustainability.
345	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by a Championship owner during a discussion of the increase in overseas investment into English football.	357	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of an EFL club in response to a question on what motivated them to invest in an English football club.	370	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR.
346	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an EFL club owner during a discussion of the spending motivations in the EFL.	358	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR.	371	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR.
347	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by a HNWI owner of an EFL club during a discussion of differing motivations for club ownership in the EFL.	359	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of an EFL club in response to a question on what motivated them to invest in an English football club.	372	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by a HNWI club owner during a discussion on liquidity requirements, investment and financial sustainability.
348	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by a HNWI owner of an	360	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by a HNWI owner of an National League club in response to a question on what motivated them to invest in an English football club.	373	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion on liquidity requirements, investment and financial
		361	Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an owner of a League Two club during a discussion on the importance of financial sustainability and		

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- sustainability.
- 374 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by a League Two club owner during a discussion on liquidity requirements, investment and financial sustainability. Several other owners made similar statements about many clubs relying on owner funding for liquidity.
- 375 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR.
- 376 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR. Statement provided by an institutional investor during a discussion on fit and proper ownership tests, investment and financial sustainability. Several other owners made similar statements about the importance of a strong fit and proper ownership test.
- 377 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'Investment in the English Football Pyramid', prepared by EY Parthenon. These transactions were identified from publicly available transaction data.
- 378 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'Investment in the English Football Pyramid', prepared by EY Parthenon.
- 379 Premier League submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'Investment in the English Football Pyramid', prepared by EY Parthenon.
- 380 Note that the analysis is based on a period of just five years, which is likely to be shorter than most ownership periods.
- 381 Actual investor returns will also depend on factors including changes in club debt, the mix of debt and equity financing used to fund losses, and the terms of any eventual sale. Therefore, while the distribution of estimated returns presented in the analysis are likely correct, the use of proxies means that the absolute levels of returns for individual clubs do not reflect these factors.
- 382 EFL submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'EFL Economics – a review of club ownership and the impact of incentives', prepared by Oliver & Ohlbaum Associates. Oliver & Ohlbaum conducted analysis on behalf of the EFL, interviewing several club owners. In these interviews, owners suggested that the pool of viable or sustainable potential investors is shrinking as annual losses grow.
- 383 Analysis by BCG on behalf of the IFR based on data received from the Premier League and EFL in response to IFR requests for information.
- 384 Premier League, '[Premier League broadcast deals for 2025-2028](#)', accessed 1 October 2026. Premier League, '[Premier League completes sales process for UK live rights & free-to-air highlights](#)', 4 December 2023, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 385 EFL, '[EFL announces landmark broadcasting deal with Sky Sports](#)', 5 May 2023, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 386 DAZN, '[DAZN secures English domestic football with acquisition of exclusive broadcast rights to the National League](#)', 30 July 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 387 The current domestic broadcasting cycle (2025/26-2028/29) involves a minimum of 267 matches broadcast per season, compared with 200 games broadcast per season for the previous cycle (2022/23-2024/25). Premier League '[Premier League completes sales process for UK live rights & free-to-air highlights](#)', 4 December 2023; Premier League, '[League secures approval in principle for renewals with UK broadcast partners](#)', 13 May 2021; Premier League, '[Broadcast](#)'. All accessed 1 October 2026.
- 388 EFL, '[EFL announces landmark broadcasting deal with Sky Sports](#)', 5 May 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 389 Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report.
- 390 Comcast '[COMCAST CORPORATION PREVAILS WITH HIGHEST OFFER PRICE IN AUCTION FOR SKY PLC](#)', 22 September 2018.
- 391 BT, '[BT Group and Warner Bros. Discovery agree to form new premium sports joint venture for the UK and Ireland](#)', 12 May 2022, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 392 The proposed merger was cleared by the Competition and Markets Authority and the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport on August 6 2026. Department for Culture Media and Sport, '[Public statement- Proposed acquisition of Warner Bros. Discovery by Paramount: decision of no intervention on Public Interest Intervention or Foreign State Influence grounds](#)', 6 August 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 393 Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report.
- 394 Premier League, '[Premier League launches video streaming service in Singapore](#)', 12 August 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 395 Amazon Prime Video did acquire a small package of specific games for the 2019/20-2021/22 and 2022/23-2024/25 seasons, however, the platform did not acquire any packages in the next cycle. Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report.
- 396 Data received from the Premier League on 6 and 13 March 2026.
- 397 EFL, '[EFL announces landmark broadcasting deal with Sky Sports](#)', 5 May 2023, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 398 DAZN, '[DAZN secures English domestic football with acquisition of exclusive broadcast rights to the National League](#)', 30 July 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 399 Premier League international broadcast rights account for a greater proportion of broadcast revenue than domestic broadcast rights. Data received from the Premier League on 6 and 13 March 2026.
- 400 The Premier League seeks to manage its exposure to foreign exchange currency risks during the term of a media rights contract by entering into foreign exchange derivative contracts and monitoring the results of this strategy at regular intervals. Premier League, '[Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2025](#)', obtained from Companies House, p. 5.
- 401 Premier League Submission to IFR State of the Game Report, 'An overview of the English football ecosystem' prepared by Keystone.
- 402 Survey respondents were asked: 'As you may or may not know, there are ways in which people in the UK can watch live football illegally by accessing certain websites and devices. This means they can watch a wide range of football, including matches broadcast in the UK and matches not broadcast in the UK, without paying for subscriptions. This includes modified Fire Sticks, illegal streaming websites and IPTV services. During a typical season, how often, if at all, do you watch football matches via pirated or illegal means?' Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', June 2026. Survey conducted online 10-14 April 2026.
- 403 BBC News, '[ITV Digital goes broke](#)', 27 March 2002, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 404 BBC News, '[Setanta loses Premier TV rights](#)', 19 June 2009, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 405 Ligue De Football, '[LFP Press Release](#)', 12 February 2025, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 406 The impact of this depends on: the extent to which the broadcaster has paid its obligations ahead of the broadcasting period; the extent to which there are any guarantees or letters of credit in place; the extent to which the broadcaster pays any exit fees; the extent to which football clubs have forward-financed broadcast revenues; and, the ability of the competition organiser to sell those rights to another broadcaster and what other broadcasters are willing to pay.
- 407 Figures do not sum due to rounding.
- 408 See Chart 4.5.1. Figures do not sum due to rounding.
- 409 BBC Sport, '[Premier League clubs set new transfer spending record](#)', 1 September 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 410 See Chart 4.5.1. EY Parthenon analysis on behalf of the IFR based on data received from clubs in response to IFR requests for information.
- 411 See Chart 4.5.1.
- 412 Calculated as transfer payables divided by transfer receivables. See Chart 4.5.1.
- 413 Calculated as net transfer debt by division divided by the number of clubs in the division. See Chart 4.5.1.
- 414 EY Parthenon analysis on behalf of the IFR based on data received from clubs in response to IFR requests for information.
- 415 See Chart 4.5.1.
- 416 These may be English clubs or clubs outside of the English system.
- 417 Under a recourse arrangement the selling club is required to reimburse the lender if the purchasing club defaults.
- 418 See Chart 4.5.3.
- 419 Calculated as the value of transfer financing divided by transfer payables.

- 420 See Chart 4.5.2.
- 421 Section 6(c) of the [Football Governance Act 2025](#) (UK)
- 422 The Fan-led Review identified governance concerns as one of three structural challenges facing men's English football, concluding that 'the regulations and oversight of the game are not up to the task of ensuring a sustainable future for clubs'. The Review concluded that a 'lack of public confidence likely stems at least in part from a system that is confused and where clarity on the roles of regulators is opaque.' Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, ['Fan Led Review of Football Governance'](#), November 2021, paragraph 1.13 and paragraph 1.30.
- 423 Premier League, ['Governance'](#), 10 May 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 424 EFL, ['Articles of Association 2026/27'](#).
- 425 The FA, ['Standardised rules'](#).
- 426 EFL, ['Supplementary written evidence submitted by the English Football League – Administration of football clubs inquiry'](#), 1 November 2019.
- 427 Premier League, ['Premier League clubs agree new financial rules'](#), 7 February 2013, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 428 EFL, ['Supplementary written evidence submitted by the English Football League – Administration of football clubs inquiry'](#), 1 November 2019.
- 429 Premier League, ['Premier League statement: New financial rules'](#), 21 November 2025, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 430 EFL, ['Championship and League One Clubs approve changes to financial control rules'](#), 15 May 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 431 Premier League, ['Premier League Handbook Season 2025/26'](#), July 2025, Section W. EFL, ['EFL Regulations 2025/26'](#), 2025. EFL, ['Judgments & Decisions'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 432 The UEFA Congress is the organisation's supreme legislative body with each national association having one vote. UEFA, ['UEFA Congress'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 433 UEFA, ['Financial fair play: all you need to know'](#), 30 June 2015, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 434 UEFA, ['Financial fair play: all you need to know'](#), 30 June 2015, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 435 UEFA, ['UEFA Executive Committee approves new financial sustainability regulations'](#), 7 April 2022, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 436 UEFA, ['UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Sustainability Regulations'](#), 2025.
- 437 The FIFA Congress is the supreme legislative body of FIFA with each member association holding one vote. FIFA, ['FIFA Congress'](#), accessed 1 October 2026; FIFA, ['2025 Legal Handbook'](#), September, Article 26. The additional five FIFA confederations are the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), the Confederation of African Football (CAF), the Confederation of North, Central America and the Caribbean (CONCACAF), the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) and Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol (CONMEBOL).
- 438 The Professional Footballers Association, ['The PFA'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 439 EFL, ['Constitution of the Professional Football Negotiating and Consultative Committee \(England and Wales\)'](#), accessed 1 October 2026 3 September 2026.
- 440 EFC, ['EFC celebrates 850-club membership milestone'](#), 25 August 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 441 EFC, ['Our Members'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 442 EFC, ['Our Priorities'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 443 UEFA, ['Club Competitions Committee'](#), 1 July 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 444 European Football Clubs, ['UC3 – What we do'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 445 FSA, ['About the FSA'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 446 Kick It Out, ['About Us'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 447 Level Playing Field, ['About'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 448 EFL, ['EFL statement: PFA arbitration'](#), 9 February 2021. PFA, ['PFA welcomes the withdrawal of salary cap rules'](#), 9 February 2021.
- 449 Premier League, ['Premier League Statement: New Financial Rules'](#), 21 November 2025, accessed 1 October 2026. BBC Sport, ['Salary cap would be legally challenged by clubs'](#), 12 November 2025, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 450 EFL Statement ['Championship and League One Clubs approve changes to financial control rules'](#), 15 May 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 451 EFL Statement ['Championship and League One Clubs approve changes to financial control rules'](#), 15 May 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 452 BBC Sport, ['PFA starts legal proceedings over League One salary cap'](#), 11 August 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 453 Sports Resolutions, ['SR/017/2020 BETWEEN: The English Football League Limited and Derby County Football Club Limited'](#), July 2020.
- 454 Sports Resolutions, ['SR/372/2019 BETWEEN: The English Football League Limited and Sheffield Wednesday Football Club'](#), July 2020.
- 455 Birmingham City Football Club PLC, ['Annual report for the year ended 30 June 2019'](#), p.9.
- 456 BBC Sport, ['Chelsea's £76.5m hotel sale for PSR is cleared by Premier League'](#), 4 September 2024, accessed 1 October 2026. Chelsea FC, ['Chelsea FC 2022/23 financial results'](#), 7 March 2024, states that 'the group generated profits on disposal of player registrations and fixed assets of £142.2m, which helped offset the increased operational costs seen in the year'.
- 457 BBC Sport, ['Chelsea's £76.5m hotel sale for PSR is cleared by Premier League'](#), 4 September 2024, accessed 1 October 2026. Chelsea FC, ['Chelsea FC 2022/23 financial results'](#), 7 March 2024, states that 'the group generated profits on disposal of player registrations and fixed assets of £142.2m, which helped offset the increased operational costs seen in the year'.
- 458 BBC Sport, ['Chelsea: What does the sale of the women's team mean for the club?'](#), 23 May 2025, accessed 1 October 2026. Chelsea FC, ['Financial results for 2024/25'](#), 1 April 2026 states that 'The loss for the year before taxation was £262.4m, compared to a profit of £128.4m in 2023/24, due to the sale of a subsidiary in the previous year and the increased operating costs this year.'
- 459 The Athletic, ['Aston Villa agree deal to sell women's team to owner V Sports'](#), 30 June 2025, accessed 1 October 2026. Aston Villa Football Club Limited, ['Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 30 June 2025'](#), 12 April 2026, p. 5.
- 460 Premier League, ['Everton FC deducted 10 points by independent Commission'](#), 17 November 2023, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 461 Premier League, ['Premier League statement'](#), 26 February 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 462 Premier League, ['Independent Appeal Board decision on Nottingham Forest'](#), 7 May 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 463 Premier League, ['Premier League Statement: Leicester City FC'](#), 5 February 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 464 Premier League, ['Premier League statement: Manchester City FC'](#), 29 September 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 465 Premier League, ['Premier League statement'](#), 16 March 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 466 Sports Resolutions, ['IN THE MATTER OF AN EFL DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION BETWEEN THE ENGLISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE \(the EFL\) and BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB \(the Club\)'](#), 22 March 2019.
- 467 EFL, ['EFL Statement: Sheffield Wednesday verdict'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 468 EFL, ['EFL statement: Reading Football Club'](#), accessed 1 October 2026.
- 469 EFL, ['Disciplinary Commission Decision re EFL and Derby County FC'](#), 30 June 2021.
- 470 Data received from the Premier League on 6 and 13 March.
- 471 [Manchester City FC v Premier League: Partial Final Award'](#), 7 October 2024.

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- 472 Premier League, '[Premier League statement](#)', 7 October 2024, accessed 1 October 2026. Manchester City, '[Manchester City Club Statement](#)', 7 October 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 473 Everton Football Club, '[Club Statement](#)', 10 June 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 474 IFR analysis of publicly available EFL and Premier League accounts obtained from Companies House and financial accounts provided by the National League.
- 475 These clubs are Real Madrid, FC Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich. Deloitte, '[Deloitte Football Money League 2026](#)', 22 January 2026.
- 476 EFL, '[EFL statement: Project Big Picture](#)', accessed 1 October 2026. Premier League, '[Premier League statement on Project Big Picture](#)', 14 October 2020, accessed 1 October 2026. Premier League, '[Premier League statement on Super League](#)', 20 April 2021, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 477 For instance, UEFA financial rules include a 70% squad cost ratio whereas the Premier League's new rules will include an 85% squad cost ratio. In addition, since UEFA applies its financial regulations on a calendar-year basis and the Premier League applies it on a season, each club must prepare two sets of financial accounts. UEFA, '[UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Sustainability Regulations](#)', 2025.
- 478 The FA, '[GBE Points Based System](#)', accessed 1 October 2026.
- 479 National League, '[National League Launches 3UP Campaign](#)', 5 February 2025, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 480 The FA, '[FA statement on changes to the Emirates FA Cup](#)', 19 April 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 481 UEFA, '[UEFA approves final format and access list for its club competitions as of the 2024/25 season](#)', 10 May 2022, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 482 FIFPRO, '[FIFPRO Europe Statement: Legal claim against FIFA](#)', 13 June 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 483 FIFA, '[FIFA Club World Cup 2025™ & 2029 media rights tender launched](#)', 15 July 2024, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 484 EFC, '[EFC Board meets in Prague](#)', 30 March 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 485 See Section 4 and Section 5 of the [Football Governance Act 2025 \(UK\)](#), and IFR, '[IFR Guidance Licensing Draft](#)', 17 March 2026.
- 486 This survey was distributed to EFL clubs by the EFL, which was conducting a similar survey at the time, to reduce the administrative burden on clubs. The IFR distributed the survey directly to Premier League and National League clubs.
- 487 Ipsos interviewed a representative sample of 4,092 adults aged 16+ across England and Wales, including 1,904 who described themselves as supporting at least one men's team in the top five divisions of men's English and Welsh Football. Polling was conducted online between 10-14 April 2026. Data are weighted to match the profile of the population. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026.
- 488 Ipsos completed qualitative research with men's football fans in England and Wales. This comprised 12 online focus groups with men's football fans in England and Wales. Groups were segmented by league tier and self-reported engagement level. Within each group there was a mix of fans by gender, age, ethnicity, and region. The groups took place online between 17th February and 13th April 2026. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026.
- 489 Premier League, '[Premier League Handbook 26/27](#)', July 2026. Premier League, '[Premier League Fan Engagement Standard](#)',
- 490 EFL, '[EFL Regulations 2026/27](#)', 2026.
- 491 IFR, Fan Engagement Club Survey, December 2025. Responses were to the question 'What approaches to fan engagement did the club take in the 2024/25 season? Please select all that apply' with answer: 'Any other approaches – please state'.
- 492 IFR, Fan Engagement Club Survey, December 2025. Responses were to the question: 'What approaches to fan engagement did the club take in the 2024/25 season? Please select all that apply' with answer: 'Any other approaches – please state'.
- 493 IFR, Fan Engagement Supporter Group Survey, March 2026.
- 494 Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 28.
- 495 Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 29.
- 496 Open text responses to IFR, Fan Engagement Club Survey, December 2025. Responses were to the question 'What approaches to fan engagement did the club take in the 2024/25 season? Please select all that apply' with answer: 'Any other approaches – please state' and to the question: 'Please provide any further views on fan engagement that you think are relevant to the work of the Independent Football Regulator'.
- 497 Open text responses to IFR, Fan Engagement Club Survey, December 2025. Responses were to the questions 'What approaches to fan engagement did the club take in the 2024/25 season?', 'Which of the following outcomes has your club experienced through fan engagement? Please select all that apply', and 'Please provide any further views on fan engagement that you think are relevant to the work of the Independent Football Regulator'.
- 498 Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 34.
- 499 IFR, Fan Engagement Club Survey, December 2025. Responses were to the questions: 'How many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were dedicated solely to fan engagement activities at your club in the 2024/25 season (not including marketing and social media activity)', 'How many part-time equivalent (PTE) staff were dedicated solely to fan engagement activities at your club in the 2024/25 season (not including marketing and social media activity)?', and 'Approximately, how much per season did your club spend on fan engagement activities in the 2024/25 season'.
- 500 Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p.32.
- 501 IFR, Fan Engagement Supporter Group Survey, March 2026. Open text responses were to the questions 'To what extent, if at all, would each of the following improve fan engagement for your club?', and 'Please provide any further views on fan engagement that you think are relevant to the work of the IFR.'
- 502 Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 34.
- 503 Responses were to the question 'Thinking of men's clubs in the top five divisions in England and Wales (Premier League to National League Step 1) and giving your overall view, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?' Base: 1,904 English or Welsh football fans 16+ who support a team in the top 5 leagues in England and Wales, online, 10-14 April 2026. 24% of respondents answered 'neither' or 'don't know'. Ipsos, 'State of the Game research', prepared on behalf of the IFR, June 2026, p. 46.
- 504 IFR, Fan Engagement Club Survey, December 2025. Responses were to the question 'Please provide any further views on fan engagement that you think are relevant to the work of the Independent Football Regulator'.
- 505 IFR, Fan Engagement Supporter Group Survey, March 2026. Responses were to the questions 'Are there any other motivations for your group when engaging with the club that were not covered above?', 'Are there any other outcomes your group aims to influence through its engagement with the club that were not covered above?', and 'Please provide any further views on fan engagement that you think are relevant to the work of the IFR.'
- 506 McKinsey & Company, '[Diversity wins: How inclusion matters](#)', 19 May 2020, accessed 1 October 2026.

- 507 Analysis based on applying the Companies Act criteria for organisations required to complete a s172 statement to clubs' Companies House accounts. Clubs would have to meet 2 or more of the following: Turnover of more than £36 million, balance sheet total (net assets/total assets) of more than £18 million, and more than 250 employees
- 508 The Football Association, '[Governance: A Guide for Clubs in the National League System & Large Community Clubs](#)'.
- 509 UK Government, '[The Companies \(Miscellaneous Reporting\) Regulations 2018](#)', 2018.
- 510 Tottenham Hotspur, '[Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements](#)', 30 June 2025, obtained from Companies House, p. 14.
- 511 Liverpool, '[Annual report and consolidated financial statements](#)', 31 May 2025, obtained from Companies House, p.4.
- 512 Premier League, '[Overview: PLEDIS](#)', March 2020, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 513 Premier League, '[No Room For Racism Action Plan - What we do to tackle discrimination and promote diversity](#)'. April 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 514 EFL, '[EFL Clubs lead the way as Equality Code of Practice hits new milestone](#)', August 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 515 EFL, '[EFL Clubs lead the way as Equality Code of Practice hits new milestone](#)', August 2026, accessed 1 October 2026.
- 516 IFR, '[The Football Club Corporate Governance Code](#)', May 2026.
- 517 Internal, desk-based research by the IFR based on publicly available data
- 518 IFR, '[The Football Club Corporate Governance Code](#)', May 2026.
- 519 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'Does the club have a formally constituted board of directors?'
- 520 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'How often does the Board meet?'
- 521 IFR, '[The Football Club Corporate Governance Code](#)', May 2026.
- 522 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the questions 'Does the club have a documented company/club strategy and purpose?', and 'Is any of the following information published on the club's website? Please select all that apply.'
- 523 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'Is any of the following information published on the club's website? Please select all that apply.'
- 524 IFR, '[The Football Club Corporate Governance Code](#)', May 2026.
- 525 IFR, desk-based research based on the latest available publicly available data from Companies House. These figures exclude clubs promoted to the National League for the 2025/26 season. One EFL club is excluded from the analysis as it was not possible to verify board numbers.
- 526 IFR, '[The Football Club Corporate Governance Code](#)', May 2026.
- 527 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'Are the roles of Chair and Chief Executive held by different people?'
- 528 IFR, '[The Football Club Corporate Governance Code](#)', May 2026.
- 529 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the questions 'Does your club's board of directors include any non-executive directors?', 'Please provide the number of non-executive directors below.', and 'How many of those non-executive directors are independent?'
- 530 IFR, '[The Football Club Corporate Governance Code](#)', May 2026.
- 531 Internal, desk-based research by the IFR based on publicly available data.
- 532 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'Do members of the board receive any of the following training?'
- 533 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'Does the club or its board perform a periodic evaluation of the board's composition? For example this may cover the board's skills, background, experience, knowledge, independence, and/or diversity'.
- 534 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'Does the club or its board perform a periodic evaluation of the performance of any of the following?'
- 535 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the questions 'Do you have sub-committees that report to the club's board?', and 'How many sub-committees report to the club's board?'
- 536 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'What topics do sub-committees report to the club's board on?'
- 537 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'Is there a board member with oversight responsibilities for the following areas? Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion'.
- 538 IFR, Club Corporate Governance survey, January 2026. Responses were to the question 'Does the board perform a periodic evaluation of the club's equality, diversity, and inclusion strategy and initiatives?'

