



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

Rt Hon Jeremy Wright QC MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture,
Media and Sport
4th Floor
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

www.gov.uk/dcms
enquiries@culture.gov.uk

Alison Mutch OBE
HM Senior Coroner
Manchester South
Coroner's Court
1 Mount Tabor Street
Stockport SK1 3AG

TO2019/01903/DC
11 February 2019

Dear Ms Mutch,

Thank you for your letter of 21 December 2018, enclosing your Regulation 28 Report on the death of Mr Richard Whale on 11 December 2017 following an incident at Old Trafford, the home ground of Manchester United FC (MUFC).

The Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) is the UK Government's expert body on sports ground safety. It has a statutory responsibility to regulate local authorities in their oversight of safety at all football grounds in the Premier League and the English Football League, as well as at Wembley and the Principality Stadium. It also issues licences to these stadia to enable them to admit spectators.

The SGSA is aware of the incident leading to the death of Mr Richard Whale in December 2017. Since the incident took place, the relevant SGSA Inspector has been liaising closely with both Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) and MUFC, most recently in November 2018. This liaison has focused on ensuring that lessons are learned from the incident and are being applied by the club and the local authority, particularly in relation to the ongoing provision of suitably qualified and trained stewards at Old Trafford. There has been monitoring of stewards' behaviour in and around vomitories, especially during ingress and egress.

Based on the assurances received from both MUFC and Trafford MBC, the SGSA is satisfied that both organisations have identified the relevant spectator safety issues arising from the incident, and that each has taken appropriate steps to address these issues. The SGSA will continue to monitor and take action as necessary, as part of its ongoing regulatory remit.

I note your report references the SGSA's Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds (the "Green Guide"). I agree with your finding that it does not include explicit "guidance as to the placement of stewards or suggest best practice to avoid stewards blocking access to the handrails". The 5th edition of the Green Guide, the current edition at the time of the incident, did include guidance on handrails and stairways at 8.8¹, 8.9², 9.9a³ and 9.9e⁴, with paragraph 9.9e emphasising that

¹ Guidance at 8.8 states, "Handrails for stairways and ramps: As stated in Section 8.6, a handrail is provided for people to grasp, for guidance or support. If the handrails are to serve only as handrails for stairways or ramps – that is they are not barriers as described in Section 8.7b - the design should meet the following requirements: [including] a. Handrails of the same height should be provided on both sides of stairways, landings and ramps..."

² Guidance at 8.9 states, "In order to ensure free flow of people, and avoid crowd pressures building up, the head of each stairway should be designed so that flow onto the stairway is uniform across its width."

³ Guidance at 9.9a states, "If passage through the vomitory is by steps, the design, dimensions, barriers and handrails should meet the requirements for stairways (see Chapter 8)."

during ingress and egress stewards should position themselves to ensure the unimpeded passage of spectators who wish to leave. However, the 5th edition was not explicit about spectator access to handrails on egress.

The SGSA has since published the latest 6th edition of the Green Guide in October 2018. This latest edition expands upon the guidance in the 5th edition and includes specific guidance on vomitories and the positioning of stewards (section 9.8), vomitory widths (section 9.9) and vomitory control measures (section 9.10). It recognises that the width of a vomitory, and of gangways leading to a vomitory, are key control measures (section 9.9). Furthermore, Chapter 4 highlights that safety at sports grounds relies to a great extent upon the deployment of an appropriate number of well trained and suitably equipped stewards, with section 4.6 outlining stewards' duties and section 4.10 detailing current stewards training and assessment processes. The new edition of the Green Guide has informed the SGSA's engagement with Trafford MBC and MUFC.

In light of the concerns you have raised the SGSA is amending the Green Guide so that section 9.8e makes a specific reference to access to handrails in the context of vomitories and the positioning of stewards. The relevant extract is below, with the proposed new wording shown in italics:

"Management should ensure that no spectators or non-essential staff are allowed to stand in vomitories during an event.

Similarly, during ingress and egress, stewards should position themselves to ensure the unimpeded passage of spectators. *Stewards should not prevent spectators being able to access any handrails present.* This is essential towards the end of an event (or a significant part of an event) in order to prevent overcrowding, to avoid impeding those spectators who wish to leave, *and to ensure spectator safety.*"

I hope this reassures you that suitable guidance is in place for sports grounds and that necessary remedial action, overseen by the SGSA, is being taken by Trafford MBC and MUFC to avoid a repetition of the incident which resulted in the tragic death of Mr Whale.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Jeremy Wright QC MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

⁴ Guidance at 9.9e states, "Management should ensure that no spectators or non-essential staff are allowed to stand in vomitories during an event. Similarly, during ingress and egress, stewards should position themselves to ensure the unimpeded passage of spectators. This is essential towards the end of an event (or significant part of an event) in order to prevent overcrowding and not to impede those spectators who wish to leave."