



THE INDEPENDENT
FOOTBALL OMBUDSMAN

**The Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes
(Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015**

ANNUAL ACTIVITY
REPORT

FEBRUARY 2021

FOREWORD

The office of the Independent Football Ombudsman (IFO) was established in July 2008 by the three football authorities (The Football Association [FA], The Premier League [PL] and the English Football League [EFL]) with the agreement of Government. The role of the IFO is to investigate and adjudicate complaints which have not been resolved within football's complaints procedure. The IFO produces an Annual Report at the end of each football season. The most recent Annual Report for 2019-20 was published in August 2020. All Annual and Adjudication Reports are published on and may be downloaded from the IFO website, www.theifo.co.uk.

In February 2016 the IFO was accredited as an Approved Alternative Dispute (ADR) Body under The Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015. The Regulations require the publication of an Annual ADR Activity Report and this publication reviews the cases investigated by the IFO in the year ending 11 February 2021.



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ANNUAL ADR ACTIVITY REPORT 2020-21

- 1. Number of Cases:** The IFO receives about 2000 messages each year, over 90% of which are submitted by e-mail. Most of these do not lead to a formal investigation or adjudication by the IFO. Some “complain” about generic issues within football, some comment on matters which are not within the IFO remit (such as player behaviour or referee performance) and others have disputes which are outside the IFO’s range of responsibility (for example children’s or grassroots football). The cases which were disputes between “consumer” and “trader” (as defined by the Regulations) and were investigated by the IFO totalled 25 in the year under review. Of these 14 were adjudicated by a formal published Adjudication Report and 11 were concluded by a letter to the complainant.
- 2. Types of Cases:** The IFO deals with a great variety of cases which include sanctions imposed on supporters, stewarding and access issues at matches, demands for refunds and compensation, together with claims that there were shortcomings in the way the governing bodies [the Football Association, the Premier League and the English Football League] have been exercising their powers.
- 3. Common problems:** In the year under review the impact of the pandemic influenced the range of issues addressed. The most common problem related to refunds for matches missed, either due to the curtailment of the 2019-20 season or because of matches played behind closed doors. Complaints were most often about delays in making refunds and the

preference for clubs to give credit towards future tickets rather than cash refunds.

4. **Recommendations**: All IFO Adjudication Reports contain recommendations. On the issues raised in Para 3, the IFO recommended that clubs should publicise even more prominently the likely penalties which will be imposed for mis-selling and the need for supporters to be careful when giving their tickets to another person.
5. **Complaints refused**: There were no cases refused during this year.
6. **Discontinued cases**: There were no complaints which were discontinued during the adjudication process and all cases were completed.
7. **Time taken**: Complaints have been dealt with within the range of 30-60 days with the average around 45 days. The pandemic led to delays in responses from clubs which lengthened the process in several cases
8. **Rate of Compliance**: Like many Ombudsman and ADR schemes the findings of the IFO are non-binding on the parties. In the year under review in all of the cases the IFO recommendations were upheld. *(Under the agreed procedure the relevant football body is required to make a public statement of the reasons if they felt unable to implement IFO findings).*

9. **Network Co-operation**: The IFO is a member of the Ombudsman Association which is a network of some 50 ADR-type schemes. This organisation publicises good practice and arranges conferences and meetings to facilitate shared learning between members. The IFO has the specific benefit of advice and support from the Rail and Furniture Ombudsman, who is a member of the IFO Advisory Panel.

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11 February 2021