VAR: what you told us, and what we heard back
(Meeting between supporters and ProRef at Premier League HQ 26th October 2026)

Ask a football fan about VAR and you won't get a short answer, so ahead of our recent meeting with the Premier League (PL) we put a couple of questions to you and 152 of you replied. Here is what you told us, what we heard back, and where we think the conversation goes next.

What you told us

Our first question asked how well VAR does its stated job of correcting clear and obvious errors. Three quarters of respondents (75%) said it interferes in marginal calls, and 62% said it misses clear errors. More than half (52.6%) said both. Just two people, 1.3%, felt it corrects clear errors without over-reaching.

We then asked for the one change that would most improve the matchday experience. The two biggest answers were a time limit on reviews (about 42 responses, around 30 of which proposed a specific cap, with 30 and 60 seconds the most popular) and scrapping VAR altogether (about 38 respondents, although around five of those would keep goal-line technology and semi-automated offsides). Others asked for better communication in the stadium, a narrower scope for VAR, dedicated VAR officials that feature non- referees or ex-players, limited challenges along the lines of rugby or cricket, greater consistency, and more transparency about how decisions and officials are reviewed.

These responses come from a self-selecting group of engaged supporters within our WhatsApp Community, so they show the strength of feeling rather than the view of every fan. But they line up closely with our annual survey from this summer. There, 95% of supporters were dissatisfied with the time taken for decisions and 83% with VAR's impact on the in-stadium experience. Watching on TV was slightly less negative, at 78%, which suggests replays and explanations take the edge off. Dissatisfaction with the accuracy of decisions was lower, at 67%.

The pattern is consistent: supporters are far more unhappy with how VAR operates, in particular the delays and the effect on their match experience, than with what it decides.

What the Premier League told us

We're grateful to the Premier League for the openness of the discussion, and there was plenty of useful information. On the day, staff from both the PL and ProRef (formerly PGMOL) answered questions from representatives of supporters' groups.

A high bar for intervention. We were told the high threshold for VAR intervention is here to stay, based on consensus among stakeholders. Players are briefed at the start of each season, through a presentation, on what will and won't be tolerated, so they know where the line is.

Stricter on holding and goalkeepers. Officials are being stronger this season on holding and on challenges on goalkeepers.

More transparency. Key Match Incidents (KMI) Panel outcomes for the weekend's games are now published at 10am every Wednesday on the Premier League website and on X. This is new, and is a welcome step. The Premier League also publishes match official and VAR quotes on decisions via the PL Match Centre X account as IFAB rules currently prohibit publishing audio during matches. As far as they are aware, they are the only league to do this.

Consistency of decisions across games. The Premier League said they recognise this is important for fans and is an area of focus for them.

VAR delays. The average VAR delay this season is 37 seconds, compared with 38 last season and 28 the season before. Averages can hide the long reviews, and it’s the long ones that fans remember. Most of the caps you suggested were between 30 and 60 seconds, so an average of 37 might suggest the

typical check is within that range and the issue is with the very long delays. It would be useful to see the share of reviews over 60 seconds published.

Added time. Substitutions are accounted for accurately: it isn't a flat 30 seconds each anymore, but timed and allocated for by the fourth official. There was some support in the room among supporters for more transparency about how added time is worked out, suggested to be shared after the game, which we would welcome too.

Communication. The PL is lobbying IFAB (International Football Association Board), which sets the Laws of the Game, for better communication, including more explanation to fans in the ground during matches. With 83% of you unhappy about VAR's impact on the stadium experience, we'd back that.

Where we go from here

I asked whether there was appetite for a time limit on VAR decisions, as it was the biggest suggestion from NUST members besides scrapping VAR altogether. The PL's response was that this would be a matter for IFAB, and there is a concern that some legitimate decisions simply take a long time due to the need to review many angles. The PL told us they want decisions made as efficiently as possible and wouldn't want, for instance, a 30 second limit when a complex decision such as a penalty plus offside could take 33 seconds to get the correct call. That's a fair point, and it suggests any cap should be nearer 60 seconds than 30, aimed at the longest reviews rather than the typical one. It also prompts the question of whether a single decision that takes longer than that is genuinely correcting a **clear** and **obvious** error.

I also raised something that sits behind many of your responses. If VAR is meant to intervene only in clear and obvious errors, then getting every decision right can't be the goal. Some finely balanced calls should simply stand and be deemed too close to call, rather than being examined to the letter of the law while fans in the stadium wait. Most of you were unhappy with the time taken on a far greater scale than with the outcomes.

In the session, we were shown some examples of where the principle of Referee's Call was followed to avoid intervention in marginal calls – in line with the high threshold for VAR intervention policy. There are also examples within the KMI Panel reports of an on-field decision being deemed incorrect whilst equally the decision not to intervene with VAR was simultaneously correct, because of the commitment to the high threshold before involvement. In addition, we were told the Premier League is the only competition to use thicker offside lines to avoid 'toenail offsides'.

The PL was also clear that VAR will never be perfect, but there is still an understandably strong emphasis on accuracy, which can come at the expense of time. Even with wide offside lines, we could zoom in on every pixel of someone's offside/onside nose to get the decision absolutely bang on. But at what cost to the in-game experience? Perhaps there needs to be even more acceptance – amongst the PL, VAR operators, fans, and the press – that there will be decisions that are allowed to be technically wrong and not overturned because the call is not 'clear and obvious'. Perhaps this would even increase the onus on referees to make the right call on the pitch.

The way I see it is that the PL feel they are maintaining the high threshold for involvement and provided some evidence of this in the session. However, fans feel that the decisions VAR does get involved in are taking too long and sometimes even appear to breach that high threshold. To me, interpreting our survey results – and this is easy for me to say without being in the emotion of a moment that could mean the difference between Newcastle winning a game or not – I'm hearing fans say that match experience is more valuable than 100% accuracy on marginal decisions. And that's sport, right?

What would we like to see next? Process measures reported alongside accuracy: published average review times, the share of reviews over 60 seconds, and how many overturns were based on fine margins. If accuracy is the headline number (though the PL say that both accuracy and efficiency are the key

drivers), the delay and the impact on the stadium are never heard. We would also welcome transparency on how added time is calculated, and continued progress on in-stadium explanation.

The PL has shared some slides from the meeting which you can access below. Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond - you told us clearly what frustrates you most, and we made sure it was heard.

Felicity Thow
NUST Vice Chair
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