STANDARDS	RSPCA ASSURED INDOOR	RSPCA ASSURED FREE-RANGE	UK LEGAL MINIMUM	LION CODE ENRICHED CAGES	LION CODE FREE-RANGE	LION CODE BARN	SOIL ASSOCIATION ORGANIC	WELFARE IMPACT
YEAR OF PUBLICATION	2025			2023			2024	
ENVIRONMENT								
SPACE REQUIREMENTS	Max 9 birds/m² of usable area* (in multi-tier systems this must be no more than 15 birds/m² when calculated at floor area) *9 birds/m² is equivalent to 1111cm² usable area per hen, compared to 600cm² in caged systems		750cm² of cage per hen (600cm² of which must be usable area*) Maximum stocking density is 9 birds/m² of usable area	750cm² of cage per hen (600cm² of which must be usable area*)	Maximum stocking density is 9 birds/m² of usable area No additional restrictions on stocking density in multi-tier systems		Max 6 bird/m² (excl. area occupied by nest boxes)	Space and freedom of movement enables birds to exercise, stretch and flap their wings improving bone strength Plenty of space allows subordinate birds to escape aggressors and enables resting birds to rest away from active, foraging birds. This can have important positive implications for injurious pecking, reducing the potential for feather loss and injury in a flock
LITTER PROVISION	Usable area in hen houses must comprise a minimum one-third litter Litter must be maintained in a dry & friable condition at a minimum of 5cm for the first 2 months and 10cm thereafter		At least 250cm² of littered area per hen, the litter occupying at least one third of the ground surface	Must be provided with litter such that pecking and scratching are possible	Unrestricted access to a littered area during daylight hours Litter must cover a minimum of 33% of total floor area, be dry & friable & at a depth of at least 5cm		At least 50% of the floor area of your poultry housing must be solid, that is, not of slatted or grid construction The solid floor area must be covered with a litter material such as straw, wood shavings, sand or turf	Where provision allows, hens will spend up to 50% of their time scratching and foraging in litter. Dry, friable litter is very important factor in the prevention of injurious pecking Hens are highly motivated to dust-bathe and to dust-bathe together. Litter in RSPCA Assured systems must enable birds to dust-bathe and additional dust-bathing boxes are recommended
ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT	For every 1,000 birds, 2 items of enrichment must be provided inside the house, which must include some destructible items Items such as knotted ropes, straw bales, pecking blocks and brassicas are recommended to encourage appropriate pecking behaviour and reduce the risk of injurious (feather) pecking		No requirement for enrichment materials	No requirement for enrichment materials although producers are recommended to be aware of and implement appropriate intervention strategies from the FeatherWel Project Cages must be fitted with suitable claw shortening devices	No requirement for enrichment materials although producers are recommended to be aware of and implement appropriate intervention strategies from the FeatherWel Project		For flocks of more than 500 birds, enough enrichment materials must be provided across the whole house to enable all birds to access it This must be no less than two items per 500 birds Destructible enrichment must be provided, including forage Enrichment must be changed frequently to maintain interest	Environmental enrichment provisions are designed to enable birds to carry out natural behaviours which they are highly motivated to perform Where provision does not satisfy these behaviours birds may peck at each others' feathers; an abnormal behaviour indicating stress and frustration in the pecking bird & causing pain and injury to the pecked bird
PERCHES	At least 15cm of perch space must be provided per hen, of which 8cm must be raised (aerial) There are strict and detailed requirements relating to raised perch position, e.g. a minimum of 45cm from the slat and an angle of not more than 45 degrees between perches, to aid bird navigation		15cm of perch space must be provided per hen; these may be incorporated into the slats No requirement for aerial perches (except in Scotland and Northern Ireland)	Requirements as per EU council Directive 1999/74/EC, requiring 15cm perch space per hen	15cm of perch space must be provided per hen; these may be incorporated into the slats No requirement for aerial perches (except in Scotland and Northern Ireland)		18cm/bird The perch space you provide must be aerial perch space	Hens have a strong instinct to roost and will seek high perches. Perches incorporated into the slats do not satisfy this instinct and may lead to frustration Raised perches have been shown to improve body condition and reduce fearfulness and aggression
LIGHTING	A minimum illumination for 20 lux is required in the open areas of the house (e.g. over feed tracks and litter) Natural daylight must be provided for a minimum of 8 hours per day (unless the natural day length is shorter) The natural light openings in the house must correspond to at least 3% of the total floor area of the house by 2035 at the latest Birds are provided with a natural or artificial dawn/dusk period		All buildings must have light levels sufficient to allow hens to see other hens and be seen clearly, to investigate their surroundings visually and to show normal levels of activity	Lighting must be a minimum of 10 lux at feed trough level			You may use artificial light to prolong the day length up to 16 hours Housing must permit plentiful natural light to enter	Increased light levels are associated with improved activity, reduced eye abnormalities, reduced fear and stress and improved ranging behaviour
FREE-RANGE ACCESS	Not applicable	Continuous daytime access to a range area from 21 weeks of age at the latest Overhead shade/shelter must be provided at a minimum of 4 selters per hectare at 8m² for every 1000 birds. Natural cover (e.g. trees, shrubs) over at least 5% of the range, increasing to 20% in 2027 Additional facilities, or designated existing natural elements, must be provided for dustbathing, perching and foraging in at least 1 area per 2000 birds and in at least 2 areas	Not required	Not applicable	Stocking density of the land must not exceed 2,000 birds/hectare over the flock's life Overhead shade/shelter is required. A minimum of 4 shelters per hectare to be evenly distributed throughout the ranging area, at a minimum of 8m² per 1,000 birds	Not applicable	Access to a range area of at least 4m²/bird from at least 12 weeks age Shelter/cover provided on the range Natural cover (e.g. trees, shrubs) over at least 5% of the range	A well-managed range can enhance bird welfare because the range provides an enriching environment with opportunities to exercise and express many natural behaviours The outside area needs to be large enough to keep the ground in good condition, provide sufficient foraging opportunities, and protect animal health by limiting parasite build-up Shade and shelter facilities are needed to protect animals from inclement weather. Chickens are also prey animals and are wary of overhead predators. Providing shade, shelter and natural cover encourages birds to use the range
FLOCK SIZE	Maximum flock size of 32,000 barn (colony of 4,000)	Maximum flock size of 16,000 free-range (colony of 4,000)	No maximum specified	No maximum specified	Maximum flock size of 16,000 free-range (colony of 4,000)	No maximum flock size Maximum colony of 6,000	Each poultry house must not contain more than 3,000 birds	Limiting the maximum flock size ensures that systems are kept to an appropriate size to facilitate good stockmanship and flock checks
HUSBANDRY								
MUTILATIONS	Beak trimming at the hatchery must only be done using infrared technology on day-old chicks, removing less than one-third of the beak Later beak trimming can only take place in an emergency on veterinary advice Other mutilations are not permitted		Mutilations such as beak trimming are permitted under the Mutilations (permitted procedures) Regulations 2007	Mutilations such as beak trimming ARE permitted under the Mutilations (permitted procedures) Regulations 2007			Not permitted	Mutilations are operations performed without pain relief, and as such likely cause pain and discomfort to birds, and may also interfere with natural behaviours. They are performed to alleviate the potential for birds to feather peck, which can also cause significant welfare problems. Mutilations, including beak trimming, are contrary to the principles of the RSPCA. However, it is accepted that, currently, in some cases, it may be necessary to beak trim to deter potential injurious pecking. For beak trimming, infrared technology is considered a higher welfare method, improving accuracy and reducing the risk of pain associated with the process
FREQUENCY OF WELFARE CHECKS BY FARMERS	At least 3 times a day		At least once a day	All birds shall be inspected at least once daily and a further two flock inspections carried out per day			Not specified. Animals must be regularly assessed to ensure their health and welfare and watch for signs of distress, disease and injury	Multiple inspections of the flock helps ensure that all birds are checked If there are any welfare issues these can be addressed quickly
TRANSPORT								
TRANSPORT DURATION	The time between loading of the last hen and arrival at the final destination must be less than 8 hours Birds must be transported by a RSPCA Assured approved haulier		Feed and water cannot be withheld for more that 12 hours	The timing of loading / unloading and transportation shall be planned ahead to comply with current legislation and industry codes EU legislation allows transport for 12 hours without feed or water			Journey times must be kept to a minimum Any long journeys, defined as being over 8 hours as calculated from first animal loaded to last unloaded, must be justified	At the end of lay, birds are particularly vulnerable to heat and cold stress, bone breakages and injury as they may be poorly feathered or suffering from weak bones. It is therefore important that standards are set to minimise the any stress and discomfort Research shows that mortality levels increase with distance travelled so it is important journey times are kept as short as possible
SLAUGHTER/KILLING METHOD								
PRE-STUN SLAUGHTER	Animals must be stunned before bleeding		Animals must be stunned before slaughter (bleeding) unless slaughtered in accordance with a religious method	Not specified			Animals must be stunned before bleeding	Pre-stunning ensures that an animal in unconscious and cannot feel pain before slaughter up until the point of death
ELECTRICAL STUNNING/ KILLING	Permitted electrical stunning/killing methods: • Electrical waterbath killing (parameters intended to only stun birds not permitted) • Dry electrical stunning Inverting and shackling conscious birds only permitted for birds slaughtered on farm, where no commercially/practically viable alternative is available		Permitted electrical stunning/killing methods: • Electrical waterbath stunning/killing • Dry electrical stunning Electrical methods may only stun the animal-bleeding must follow to ensure death	Not specified			All methods permitted by law (see relevant column) are allowed, with the exception that for waterbath stunning, for which frequencies greater than 800Hz must not be used	Electrical waterbath stunning used to be the conventional method of killing poultry. However, this method has many disadvantages. It requires livebirds to be handled, inverted and hung into shackles while conscious, which causes stress and discomfort. It can also be difficult to ensure all birds are stunned correctly, without damaging the meat produced
GAS KILLING	Permitted gas killing methods; Exposure to one of the following until death occurs: • carbon dioxide in two phases, from less than 33% to a higher concentration once animals have lost consciousness • carbon dioxide and inert gas mixture, maximum 30% carbon dioxide and less than 2% oxygen • inert gases, less than 2% oxygen		Permitted gas killing methods; Exposure to one of the following until death occurs: • carbon dioxide at over 40% concentration • carbon dioxide in two phases, from less than 40% to a higher concentration once animals have lost consciousness • carbon dioxide and inert gas mixture, maximum 40% carbon dioxide • inert gases	Not specified			All methods permitted by law (see relevant column) are allowed	It is now more common to use gas killing methods. These do not require manual handling and shackling of conscious birds, which reduces stress and improves welfare at slaughter. Birds are also killed more consistently in the gas chamber. Carbon dioxide is aversive to birds. While currently uncommon, it is preferable to use inert gases such as argon and nitrogen, which are reportedly not aversive to poultry. This enables a more humane induction to unconsciousness compared to using carbon dioxide. Where carbon dioxide gas alone is being used, exposing birds to a controlled, gradually increasing concentration results in a smoother transition to unconsciousness
AUDITING								
INSPECTION FREQUENCY	Annual audit of each farm, slaughter facility and catching/transporters by RSPCA Assured		Local Authority Trading Standards enforce legislation covering farm animal health and welfare Farms can be inspected by Trading Standards and/or the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) if a complaint is received Slaughter facilities can be inspected by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and an FSA vet is also always present on site Birds marketed using protected terms (free-range, traditional free-range, barn reared, extensive indoor) are inspected by APHA once per flock	Annual audit of each farm,slaughter facility, and catching/transporters by a third party certification body Spot checks, potentially unannounced, carried out based on risk of nonconformance			Annual audit of each farm and slaughter facility by Soil Association Certification	Frequent inspections help ensure that standards are complied with Unannounced spot-checks help ensure that standards are complied with at all times, not just when an inspection is expected. Useful approaches may be random, where sites can receive a visit at any time, or risk-based, targeting sites with a higher risk of non-compliance
WELFARE OUTCOME MONITORING	On-farm welfare outcome assessment carried out during the annual assessment. Measures include: • feather loss • dirtiness • antagonistic behaviours • beak trimming • flightiness • enrichment • mortality		Not required	Data collection by the producer required for: • mortality and records at 40 and 70 weeks • feather cover at 40 and 70 weeks			On-farm welfare outcome assessment carried out during the annual assessment. Measures include: • Feather loss • Bird dirtiness • Antagonistic behaviours such as aggressive behaviour and injurious feather pecking • Flightiness • Birds that need further care • Mortality records	Welfare Outcome measures are animal-based metrics that reflect aspects of their welfare. They can include physical factors, such as the level of feather pecking or other diseases, and behavioural factors, such as the level of aggressive behaviour seen