Balustrade and handrail *rules* in England

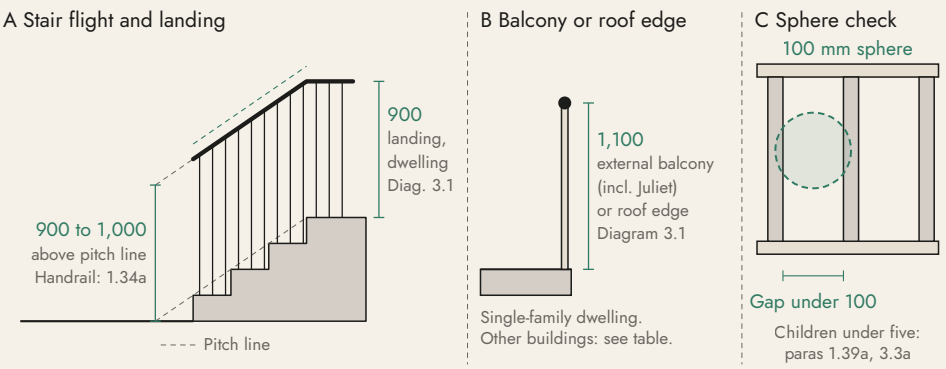
Guarding and handrail heights, the 100 mm sphere rule and its condition, and glazing in critical locations, by paragraph (Approved Document K, 2013 edition, England).

Compliance guidance. Figures on this page come from *Approved Document K: Protection from falling, collision and impact*, 2013 edition, for use in England, which we read on gov.uk on 5 November 2026. Check the current edition and your building control body before you rely on any figure: the Building Safety Regulator opened a call for evidence on Part K on 19 October 2026 and says the current requirements and guidance remain in place while it is under review. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own rules. This is compliance guidance, not legal or engineering advice, and loads and fixings are for a structural engineer.

AT A GLANCE

Item	What the document gives (paragraph or diagram)
Dwelling: stairs, landings	900 mm; also ramps and edges of internal floors (Diagram 3.1)
Dwelling: external balconies	1,100 mm, including Juliet balconies and roof edges (Diagram 3.1)
Residential, institutional, educational, office, public, retail	900 mm for flights, otherwise 1,100 mm (Diagram 3.1)
Assembly	800 mm within 530 mm in front of fixed seating; otherwise 900 mm for flights, 1,100 mm elsewhere (Diagram 3.1)
Factories, warehouses (light traffic)	Stairs, ramps 900 mm; landings, floor edges 1,100 mm (Diagram 3.1)
Glazing, all buildings	800 mm at opening windows (roof windows in loft extensions: see Approved Document B1); "below 800 mm" to changes of level, as printed (Diagram 3.1)
Stairs: guarding needed	Dwellings: drop over 600 mm (para 1.41). Others: two or more risers (para 1.40)
Handrail	Top 900 to 1,000 mm from pitch line or floor (para 1.34a); both sides if stair 1,000 mm wide or more (para 1.34c)
100 mm sphere; climbing	Where children under five may use the building: no opening passes a 100 mm sphere; avoid horizontal rails (paras 3.3, 1.39)
Loads on guarding	At least the loads in BS EN 1991-1-1 with UK National Annex and PD 6688-1-1; no load figures on this sheet (para 3.2c)

Millimetres, 2013 edition (England). "Dwelling" means the diagram's "single family dwellings".



Guarding and handrail heights in millimetres, each with its paragraph or diagram (Approved Document K, 2013 edition, England). C is drawn larger. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio; schematic, not for production.

WHEN THE 100 MM SPHERE RULE APPLIES

Paragraphs 3.3 and 1.39: where children under five may use the building, no opening may let a 100 mm sphere pass and horizontal rails are to be avoided. No building types are listed: agree the point with building control early.

LOADS, FIXINGS AND GLASS

Paragraph 3.2c: guarding should resist at least the loads in BS EN 1991-1-1 with its UK National Annex and PD 6688-1-1. No load figure is given on this sheet. A structural engineer chooses the category and checks posts, fixings and supporting structure. For glass see paras 5.2 to 5.8 and Diagram 5.1; no glass thickness is given.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

GUARDING (STAIR, LANDING OR BALCONY)

Guarding to [stair / landing / balcony], finished height [ ] mm, not less than Approved Document K (2013, England) Diagram 3.1 for [building category and location]. [Where children under five may use the building: no opening to pass a 100 mm sphere; no horizontal rails (paras 1.39, 3.3).] To resist not less than the loads in BS EN 1991-1-1 with its UK National Annex and PD 6688-1-1, category [ ], as set by [structural engineer]; calculations or test evidence and fixing detail agreed before fabrication.

HANDRAIL

Handrail to [stair reference], top [ ] mm above the pitch line (900 to 1,000 mm, Approved Document K 2013 para 1.34a) and [ ] mm above landing floor level, on [one side / both sides; both if the stair is 1,000 mm wide or more]. [Buildings other than dwellings: continuous; section to Diagram 1.13; contrasting, not highly reflective; end finished to avoid catching clothing (paras 1.35, 1.36).]

GLAZED GUARDING

Glazed guarding to [location]: [laminated / toughened laminated] glass [ ] mm, to the structural engineer's design for the loads in BS EN 1991-1-1 with its UK National Annex, category [ ]. Critical locations (Diagram 5.1): para 5.4 [Class 3 of BS EN 12600, or the class the engineer states]. Fixing, edge and base detail by [structural engineer / glazing specialist], agreed with building control before fabrication.

TERMS USED

Guarding

A barrier at an edge that stops people falling to the area below. A balustrade is one form (Approved Document K, Appendix A and para 3.2b).

Pitch line

The line joining the nosings of a stair. Handrail height is measured from it.

100 mm sphere rule

In a building children under five may use, a 100 mm sphere must not pass through any opening in the guarding, so a child cannot be held fast (paras 3.3a, 1.39a).

Critical location (glazing)

Glazing in the shaded areas of Diagram 5.1, where requirement K4 applies. It must break safely, be robust or small-paned, or be protected.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- Approved Document K: Protection from falling, collision and impact, 2013 edition, England: read in full on 5 November 2026.
- gov.uk: Building Safety Regulator call for evidence on Part K (19 Oct 2026): a review; current guidance stays in place.
- BS EN 1991-1-1 and UK National Annex; PD 6688-1-1; BS 6180; BS EN 12600; BS 6206: named in the document; not read.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/balustrade-and-handrail-rules. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.