



**For ALL**

# A THRIVING GRASSROOTS GAME

THE FA GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL STRATEGY  
2024-2028



**Definitions:**

Throughout this strategy, you'll see the phrase '**grassroots football**'. This is any football, played as part of a team or in an organised casual session, where the primary purpose is for the love of the game, whether that's to develop skills, to compete, to socialise or for health reasons.

Grassroots football sits at Step 7 (Regional Feeder Leagues) and below of the men's football pyramid, at Tier 7 and below in the women's pyramid, and covers all youth football and alternative formats of the game. e.g. small-sided, walking football and Tier 3 and below in the futsal pyramid.

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## A THRIVING GRASSROOTS GAME

**The scale and influence of grassroots football in England means it's uniquely positioned to unite communities, tackle inequalities and improve the health of the nation.**

Over the past four years we've faced some seismic challenges, not only in football, but across society. The title of our previous strategy 'Survive. Revive. Thrive' perfectly encapsulates the journey we've been on as we've navigated our way through Covid-19 and the lockdowns that put all grassroots sport on ice, for months at a time. We've seen the highest rates of inflation in over 40 years and a cost-of-living crisis that continues to impact families across the country.

I am incredibly proud of the way that we, and everyone involved in grassroots football, has navigated our way through these significant challenges, together.

Indeed, when we look at the state of the grassroots game now, it is the healthiest it has ever been, with more people playing than ever before. We reached our target of delivering 5,000 quality grass pitches, our technology is improving – making our volunteers lives easier, and 77% of schools are now providing equal access for girls. We have lots to be extremely positive about. However, we must not rest on our laurels.

Looking ahead we are projecting 12% further team growth in the game, equating to 15,000 more teams over the next four years. This continued expansion of grassroots football is fantastic, but it also represents a significant challenge.

We must ensure the infrastructure to support this growth is in place. We'll need even more quality pitches, coaches, referees and volunteers to ensure football grows in the right way – so that it is safe, inclusive and fun for all. Our 2024-28 Safeguarding Strategy details how we plan to embed an ever-safe culture throughout the grassroots game.

We are also fully aware of the challenges that exist in the game. To understand them better and to hear what our participants want to see from The FA and our County FAs, last summer we undertook our biggest consultation to date of the grassroots game. The insight we gathered was immensely valuable and has directly informed this strategy. You can read more about this on page 8.

Many of the challenges the consultation raised are stubborn and enduring. The FA cannot solve them alone which is why our continued partnership working with County FAs, Education Partners, the Football Foundation, and many other commercial and delivery partners, is crucial if we are to truly drive progress.

This strategy is very deliberately targeted on the areas the game has told us to focus on. Our objectives are intentional, and we have an ambitious set of success measures that will hold us to account for the progress we are determined to make. Together, I am incredibly excited about what we can achieve over the next four years.

Our sincere advance thanks go to everyone in the grassroots game who will help turn all our ambitions into reality.



**James Kendall**  
FA Director of Football Development

# 2020-24 STRATEGY REVIEWED

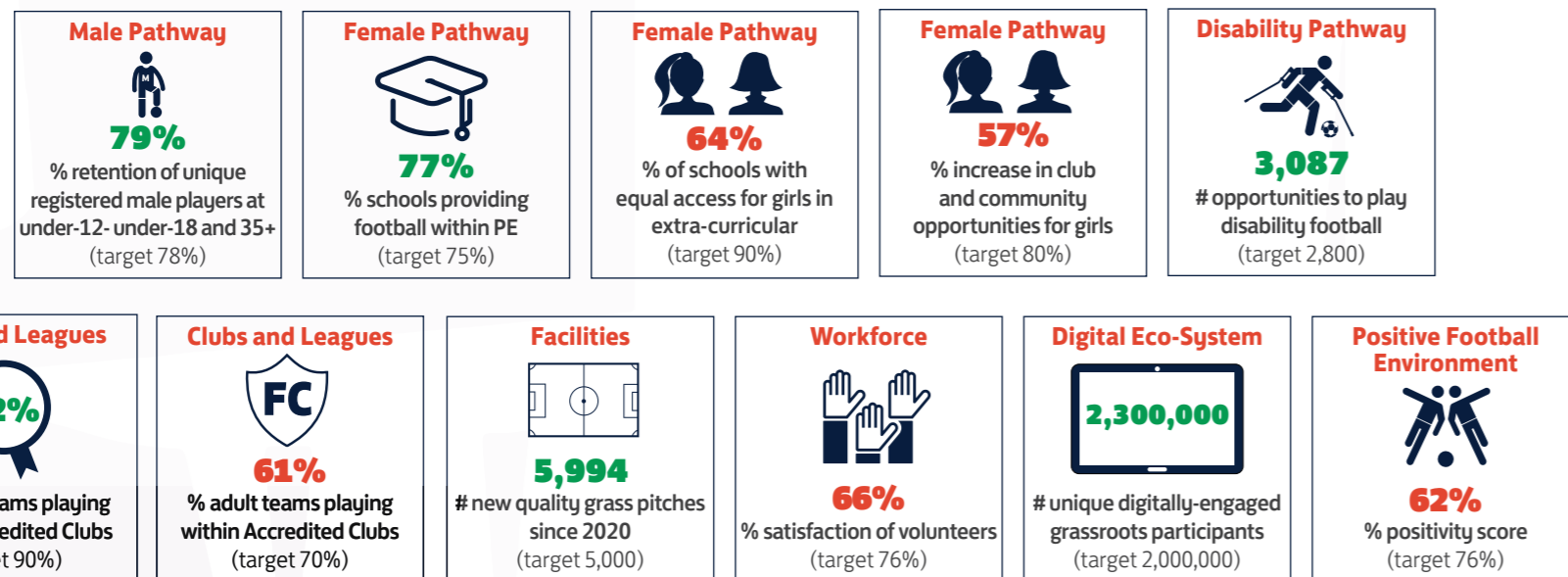
## Success against our targets

In 2020 we set ourselves an ambitious and challenging set of success measures to hold ourselves to account and have a clear view on progress against our strategic priorities.

We can be proud of a huge amount, including the progress made across our player pathways, the number of new quality grassroots pitches and the improvements to our digital platforms.

It is also clear where we need further work and focus where we haven't yet seen the progress we want – most notably on behaviours and supporting our volunteers to feel valued.

We will double down on our efforts to drive progress in these areas over the next strategy cycle.



## THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC VALUE OF GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL IN ENGLAND

### Social return on investment (SROI)

We often talk about the unique power of football to improve lives and drive positive social change. This is brought into focus when we look at the social, health and economic return on investment from grassroots football in England. More people than ever – **15.7 million**<sup>1</sup> – are playing football, creating a growing value to society.

The FA's SROI 2024 report provides robust and compelling evidence of the significant value that the grassroots game contributes – **over £15.9bn**<sup>2</sup>. All these statistics and the narrative behind them appear in the full report, which you can read on [TheFA.com](https://www.thefa.com).

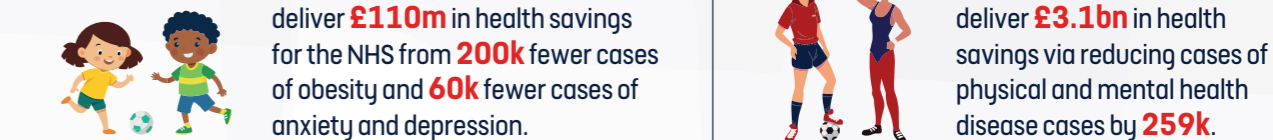
### NATIONAL SUMMARY



#### This includes:



#### In addition:



### THE STORIES BEHIND THE STATS

#### SROI is growing

More people than ever are playing football, growing its annual SROI value to society: **£15.9bn** in 2024 v. **£10.2bn** in 2021.

#### Mental and physical wellbeing benefits

Grassroots football participation contributes to **519k** preventions of disease cases and **£3.2bn** NHS savings – equivalent to **34.8m** A&E visits. Children who regularly play football are **20% more likely** to have met the Chief Medical Officer's physical activity guidelines (v. non players).

#### Reach and scope

Football is **four times more popular** than any other team sport in adults from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

#### Women's and girls' football

**4.4m** women and girls currently play regularly. **86%** of girls who play say football has helped them become more confident.

#### Power to tackle societal issues

Grassroots football delivers positive outcomes for our society via more than **360m** social interaction hours enjoyed by England's children each year. That equates to **£908m** GDP growth through improved educational attainment.

#### Volunteers

**Over 1m** individuals work and volunteer in grassroots football, contributing **£5.8bn** to society each year.

#### Clubs

**18,000** registered clubs across the country, supporting **120,000 teams** with **1.3m players**. **99.7%** of the country have an Accredited club in their local authority.

#### Facilities

Since 2000, The FA and Football Foundation have invested **over £1Bn** into improving grassroots clubs and facilities; creating jobs and growing local economies, with **50%** of investment directed into our most deprived and inactive communities.

All the above statistics are taken from The FA's independent survey of the social return on investment (SROI) of grassroots football in England.

<sup>1</sup> **15.7m** regular players consists of **5.1m** children and **10.6m** adults playing any type of football, including in the garden, park or street with friends or family, as well as team-based, sessional football and school football.

<sup>2</sup> The **£15.9bn** contribution of football to society is enabled by a football workforce exceeding **1m**, **21k** facilities and **114k** teams across England.

# DEVELOPING OUR NEW STRATEGY

## A Conversation About Our Game – Consultation Summary

In summer 2023 we undertook the most comprehensive grassroots football consultation to date, to hear the views of our grassroots participants directly.

The consultation was called 'A Conversation About Our Game'. It actively sought the views of those who make football happen week-in week-out, to ensure our new strategy is based on what our participants want and need.

We took a twofold approach:

- 16 in-person events held throughout the country attended by players, coaches, parents/carers, referees, club and league representatives, County FAs and other football partners.
- A national online survey, through which we collected over 48,000 data modules.

### What we learned

Our 2024-28 priorities are directly based on key findings from the consultation:

- Players want a wider range of football formats and opportunities, at times and in places that suit them.
- Women and girls need more and better playing opportunities to keep pace in line with demand.

- More improved and new football pitches are desperately needed.
- Worsening behaviours – on and off the field – need to be tackled.
- Volunteers, coaches, and referees need more support amid ever-increasing pressures on running the game.
- Growing community clubs which run multiple teams need more support to develop.
- Participants want to feel better connected and more informed to make their football lives easier.
- There is still important work to do, to ensure that football is run in the right way.

A huge thanks goes out to everyone who gave their time to take part in our consultation.

## Future trends in the grassroots game

As well as speaking directly to the grassroots game, we've undertaken analysis of trends over the last six seasons to help understand the direction our game is heading.

For example, we know that the grassroots game is growing – we have seen a 20% growth in team numbers over the last six years.

Youth male and mixed football has increased by 12,500 teams, the female game – both at adult and youth – has exploded and we are seeing more larger clubs with multiple teams.

By the end of this strategic term (2028), there will be approximately 120,000 - 128,000 affiliated teams, further growth in areas of football like small-sided and one in five teams will be playing in clubs with 40+ teams (compared to one in 20 in 2024).

This growth is fantastic, and it is what we want to see – however we must ensure that we support the game to grow in the right way.

We need to train more coaches and referees to prepare for the 220,000 anticipated increase in players. We will need more and better pitches, more volunteers, and more opportunities to play. In parallel, we need to make it easier to run football with better technology and more connected online services.

The opportunity is clear and so is the task – we must future proof our game and ensure its growth is sustainable and successful.

# HOW OUR GRASSROOTS STRATEGY HELPS DELIVER THE FA GROUP STRATEGY

## Delivering The FA Group Strategy

Our Grassroots Football Strategy is central to the organisation-wide FA Strategy 2024-2028.

The grassroots game will play an important role in delivering three of the four FA 'game-changer' priorities over the next four years. These are to create equal opportunities for women and girls, transform the pitch landscape nationally and see a game free from discrimination – as indicated in gold opposite.

In addition, three of the four drivers of The FA's Strategy 2024 are mirrored in the Grassroots Football Strategy, namely the push to create thriving community clubs, developing a participant-led approach and the push for progressive governance. Again, these are indicated in gold.

You can read the main FA Strategy on [TheFA.com](https://www.thefa.com).



# THE FRAMEWORK FOR OUR GRASSROOTS STRATEGY 2024-28

Our purpose: **Inspiring positive change through football – by uniting communities, tackling inequalities and improving the health of the nation.**





Priority 1:

# IMPROVING PLAYING CHOICE AND OPPORTUNITY

Our 2028 ambition:

To create new and varied playing opportunities to give everyone a chance to play the game, in a way that suits them best.

What we HEARD:

“ Life is changing and people don’t just want to commit to a team. They want to explore football in different ways, such as drop-in sessions where they can get their football fix in a way that suits their life circumstances ”

Male player, 30-35

Football today is reflective of a modern and on-demand world – people want to play where and how they want in a location, format and environment that suits them best.

It is vital that we meet this demand by providing a rich and varied menu of opportunities that suit everyone who wants to play.

This includes growing walking football, developing more sessional football<sup>1</sup> and continuing to improve the appeal of more traditional formats.

We must also continue to develop and improve the youth game. Great strides have been made, but we must continue to offer children more enjoyable football formats that support their development.

<sup>1</sup> Sessional football = casual and social football that does not include fixtures. Individuals' commitment is defined by their lifestyle. Activity is registered with the FA for safeguarding and quality assurance. Meanwhile 'team football' is football training, games and competitions with a set start and end date. Individuals play as a team in fixtures against other teams.

Understandably, Disability Football faced a challenging period post-Covid, as participants needed to regain confidence to return to the game. Happily, the game has bounced back well, but there is more to do to fill the activity gap among disabled people that remains.

We will:	Interventions
Evolve the youth game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement evolving pathway age groups and formats and deliver coach, league and parent/carer awareness campaigns and learning assets to support this change.</li> <li>Create exciting and inspiring opportunities for under-5s and under-6s to play</li> <li>Develop a new small-sided competition offer for teenage players.</li> </ul>
Improve team football for adult male players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide small-sided, walking football and flexible competitive opportunities to fit modern lifestyles and life-stages.</li> <li>Improve the appeal of the traditional 11v11 format to attract and retain players.</li> <li>Support young people to transition from youth into adult football.</li> </ul>
Create more opportunities to play safe, inclusive, sessional football	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a range of sessional football offers to include small-sided, fun and fitness, walking football and futsal, supported by reconfiguring our Just Play programme.</li> <li>Harness and expand the provider network (including CCOs<sup>1</sup>, leisure industry and commercial football providers) to deepen the reach of sessional football (e.g. in communities we don't currently reach).</li> <li>Ensure our systems are fit-for-purpose for sessional football (e.g. make booking easy and ensure environments are safe/insured).</li> </ul>
Support the disability game to grow and thrive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide FA resources to support the provision of more opportunities for disabled people to play football in schools.</li> <li>Provide opportunities for Disabled people of all ages to play sessional football in fun and safe environments.</li> <li>Increase the quality and quantity of team opportunities for disabled people to play in grassroots clubs and leagues.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Club Community Organisations, i.e. charities linked to professional clubs throughout England that offer a range of footballing opportunities and community initiatives.

Our success MEASURES:

- 100,000 more male players.
- 37% increase in the number of players within Disability Football.
- A significant increase in the percentage of people playing the type of football they want to play.



Priority 2:

# DELIVER EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS TO PLAY

Our 2028 ambition:

To ensure every woman and girl who wants to play football has an opportunity to do so in a safe and enjoyable setting and in a way that suits their lifestyle.

What we **HEARD**:

“The growth in the women’s and girls’ game has been brilliant to see – but there is more support needed for the game to be truly equal” Female parent, 35-40

The growth in the women’s and girls’ game over the last four years has been incredible. The amazing success of the Lionesses has super-charged the demand for women and girls to play and we have worked hard to meet it by providing more playing opportunities and programmes, across the country.

Participation by women and girls has doubled in the last six years – we’ve had nearly one million girls participate in our Biggest Ever Football Session for Girls in Schools (since 2020). We’ve now got the highest number of female players on record, and we have made huge progress in school provision for girls.

However, women’s and girls’ teams still only account for 12% of our total teams<sup>1</sup> and women and girls still do not have equal opportunities to play in all schools and communities. Simply put, the job is not yet done.

<sup>1</sup>Affiliated Team Analysis 2016-2024.

We know that we need to create more sessional football opportunities for women, so they can play in casual and flexible formats. We need to do more to ensure that the environment in football is safe, welcoming and inclusive. In addition, we need to make sure that facilities consider and prioritise female health and wellbeing, removing barriers for women and girls to participate.

We’ve made some excellent progress in schools over the past four years but again there is more to do to ensure that all schools provide the same opportunities for girls, as they do for boys – and that the pathway to clubs (both professional and grassroots) is much stronger.

We will:	Interventions
Sustain and grow more playing opportunities in schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver a new KS4 offer for secondary school, while maintaining the KS3 offers and deliver a new extra-curricular programme for primary schools.</li> <li>Work with the Government to deliver a sustainable school sport infrastructure to embed football in school life for girls.</li> <li>Retain the Girls Football Schools’ Partnership Network and establish a new club-to-school collaboration model that provides a connected pathway to clubs (Barclays WSL/WC, FA WNL and grassroots).</li> </ul>
Create more team playing opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to grow the number of girls teams and clubs that offer a full female pathway, ensuring access to high-quality competition opportunities.</li> <li>Grow the number of adult women’s teams playing 11v11, small-sided and alternative games (with a focus on those aged 35+) and deliver new and appealing league offers nationwide.</li> <li>Actively improve the transition of girls from youth to women’s open-age football.</li> </ul>
Extend and enhance sessional opportunities to play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grow the number of girls engaging in the youth pathway ‘Play Phase’ and embed ‘Wildcats’ in England Football Club Accreditation.</li> <li>Expand the delivery of the teenage programme ‘Squad’ and ensure all girls up to 16 years have a sessional football offer.</li> <li>Expand the casual football offer for adult women to include small-sided, walking football and fitness sessions nationwide.</li> </ul>
Deliver safe and inclusive environments for women and girls to thrive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the awareness of female health and wellbeing of players and for those delivering the grassroots game.</li> <li>Provide specific support for female players through different life stages to sustain participation.</li> <li>Continue to influence policies and standards across the grassroots landscape to support female participation.</li> </ul>

Our success **MEASURES**:

- 50% increase in the **number of female players**.
- 8,800 more **women and girls only** teams and sessions.
- 90% schools delivering **equal access** in curriculum and **equal opportunities** in extra-curricular.



Priority 3:

# BUILD MORE AND IMPROVE EXISTING FACILITIES

**Our 2028 ambition:**

To increase the quality and quantity of grassroots football pitches and facilities across England, to better meet the demand.



What we **HEARD**:

“ Pitches are improving and there are now some great ones in my area meaning fewer matches are postponed, but there are still many more which need work to get to a good standard ” Male player, 20-25

Over 5,000 new, quality grass pitches in the last four years have started changing the landscape of grassroots playing surfaces, with fewer and fewer games postponed due to adverse weather.

This has been made possible via £1bn of investment from The FA, Premier League and Government, into grassroots facilities since 2000, via the Football Foundation. These facilities include new and improved clubhouses.

However, taken as a whole, the national football facilities landscape is still nowhere near the standard that participants in our national sport deserve.

For example, two in three grass pitches are rated as ‘poor’ quality<sup>1</sup> and 2,000 more 3G pitches are needed to meet demand. 96% of local authorities do not have enough 3G pitches.

<sup>1</sup> Rated by PitchPower, a digital assessment tool run by the Football Foundation.  
<sup>2</sup> A Conversation About Our Game, Digital Survey.  
<sup>3</sup> Positive Football Environment Survey, March 2023.

We know<sup>2</sup> that the quality of grass pitches is the number one factor that would make the playing experience more enjoyable. It’s also one of the main reasons players drop out of the game.

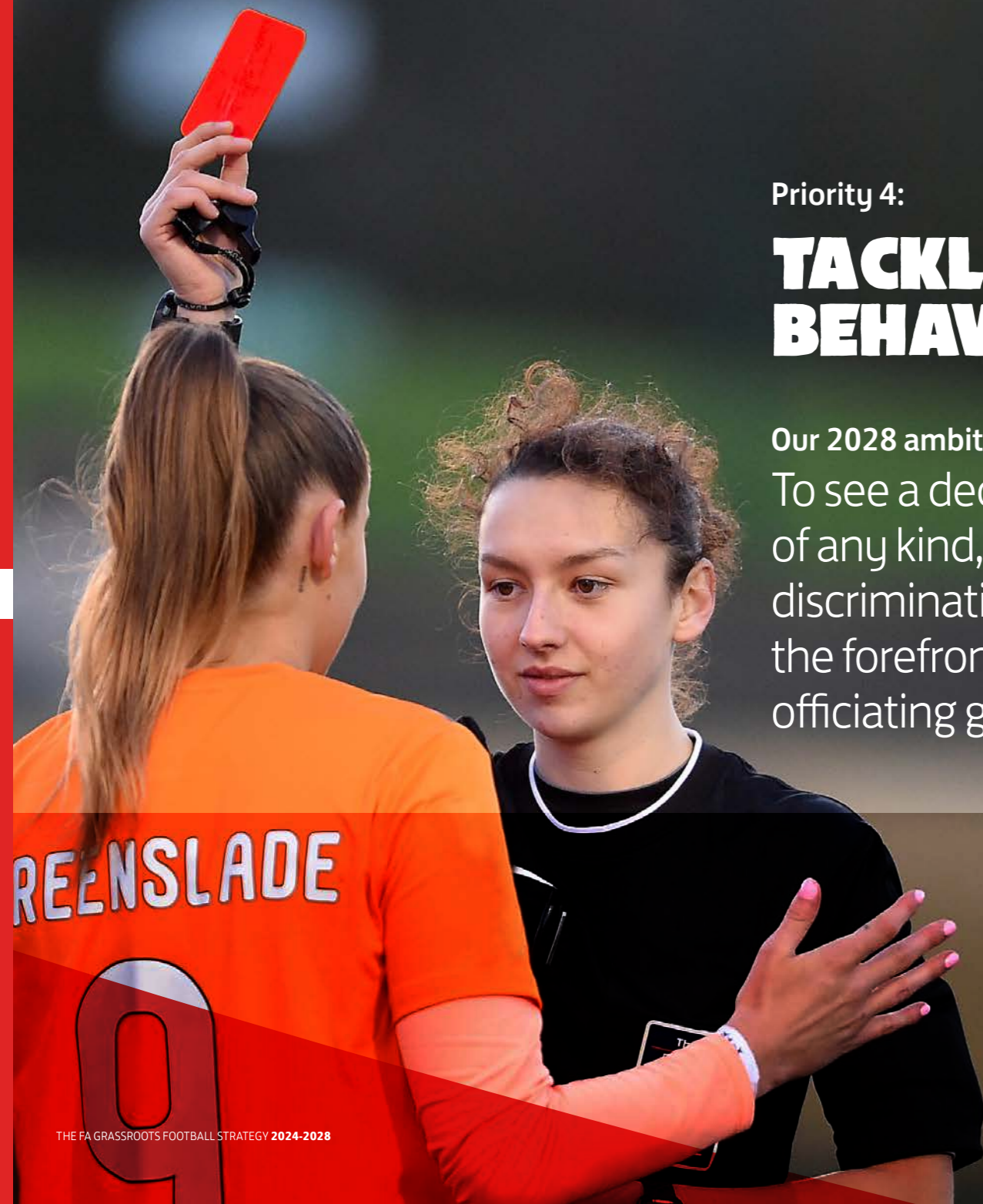
Dissatisfaction doesn’t just come from players. Club and league officials, volunteers and coaches all cite ‘facilities and/or pitch quality’ as the top reason for dissatisfaction with their football experience<sup>3</sup>. We also know that better quality pitches means more games can be played, supporting participation to grow.

That’s why we need to build on the great work we’ve done over the past four years to continue to transform the quality of existing grass pitches and build more, new 3G pitches. It’s also why we need to fund more inclusive and accessible facilities and ensure a keen focus on environmental sustainability.

We will:	Interventions
<b>Transform grass pitch quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide expert advice and recommendations to enhance every pitch.</li> <li>• Offer grants for pitch maintenance and equipment upgrades.</li> <li>• Empower groundskeepers with workshops, courses and an online community.</li> </ul>
<b>Build more 3G pitches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase funding to build more 3G pitches.</li> <li>• Build more multi-pitch ‘hub sites’ in places where demand is greatest.</li> <li>• Build new ‘Playzones’ to grow sessional football in urban areas.</li> </ul>
<b>Create inclusive and accessible facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set standards for new-build facilities, and support improvements to existing facilities, to provide better access for women and girls.</li> <li>• Provide more funding towards inclusive and accessible clubhouses.</li> <li>• Prioritise funding to help tackle inequalities and support communities with the greatest need.</li> </ul>
<b>Improve environmental sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide guidance and support to help improve environmental sustainability.</li> <li>• Equip facility providers with innovative tools and support to reduce and manage energy consumption.</li> <li>• Facilitate the adoption of renewable energy sources for long-term environmental and financial benefits.</li> </ul>

Our success **MEASURES**:

- 12,000 quality grass pitches.
- 300 more 3G pitches.



#### Priority 4:

# TACKLE POOR BEHAVIOUR

#### Our 2028 ambition:

To see a decline in cases of poor behaviour of any kind, and to increase reporting of discrimination, ensuring enjoyment is at the forefront of playing, volunteering or officiating grassroots football.

#### What we HEARD:

“ We all have a role to play in tackling poor behaviour. There is a collective responsibility on everyone in the game to manage their own behaviour, challenge others when they step out of line, and a responsibility on clubs, leagues and the County FA to punish those that don't meet the standard “ Male coach, 40-45

#### Football should be safe, fun and inclusive for everyone.

While most of our participants play the game and behave in the right way, we face a stubborn and enduring problem; some participants persist in poor behaviour, ruining the game for others.

Sadly, we know that the number of participants witnessing or experiencing discriminatory abuse is increasing. We also know that a significant number of cases go under-reported<sup>1</sup>. We must do more to encourage reporting and to build trust that when cases are reported, we will investigate robustly and hold perpetrators to account. Although only 30% of participants believe a report will lead to a successful charge, it's actually more than double that – 63%.

We know that participants want The FA to do more to tackle poor behaviour – on the pitch and on the sidelines. This means a

<sup>1</sup> 2CV independent research.

mixture of reviewing current sanctions, while looking at ways to celebrate good behaviour, such as providing awards and recognition.

It also means working seamlessly with the professional game as there's no question that behaviours in the elite game impact those at the grassroots level. Among other initiatives, this entails building on joint campaigns such as **'Love Football, Protect The Game'** to ensure a consistent and unified stance.

The challenge is clear, and so is our plan. Our efforts will focus on getting tougher with punishments, rewarding good behaviour and driving collective responsibility to change things for the better.

We've made a start, with initiatives including points deductions, prompter response to cases and trialling bodycams, but there is more to do along this ongoing journey.

We will:	Interventions
Apply tougher sanctions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and amplify sanctions including simplifying sin-bins, points deductions and heavier weighting towards offence history.</li> <li>Explore options for addressing parents' poor behaviour, including through education.</li> <li>Publicise sanctions more openly (e.g. points deductions for serious offences should be widely known to act as deterrent).</li> </ul>
Promote positive behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore and implement tangible ideas to reward positive behaviour.</li> <li>Celebrate positive behaviours (e.g. local and national awards).</li> <li>Develop and embed a long-term comms and campaign approach to amplify best practice, showcase the values of the game and provide clear messaging on behaviours.</li> </ul>
Drive collective responsibility across the game to raise standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower and support parents and coaches to set standards and lead by example.</li> <li>Launch a programme to elevate the responsibility of captains in ensuring positive behaviour on-pitch.</li> <li>Support referees to manage behaviours (e.g. referee coaching and development, greater support, and engagement with disciplinary process, roll-out of body cams).</li> </ul>

#### Our success MEASURES:

- An improvement in the percentages of **games where behaviour is 'good' or better.**
- Fewer teams breaching the **behaviour penalty point threshold.**



## Priority 5:

# DEVELOP A VALUED NETWORK OF VOLUNTEERS, COACHES AND REFEREES

## Our 2028 ambition:

To grow the number of grassroots volunteers, coaches and referees – and ensure they all feel valued and supported to fulfil their roles in the game.

What we **HEARD**:

“ Our volunteers put so much hard work and effort into their roles, and they have an unbelievable impact on people’s lives – it is so important that we support them to stay in the game ” Male Club Chair, 60-65

**Grassroots football would not exist without our invaluable volunteers, coaches and referees.**

This equates to one million volunteers, including 160,000 coaches and 37,000 referees.

Over the past four years we have worked hard to serve and support this crucial workforce. There is ongoing work to develop and strengthen our education and support for volunteers, coaches and referees.

We’ve achieved a lot; our national and County FA grassroots awards have provided an important opportunity to thank those who go above and beyond. We have also created a ‘The England Football Family’ free membership scheme to reward and celebrate grassroots volunteers with experiences and prizes – as well as seeing over 20,000 volunteers recognised by their communities and The FA.

However, 25% of volunteers – the people who run and administer clubs – tell us they do not feel valued<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Positive Football Environment Survey, March 2023.  
<sup>2</sup> A Conversation About Our Game.

Feeling under-appreciated is one of the reasons volunteers leave football. We also know that there is a perceived lack of accessible, affordable, quality education for volunteers, particularly for off-pitch roles<sup>3</sup>.

We must do more to support volunteers, to celebrate and reward the amazing work they do and ensure they have the learning and development they need to effectively fulfil their roles.

We also know that with the game continuing to grow, in the future we’ll need even more volunteers to support the game – that means recruiting more people but also retaining the excellent individuals who already give so much to the game.

We are starting from a solid foundation – there are many people who love volunteering in football. It’s our job in the next four years to ensure everyone feels that way.

To find out more about our work to support coaches, click [here](#). To find out more about our work to support referees, click [here](#). To find out more about our work to support volunteers, click [here](#).

We will:	Interventions
Grow the number of people running the game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with national education and football partners to support and deploy young people and adults into roles in clubs and leagues.</li> <li>Drive equal opportunities by supporting and growing the number of female coaches and referees.</li> <li>Lead a national recruitment drive to utilise the power of The FA’s reach for the benefit of local clubs.</li> </ul>
Improve the diversity of those running the game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure qualifications and support effectively meet the needs of coaches working in the female game.</li> <li>Support clubs and leagues to create sustainable plans and welcoming environments for all volunteers from all backgrounds.</li> <li>Deliver regular campaigns and activation projects that demonstrate volunteering in football is for everyone.</li> </ul>
Support those running the game to learn and develop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop role specific support and development plans for volunteers, coaches and referees.</li> <li>Provide training for those running FA Programmes.</li> <li>Provide appropriate access to FA qualifications to support regulatory need.</li> </ul>
Celebrate and reward those running the game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Showcase and raise the sense of value placed on voluntary roles.</li> <li>Expand and build our reward and recognition scheme reaching as many volunteers as possible.</li> <li>Deliver celebration events for all voluntary roles.</li> </ul>

Our success **MEASURES**:

- Increases in **the number of registered volunteers, coaches and referees** at least in line with participation.
- Improvements in the percentage of volunteers, coaches and referees who are **satisfied with their footballing experience**.

## Driver 1:

# SUPPORT THRIVING COMMUNITY CLUBS

## Our 2028 ambition:

To support a network of thriving community clubs to provide a brilliant football offer to their local communities, to grow in a sustainable way, and to be well-run.

## What we HEARD:

“It can be challenging, time-consuming and costly to run large grassroots clubs, more support is needed for the people in these roles” Female Club Secretary, 30-35

We have an exciting opportunity to support our grassroots football clubs to grow. Multi-team clubs are getting bigger, a trend we've seen over recent years.

By 2028 we expect over half of all football will be played in clubs with 20 or more teams. Their size means comprehensive football opportunities, but they can also act as local, and accessible places for people to meet, socialise and learn, creating community cohesion, inside and outside football.

Of course, smaller clubs still have a vital place within grassroots football, and we will continue to support them.

Nevertheless, this shift to larger clubs brings its challenges. In effect, these clubs are community businesses and if they are to prosper, they need access to the expertise on which such organisations are built. Such expertise is available through the England Football Accreditation programme. We want to support more clubs to get into the Accreditation programme to ensure they are growing and run in a successful and sustainable way.

Crucially, our support needs to focus on developing the leadership skills of the people who are running these clubs, and to support this, we will launch a new FA Leadership programme with exactly this aim in mind.

We also aim to equip clubs with the ability to maximise and evaluate their community impact, engaging local stakeholders and sourcing available investment in their areas. This is vital as the cost-of-living crisis continues to bite.

The FA is committed to supplying the tools and skills needed for clubs to thrive, enabling them to provide invaluable economic, health and social benefits to their local communities.

We will:	Interventions
Ensure clubs grow opportunities and provide a quality experience through England Football Accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhancing benefits and services that clubs value to drive up the number of England Football Accredited clubs.</li> <li>Support 1★, 2★ and 3★ England Football Accredited clubs to increase female and disability provision, as well as supporting the development of coaches, referees and volunteers.</li> <li>Continue to support 1★ and smaller clubs in providing football opportunities in both rural and urban areas.</li> </ul>
Help clubs to become more sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the finance and business acumen in clubs by providing a range of tools and education.</li> <li>Enable more clubs to build and take ownership of facilities, such as 3Gs, grass pitches and clubhouses.</li> <li>Support clubs in creating commercial and sponsorship opportunities.</li> </ul>
Support the current and future generation of club leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver a bespoke club leadership programme recognising their unique responsibilities and opportunities.</li> <li>Provide club leaders with EDI training to support them in building inclusive environments.</li> <li>Identify, support and develop the club leaders of the future aligned to the volunteering programme.</li> </ul>
Equip clubs to add value to their local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support clubs to maximise and demonstrate their social and economic impact.</li> <li>Support clubs to provide mental health signposting support for their members and communities.</li> <li>Support clubs to create wider community opportunities if they choose to do so and link them with other community organisations where relevant i.e. NHS forums, policing and local refugee groups.</li> </ul>

## Our success MEASURES:

- 1,000 thriving 3★ community clubs.
- Sustain the percentage of teams playing within an England Football Accredited club in line with growth in participation.

Must join local club!!

Driver 2:

# CONNECT AND SERVE PARTICIPANTS

Our 2028 ambition:

To improve our digital offering and deliver new online services which are personalised, easy to access and help participants to fulfil their roles and find new opportunities.



What we **HEARD**:

“The FA’s digital tools and systems are improving. The next step is to connect them all up – for example, I want to be able to navigate seamlessly between Club Portal and the relevant pages of Full-Time”

Male Club Secretary, 50-55

Though football is our national game, grassroots participants have told us that they lack meaningful connections to The FA, County FAs and fundamentally, to each other.

The game is brimming with opportunities to play, volunteer, and learn, but it’s not always easy for people to find them. We need to do more to connect people, particularly those new to the game, to the opportunities that are right for them.

Part of this is about creating a digital hub where we can surface all information related to grassroots football, whether it’s about coaching, playing, volunteering, refereeing, learning, or simply connecting with one another. It’s also about improving how we communicate. By sharing the right information in the right way at the right time, we can connect more people more meaningfully into the game.

Over the past four years, we have delivered game-changing digital tools to help the grassroots community play and run the

game. We need to build on this success, developing new features that continue to ease the administrative burden on volunteers. We also need to better connect our existing systems and platforms, making them more intuitive for users to navigate.

Behind the scenes, we’ll ensure that however and whenever people reach out to us, they can expect the same high-quality standard across the board.

We are also committed to ‘safety by design,’ and we’ll continue to prioritise participants’ (particularly children’s) safety in our digital products. To read about our wider safeguarding work, click [here](#).

With support from County FAs and other partners, we’ll look at digital opportunities that do more to serve the game and enhance the football experience for all.

We will:	Interventions
Make it easier to find information and opportunities to play, volunteer and learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a digital ‘one stop shop’ for all useful information on grassroots football, by role or interest.</li> <li>Make the online search tool ‘Find Football’ the no. 1 place to find opportunities to play and volunteer in football (including small-sided providers).</li> <li>Improve the ability of our participants to book pitches and places to play that suit them.</li> </ul>
Improve our customer service and communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide clear, timely and tailored communications so that participants receive the right information, at the right time and in the right way.</li> <li>Create and implement a high standard of customer service that participants can expect when contacting or working with The FA, County FAs or funded partners.</li> <li>Improve our overall communications and social media presence to both showcase the brilliance of the grassroots game, but also act as a useful information tool.</li> </ul>
Develop our digital tools to make running the game easier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect all our apps and platforms behind a universal log-in, to provide a seamless user experience.</li> <li>Ensure our apps and systems are developed to accommodate sessional football opportunities.</li> <li>Consider future opportunities to improve the experience of those administering and engaging in the game.</li> </ul>
Explore digital opportunities to enhance the football experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore opportunities with partners to improve the experience of playing, volunteering and running the game (e.g. personalised playing stats in Matchday app, sharable videos of game play).</li> </ul>

Our success **MEASURES**:

- Highest ever percentage of users agreeing that **FA grassroots digital tools are ‘good’ or better**.
- 70% improvement in **click-through rates on FA emails**.



Driver 3:

# PROGRESS THE GAME'S GOVERNANCE

Our 2028 ambition:

To better serve all football participants through the highest governance standards, at all levels in the grassroots game.

What we HEARD:

“ There are some big challenges facing grassroots football – making sure it is safe and well run is the most important of them all ” Female League Chair, 40-45

Ensuring grassroots football is run in the right way is non-negotiable. We must ensure it is safe, financially robust, and well governed at all levels.

To help achieve high-quality governance processes and procedures, The FA has adopted the Code of Governance for sport and all 50 County FAs are currently working towards mandatory compliance with this code by June 2025.

Meanwhile, all 50 County FAs, plus ESFA and ISFA<sup>1</sup>, have continued to demonstrate through independent assessments, that they meet and, in many cases, exceed The FA's Safeguarding 365 Standard.

Our equality, diversity and inclusion work continues to be a key area of focus and there are numerous goals we want to achieve. For example, increasing the percentage of women and people from historically under-represented groups operating at management and Board levels

<sup>1</sup> English Schools' Football Association and Independent Schools' Football Association

across the grassroots landscape. We're heading in the right direction, but there is more to do.

In addition, research suggests discrimination is under-reported and so we are reviewing the requirements of the Equality Standard for Sport, to ensure it includes wide-ranging tactics to tackle discrimination.

To read more about our equality, diversity and inclusion work, click [here](#).

All of this is underpinned by a piece of work to look at the future role and function of County FAs, to ensure that we have the most effective and optimum model in place to best serve football's participants locally.

Our 'A Conversation About Our Game' consultation also left us in no doubt about the financial pressure the grassroots game faces. A clear objective of ours is to ensure the financial robustness of the grassroots game to 2028 and beyond.

We will:	Interventions
Promote the highest levels of governance across the grassroots network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support all County FAs and Education Partners to achieve compliance – and remain compliant – with The FA's Code of Governance and Equality Standard.</li> <li>Complete a full review of the league role, function, identity and structure to support them in being modern, progressive and customer-centric organisations, including the implementation of a league licensing programme.</li> <li>Explore and prioritise governance risks with a particular focus on safeguarding and leadership in open-age clubs.</li> </ul>
Evolve local Football Associations focused on supporting and developing football For All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete a full review – with the County FAs – of the future role, function, identity and structure of County FAs and make recommendations via the County Review.</li> <li>Develop a new agreed operating model for County FAs.</li> <li>Ensure County FAs have strategies and operational plans that align with The FA Grassroots Football Strategy framework (see the graphic on page 11).</li> </ul>
Support the grassroots game to be financially robust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the reinvestment of surplus funds held by County FAs, Education Partners and leagues to maximise funding into the grassroots game.</li> <li>Explore partnership opportunities that benefit the football network by seeking ways to bring in additional investment and improve the exposure and relevance of the County FAs.</li> <li>Provide the game with ongoing support via the <a href="#">Cost-of-Living Resource Hub</a>.</li> </ul>
Support the game to be safe and well-run	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drive consistent standards, culture and practice, e.g., The FA's Safeguarding 365 and Anti-Discrimination Standards.</li> <li>Create systems which enable County FAs to easily connect low-level safeguarding concerns, discipline cases and club visit data to identify issues and manage cases.</li> <li>Engage private coaching providers to support and drive standards and quality.</li> </ul>

Our success MEASURES:

- All County FAs, plus EFSA and ISFA<sup>1</sup>, compliant with Code of Governance, Equality Standard and Safeguarding 365 Standard.

# OUR VALUED PARTNERS

Delivering this strategy will require continued, strong collaboration with our valued partners who work across the grassroots game.

## The County FAs

There are 50 County Football Associations (County FAs), as shown alongside.

46 County FAs are geographically-based, including three islands (Isle of Man FA, Guernsey FA, and Jersey FA). Four are non-geographically based (Amateur Football Alliance, Army FA, Royal Navy FA, and Royal Air Force FA).

Each County FA is responsible for supporting delivery of the game and leading the strategic development of the game in their local area. This includes promoting participation; ensuring there are accessible facilities across all formats; providing equal opportunities to play and creating a fun and safe environment for all. They also ensure local coaches, referees and volunteers are well supported to meet the needs of the game. Funding is received centrally from The FA, as well as driving their own revenue streams through local commercial opportunities. County FAs, like us, are not-for-profit and all surplus money generated is reinvested back into football.

County FAs also govern the game by affiliating clubs, sanctioning leagues, registering referees, running local cup competitions, and implementing our Rules and Regulations within their local area. They also play a critical role in ensuring safeguarding compliance is adhered to by all stakeholders within the game.

This strategy has been developed in collaboration with the County FA network, giving them the opportunity to shape our national direction using their local knowledge. County FAs have adopted the same strategy framework and will be sharing our strategic priorities over this four-year period to ensure we meet the needs of the game locally. In addition, their measures of success also align with the national measures, ensuring we collaboratively deliver the priorities within this strategy and inspire positive change through football. Together we will unite communities, tackle inequalities and improve the health of the nation.

The respective County FA contact details can be accessed [here](#).





# OUR VALUED PARTNERS

## (CONTINUED)

Although The FA and County FAs lead the way – nationally and locally – the development of grassroots football would be impossible without external partner support.

For example, in the educational world, we rely on the knowledge and reach of national bodies such as the English Schools Football Association (ESFA), the Independent Schools Football Association (ISFA), the Association of Colleges (AoC) and British Universities & Colleges Sport (BUCS).

To reach some audiences and deliver engaging programmes, we also need the expertise of organisations such as Wheelchair Football Association, the Activity Alliance, Cerebral Palsy Sport and Special Olympics UK, to name but four.

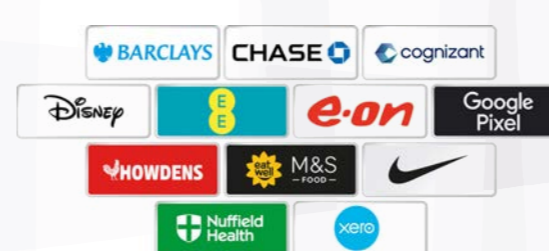
Our inclusion initiatives could also not run without partners such as Kick It Out and others you'll see listed opposite.

We also need and are grateful for the financial input of organisations such as Sport England, FIFA and UEFA. In addition, commercial partnerships provide publicity, customer engagement and funding that amplifies the impact of many of our programmes – for example from world-leading companies such as Nike and Disney.

Finally, there is our important relationship with the Football Foundation, football's own grant-funding charity, primarily focused on improving facilities and pitches. Alongside the Premier League and Government, we fund the Foundation, but rely on their expertise to ensure grants go where they are most needed. Our aim to ensure 12,000 quality grass pitches and 300 more 3G pitches by 2028 will be delivered via the Foundation.

### Commercial partners:

Support from the business community is vital to expand the scope of key programmes:



### National delivery partners:

The game's infrastructure and general development is supported by:



### Educational delivery partners:

Within the education sector, grassroots football would not happen without:



### Disability delivery partners:

Key to providing opportunities for people who are disabled to play football are:



### Inclusion delivery partners:

To ensure grassroots football is accessible to everyone and is used to combat societal issues, we work with:







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