

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Women and Equalities Committee
Committee Office,
House of Commons,
Palace of Westminster,
SW1A 0AA



20th of October 2023

Dear Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP,

We are very proud of the continued growth of women's and girls' football. As part of our 2016-2020 Game Plan for Growth Strategy, we set ourselves targets to double both women's and girls' participation and the number of attendees at professional women's football matches. We achieved both of those targets and are continuing that growth trajectory and, since winning EURO2021, an incredible 2.4m more women and girls have started playing football in England.

As you know, we are currently transitioning the professional leagues (Women's Super League and Women's Championship) from the FA to a new club-led entity (NewCo). The Governance of NewCo will have the athlete at its centre, and we are passionate about putting female athlete health first.

Please find our written response below to the letter addressed to Mark Bullingham on the 25th of September 2023.

1. Has the FA accepted Karen Carney's recommendation on an FA funded unit to look at issues affecting female footballers and, if so, when will it be established and what will be its priority research areas?

The newly established company responsible for managing the top two tiers of women's football (WSL and WC) will create a dedicated central research unit focused on player health, injury prevention and management.

Currently, The FA is conducting its own research on elite female athletes, with a specific focus on female health. In collaboration with Nottingham Trent University, we have initiated a new research project on ACL injuries, and have recently concluded a comprehensive two-year study on injuries among elite female footballers.

2. Whether the FA has considered the potential merits of a cross-sports female sports science research unit and, if so, have you had discussions with other governing bodies on this?

The requirements of female sports differ widely, with varying types of injuries, performance demands and strategies for managing elite female athletes. Currently, our focus is on expanding our own pool of research, with the hope of addressing and better understanding the



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issues and challenges within elite women's football. We will continue to engage to exchange knowledge and share learning with other sports on an informal basis.

3. What is the FA's guidance and policy, from the elite level of coaches and medical staff working with the Lionesses to grassroots girls' and women's football, on menstrual monitoring and tailored training programmes?

For the past three years, we have been offering menstrual cycle guidance to our senior England Women's team. We are also currently working with FIFA on making a compulsory part of professional contracts globally the requirement for clubs to provide leave and support for athletes requiring it due to menstruation and associated symptoms.

In other policy areas, we have also conducted research on bra fittings and women's shoe development; our physical conditioning department oversees all women's teams and collaborates closely with coaching in preparing our England senior and age group teams.

4. What efforts has the FA made to share and learn from best practice in female health across sports?

We want to ensure that football is a welcoming and supportive environment for all and women and girls to thrive. Earlier this year, we conducted a research study into the state of play regarding the support and education around female health in the grassroots game.

As part of this study, the FA organised a number of one-hour online group discussions to discuss topics such as menstrual cycle, pelvic floor, breast health, life stages (e.g. puberty, pregnancy, menopause), equipment, facilities and culture.

At the professional game level, we have recently initiated a collaborative project with our external partner, the WellHQ, renowned for their extensive knowledge and expertise in Olympic, Paralympic, and Professional sports, particularly in the realm of female athlete health.

As the national governing body for football, we also informally engage with other sports bodies to share and discuss cross-sports issues.

5. To what extent is female health built into the FA's coaching qualifications? Can you set out what is covered at different levels of coaching?

We are constantly working on improving and adding content around female health to our qualifications. This season, following an exhaustive research and insights endeavor named 'State of Play' within the Women's Professional Game (WPG), involving active participation from players and staff (with 200+ individuals engaged in surveys and focus groups), we have tailored a specialized online learning program for WPG club staff. This initiative, titled FootballHER, comprises six modules addressing crucial topics pertinent to female footballers:

1. Women Belonging in Football
2. The Menstrual Cycle and Performance
3. Kit Designed for Female Bodies

4. Nutritional Considerations for Active Women
5. Injury Risk and Resilience
6. Bladders, Bowels, and Pelvic Health
7. Fertility, Pregnancy, and Postnatal Care
8. Creating Environments Where Women Can Thrive

Each module incorporates references to research papers, valuable links to books, websites, and noteworthy researchers in the field. Scheduled to commence in mid-October, this program will continue throughout the season and beyond, with the aim of ensuring that all staff members within the WPG participate in this comprehensive learning experience.

Additionally, we are in the process of developing a Female Athlete Health Lead course, due to launch within the next 2-3 months. This course specifically targets the nominated FAH leads in each WSL and WC club, further enhancing our commitment to promoting female athlete health and well-being across the board.

We also run CPD programmes that include female health and are delivered at bespoke events for coaches across the game.

6. What is the FA's guidance and policy, across all levels of football, on choice of apparel for girls and women playing football?

This season we have stopped checking for short 'clashes' in our kit management processes across the Women's Professional Game (WPG). This means clubs are free to select any shorts they wish for their kits and this is supported by PGMOL. The majority of WPG clubs are now choosing not to wear white shorts, and, in many cases, this means women's teams wearing different colour shorts to those worn by their respective men's teams.

For England teams, informal guidance is provided around sports bras, recovery tights and performance-enhancing apparel.

IFAB's players' equipment policy applies to all levels of English grassroots football, and, as such, there is currently no specific policy regarding apparel for women and girls.

7. Has the FA taken any steps to incentivise sportswear companies and retailers to market a wider range of female-specific football apparel, including boots designed for female feet?

We work closely with Nike, our supplier of England kit, and in 2019 introduced our first England kit specifically designed for the women's team – with most recent developments around the avoidance of white shorts and the development of leak proof shorts.

In general, however, sportswear companies define their own products based on their own research and insights, business models, and demand. We are aware that the committee has also reached out to Nike for information, and they will be best placed to update you on their latest position.

Kind regards,

Sue Campbell

FA Director of Women's Football