

# Women in Football – Written evidence (NPS0077)

## ABOUT WOMEN IN FOOTBALL

1. Women in Football is the leading NGO dedicated to supporting, celebrating and championing women in the game. We are a network of over 4,500 women, men and non-binary people committed to driving football forward and transforming the industry for the better. Our vision is a football industry which is accessible to all, and in which everyone can thrive and reach their full potential. We empower people and organisations with the knowledge, expertise and collective support to drive the change we want to see.
2. We have a strong focus on women who work in the game, and our regular member engagement via courses, events and surveys enables us to speak credibly for them.

## OUR EVIDENCE

3. Given the nature of our vision, mission and work, we have focussed on the following questions, and in the context of football:

*6. How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?*

*10. Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?*

## GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN FOOTBALL

4. In spring 2020, we undertook a survey of our members to understand their experiences of working in football:
  - 81% 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they've faced gender stereotyping in their career
  - Only 45% believe that the football sector is one where women can excel (agree and strongly agree)
  - Only 14% believe that women are encouraged to forge pathways to the highest careers in football (agree and strongly agree)
  - 66% of respondents say that they have personally experienced some form of gender discrimination within the footballing workplace.
  - 34% have witnessed it.
  - Only 12% have reported it.

There was also some better news:

- 48% of respondents think incidences of discrimination have decreased over the course of their career – but 16% think it has increased. It looks like the dial is shifting - but slowly.
- 82% feel supported by their co-workers (agree/strongly agree)

- 78% agree or strongly agree that they feel supported by their colleagues in the workplace
  - 66% feel supported by their employer (agree/strongly agree)
  - 59% feel that their organisation celebrates female talent (agree/strongly agree)
5. These findings, backed up by our experience from interacting with our members at our online courses, webinars, round tables and events, show an interesting picture. Football is changing, but the rate of change is slow and real problems for women continue to exist.
  6. It is important to bear in mind the impact of intersectionality, which can lead to other discriminations against women aside from on the grounds of their gender. The Black Lives Matter events of 2020 acted as a wake-up call to football, and in some ways it has responded positively. However, football's strategic approach to equality, diversity and inclusion must take full account of the challenges of intersectionality, recognising that women and non-binary people can suffer discrimination and marginalisation within the game due to others factors in addition to gender.
  7. THE DIVERSITY OF THE FOOTBALL WORKFORCE
  8. In order to draw up proper strategies to tackle football's diversity problems, it is necessary to have good base data. Unfortunately, no data about the football workforce as a whole exists in the public domain (or, as far as we are aware, privately). Individual organisations may doubtless hold their own data on their workforce, but do not publish it. It is not clear whether The FA's Football Leadership Diversity Code will require clubs to publish this data. Even if it does, clubs are only one employer sector of the football industry (albeit a key one).
  9. Our experience as the leading voice advocating for women in football, and one of the largest networks in the game with over 4,500 members, is that women undertake every role in the game. We can name several female board members and C-Suite executives, and women in management and leadership positions throughout the game. However, there are not enough of them in leadership positions, and they are under-represented in certain key functions such as coaching and sports science and medicine - although without proper data, it is difficult to know empirically where they are working and what they are doing, and where they are under- and over-represented.

**Recommendation:** UK Government to explore with football ways to establish high quality football workforce data, to be placed into the public domain.

## THE LEADERSHIP OF FOOTBALL

10. To deliver the football we all want to see, change must start at the top. In 2019, leading sports law practice Farrer & Co published research which showed that only 3% of professional sports clubs achieved 30% female board representation, and 53% of professional clubs had no women on

their board (<https://www.farrer.co.uk/clients-and-sectors/not-for-profit/sport/women-in-sport-levelling-the-playing-field/>). Our experience suggests that these figures will not have substantially changed in the two years since the report's publication.

11. By contrast, according to Sport England, women now make up an average of 40% of board members of publicly funded sports bodies. We infer this is due to the success of A Code for Sports Governance in requiring funded organisations to adopt a target of at least 30% of each gender on their board. Most professional football clubs do not of course receive public money, and hence are not subject to the Code. On the question of diversity of race and colour at board level, the Code has been less successful and we welcome the government's review of this.
12. The introduction of The FA's Code of Governance for County Football Associations, which we welcome, will introduce greater diversity onto the boards of the County FAs. This will increasingly make private clubs look like outliers when it comes to board diversity.

**Recommendation:** UK Government and the football authorities to set a road map to achieve greater board diversity in all football organisations.

#### MAKING CHANGE

13. We welcome the commitment of many clubs to The FA's Football Leadership Diversity Code ('FLD Code'). On gender, this Code requires 30% of new hires in senior leadership and team operations to be female, alongside other targets. If clubs do not meet these targets, they must explain on an annual basis why. The Code also sets out helpful practical steps that clubs can take with regard to their recruitment practices.
14. We understand that the FLD Code is regarded by many as a first step, and that football is on a journey, and we empathise with the view that transformational change takes time and that what is right to ask for at Stage One may not be the ultimate desired destination. However, the only 'sanction' for failure to deliver on commitment to the Code is having to explain why. While transparency can be a powerful tool in driving organisational change, the sector may need more 'carrot' and more 'stick' in order to change.
15. Critically, the sector needs help in order to change. Our experience is that many football organisations understand the case for diversity but often need help to become truly diverse, equal and inclusive organisations.

#### **Recommendations:**

(A) The football authorities to formalise:

- (i) a vision of how football should be, with regard to diversity, equality and inclusion, in five years, and

(ii) a strategy for how they will help football to get there. Not all football organisations can achieve what needs to be achieved on their own resources.

(B) A national plan for sport and recreation should include detailed requirements and/or recommendations regarding the diversity of the leadership and workforce of sport. If this is done, the national plan would become one of the key drivers of the change we seek. By setting objectives at national level, it would give sport and the national governing bodies a clear framework within which to work.

16. As Women in Football, we will not cease our activity to help the game with this agenda, and we are unrolling new corporate membership and consultancy support packages to do exactly this. However, we receive no funding from any football governing body. All our work is funded by what we raise through our own efforts and projects. This is not a plea for funding, but we consider that football needs to discuss and agree the importance it places on ensuring it is truly diverse and inclusive with regard to gender (and other diversity characteristics), and what it is prepared to commit to in order to get there.

*29 January 2021*