

Written evidence submitted by the Football Association

The FA: Inquiry into impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors

June 2020

About The FA

1. The FA is the not-for-profit national governing body of football in England, which in recent years has given over £180m back into the game annually. It grows participation, promotes diversity and regulates the sport for everyone to enjoy.
2. Twelve million players of all ages, approximately 400,000 volunteers, over 200,000 coaches all qualified within the last decade, and over 27,000 qualified referees help The FA keep the grassroots game going.
3. The FA runs 28 England teams, across men's women's, youth and disability football, utilising the world-class facilities of Wembley Stadium and St. George's Park. It has oversight of football at every level and works to ensure that the 11.8 million people who play football in England have a positive and safe experience of doing so.

Question 1: What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

1. Football across England stopped at all levels of the game in March. Thousands of clubs have been unable to complete their league season and millions of recreational footballers across the country have been unable to play.
2. The FA has worked with stakeholders across the football pyramid to conclude the 2019-20 season in the most appropriate way possible. The primary concern has and always will be for the safety and welfare of players, staff, officials, volunteers, supporters and clubs.
3. The Premier League and EFL Championship are hoping to complete their seasons behind closed doors with a compressed schedule, that kicked off on 17th June.
4. League One and League Two have ended their seasons, using points-per-game to determine final table positions with play-offs to follow.
5. The National League's Steps 1 and 2 (National League and National League North and South) have also finished their seasons on a points-per-game basis and are planning to hold play-offs to determine the final promotion places.
6. While The FA has worked collaboratively with the Premier League and EFL on considerations for their competitions, the areas of the game which are supported directly by The FA are the National League System (NLS), the women's football pyramid, the wider grassroots game and FA competitions.
7. **NLS:** Steps three to seven of the National League System (NLS) have seen their seasons brought to an end, with all results so far this season expunged. This will mean no promotion or relegation of

clubs between NLS steps three to seven, and no promotion to NLS step two. The various options for ending the season were carefully considered by a committee of FA Council comprising representatives from across the relevant leagues. A recommendation was then made to the FA Council which was supported by the FA Board. The FA Council considered the issues in detail and ultimately determined the matter on the 9th April. It was important for clubs that a quick decision was made to mitigate significant financial uncertainty. Some clubs had as many as 16 matches remaining, which posed significant challenges regarding scheduling fixtures, and the expiry dates of players' contracts also posed considerable problems. As an appendix, members of the Committee can read a detailed explanation of the decision-making process by The FA's head of National League System Laurence Jones [here](#) and also read FA CEO Mark Bullingham's letter to Chair Julian Knight MP on the decision-making process [here](#). The decision of the FA Council to end the season with no promotion and relegation was subject to a legal challenge brought by a club in Step 3. An independent panel of three arbitrators (chaired by Lord Dyson) determined that the decision of the FA Council was lawful.

8. **Women's Football:** The Barclays FA Women's Super League and FA Women's Championship, as well as the leagues within tiers three to seven, have reached a consensus to bring the season to an immediate end. In steps 3-7 all results were expunged, meaning no promotion or relegation of clubs, while the WSL and WC chose to finish their leagues on a points-per-game basis with relegation and promotion between the divisions. Agreement has also been reached to end the Regional Talent Clubs season, which was due to conclude in April 2020. The decision to conclude the Barclays FA Women's Super League and FA Women's Championship was taken following extensive consultation with the clubs and the boards.
9. **Grassroots' Football:** All grassroots football was concluded for the 2019-20 season. This allowed the game to move forward and to commence planning for next season. Our 50 County Football Associations (CFAs) – that govern and oversee the game at a local level – supported grassroots leagues to determine how they should close out their current competitions. [Updated grassroots guidance](#) has now been issued in light of relaxed government Covid-19 restrictions.
10. **FA Competitions:** The 2019-20 Emirates FA Cup will be completed behind closed doors, kicking off on 27th June. The final will take place at Wembley Stadium on 1st August. The Emirates FA Cup Final will be renamed this year to be the Heads Up FA Cup to raise awareness of mental health issues that have become even more prevalent in lockdown. The Women's FA Cup is planned to be rescheduled later in the year.
11. With competitions stopping or pausing, there has been an immediate and significant financial impact for The FA. The cancellation of England internationals and the remaining Women's Super League matches, Emirates FA Cup matches and Wembley events have a significant impact on the business. Meanwhile, The FA will also no longer benefit from Wembley's concert programme over summer 2021 as the Euros have been delayed by one year.
12. The immediate impact of these changes means a loss in revenue for The FA of at least £60m. The FA Board has approved an annual budget cut of £75m for the next four years to offset potential losses of up to £300m.
13. Since lockdown began, all FA employees earning £50,000 or more per annum have taken a temporary pay reduction of 7.5 per cent; the Senior Management team have taken a 15 per cent reduction; and the highest earners in the organisation have taken a 30 per cent reduction. The FA has also utilised the employee furlough scheme; furloughing has been deployed prudently, largely

affecting individuals such as events staff and football coaches, who were unable to carry out even a modified version of their responsibilities during lockdown.

Question 2: How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

14. The FA would like to recognise the efforts of DCMS staff, who have kept lines of communication open, responded to questions and kept the sector up to date with the latest relevant information.
15. The FA appreciates the support we have received from the Government and the Bank of England in applying and being approved for the Covid Corporate Financing Facility (CCFF) scheme.
16. Also, the financial support package from Sport England to grassroots clubs has been a welcome initiative.
17. The FA found the Chancellor's fiscal package, and the various measures of support within it, to be very important to help stymie the short-term economic problems within the sector. There were some issues with clubs attempting to access business loans, but DCMS colleagues were quick to filter these problems through and support solutions.

Question 3: What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

18. The long-term impacts of Covid-19 will be significant for football, both for the professional, semi-professional and grassroots game.
19. Revenue streams have collapsed across the game with the Premier League, EFL, WSL, National League, National League System, and grassroots all losing a very high proportion of their revenue.
20. Lower down the pyramid, nearly all income will have stopped as smaller clubs depend heavily on the ecosystem of paying spectator ticket sales, catering, bar facilities, merchandise, as well as player subscriptions, pitch hire, non-event income and so on.
21. The most important prerequisite to football's survival was that the elite game could resume playing and retain enough broadcasting revenue to allow solidarity flows to continue, even if at reduced levels.
22. The Government's efforts in supporting elite sport to restart - thereby allowing broadcasting contracts to be completed - has provided football with the opportunity to support itself. The Secretary of State made it clear that a condition of the resumption of play was that the funding released "benefits the entire football family". Losses will be minimised if the football season can be completed in full and solidarity mechanisms are being discussed with the Premier League now that the revenue picture for this season is becoming clearer.
23. Lower down the pyramid, it is essential that National League System clubs are supported to restart as soon as possible, as the longer the delay the greater the risk of insolvency. These small businesses have partaken in the support mechanisms on offer from the Treasury, such as the furlough scheme and applying for grants, but like any other entertainment or hospitality small

business which relies on paying customers, once those support mechanisms start to be taken away the financial situation could become dire very quickly.

24. Within the grassroots game, The FA has already been working with County FAs to ensure that they are supported until the scheduled start of the new season, by conducting a full audit of their financial positions and providing over £750,000 of support. The FA will be conducting additional analysis when it becomes clearer when the actual season start might be.
25. In May, The FA, The Premier League and the Football Foundation launched the Pitch Preparation Fund to provide clubs with grant funding to ready their pitches for the return of football. The £7million scheme has provided funding for 2,902 clubs and organisations which will allow 9,588 football pitches to be made match-fit, benefiting 33,153 football teams in the grassroots, non-League and women's game, as well as Welsh Cymru Premier League. This will assist in the smooth return of grassroots football when it is safe to do so.
26. The FA, Premier League and Football Foundation have also now created a new £1.69m Club Preparation Fund for clubs needing to modify their facilities ahead of the new season in order to promote good hygiene; keep facilities and equipment clean; and/or maintain social distancing and avoid congestion. This will be in the form of a grant available to clubs operating a clubhouse building within Steps 1-6 of the National League, Women's Pyramid and Welsh Premier League.
27. Regarding future government intervention, it should be noted that EFL Leagues 1 and 2, the National League System and Steps 1 to 7 of the women's pyramid would not be sustainable if they had to play behind closed doors as they are much more dependent on matchday income than the Premier League or Championship. For most clubs in the football pyramid, playing behind closed doors is simply not a viable financial option, and a number of spectators are needed. However, at these levels of the game a return to matches with crowds may be more viable than at the elite men's level, with small crowds operating well within ground capacity. It would be welcome if the Government could consider a phased return to socially distanced crowds if full crowds are not viable for the start of the new football season.
28. While the financial implications of not returning to play are considerable, football's foremost concern is safety.
29. As more of the game returns, football will play a pivotal role for many as they try to return to "normal". The FA, in coordination with the Government, the other football authorities and other sports, is developing a Return to Play strategy to safely enable people to physically engage with the game again.
30. While the resumption of the professional game will give a boost to many, the nearly 12 million people returning to play the grassroots game will also be vital to finding a new normality. The FA's recently published [report](#) looking at the economic and social value of playing grassroots football has shown that playing the game is worth over £10bn annually and saves the NHS over £43 million per year through reduced GP visits alone. The health of the sports sector will be critical during this delicate post-lockdown period; emerging from coronavirus, maintaining good physical and mental health will take on even greater significance and football is ready to play its part in that.
31. Women and girls' participation in team sport has increased considerably over the last four years, due to immense efforts by NGBs and the sector at large to raise the profile of female sports and attract players. Unfortunately, there is a real risk that a lot of this progress could be lost as a

result of Covid-19 and the lockdown; press coverage of women's sport has declined severely, and resource-draining return-to-play and hygiene protocols have placed a disproportionate burden on women's sports. Research conducted by Sport England shows that prior to the pandemic, activity levels were at a record high, and this was being driven by a rise in female participation, but initial studies have shown that 42% of women have experienced a drop in activity levels, and also that women are doing more housework and childcare during lockdown, whilst often trying to juggle fulltime work as well. Mental health has become an even greater challenge during this period. It's critical that female team sports are invested in and supported by both government and sporting bodies so that female sports continue to be promoted and continue to offer an attractive experience to women and girls (please see section 39 for next steps The FA is taking in this area).

32. Looking to the future of the grassroots game, The FA looks forward to continuing its partnership with the Government to improve the provision of quality facilities which is fundamental to making football accessible and will contribute greatly to the health and wellbeing of the whole nation. The FA welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement to invest in grassroots football facilities during the last election and the organisation will be focusing on working with colleagues in DCMS and across government to deliver on this pledge in a way that offers maximum benefits for the most deprived areas of the country.

Question 4: What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

33. Football, like all sectors in the wake of Covid-19, will no doubt review its business models and how it operates. A club/league/body's ability to recover is variably dependent on its general financial health, government support, and how/when football at the levels resumes. This reality has meant that the pandemic, and the disruption of the 2019/20 season, has posed a considerable challenge to the sector and the full extent of the damage remains to be seen.
34. Despite this disruption, the football sector's response to the crisis – at every level – is testament to the integral place that clubs hold at the heart of communities. The activity of the grassroots game during this difficult time has been nothing short of remarkable. In the face of financial uncertainty and the disappointment of months without play, grassroots clubs and leagues have come together to provide help and support to the NHS and the wider local community. The FA commends their response. This activity has included setting up food banks, providing and delivering hot meals, delivering facemasks, donating medical supplies, donating funds to the NHS, and a whole range of other enterprising initiatives, as well as fun online activities to keep fans' spirits up.
35. Wembley Stadium has also been put to good use during the crisis, turning into a training centre for the London Ambulance and Fire Brigade with staff taking part in mock training exercises in the stadium's internal road networks. The stadium's kitchens were also given to Compassion London to provide 140,000 meals per week to disadvantaged Londoners.
36. A further clear development over the last three months has been sport's ability to engage and inspire over digital media. At the beginning of the lockdown period The FA launched the [#FootballsStayingHome](#) campaign which is designed to connect and uplift people across the country in this period of isolation. The campaign offered tips, workouts, online games and trivia, with appearances from coaching experts and players. As part of this, a [new YouTube channel](#) was launched to offer coaches and learners a new way to keep learning, brush up on ideas and prepare for football's return while staying home and staying safe.

Question 5: How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

37. When the country enters a phased relaxation of social distancing rules, The FA wants to play a key role in re-integrating the grassroots games into people's lives, but in a way that is responsible and safe. As outlined above, football will be helping to reconnect communities and The FA wants to encourage men, women, girls and boys – particularly those who have not played before – to reengage with the sport and take up playing the game. The FA has published updated return to play guidance throughout the pandemic which can be found [here](#). DCMS' continued support in creating safe return-to-play guidance will be vital in re-establishing grassroots sport.
38. There is also an opportunity for football to play a major role in boosting the economy in a post Covid-19 environment. Clubs at every level have a significant impact on local economies, and naturally play a very important social role as well. Competitions such as UEFA EURO 2020 (now taking place in 2021) and the Women's UEFA EURO 2021 (now taking place in 2022) both have matches scheduled to take place in England, including finals at Wembley. The competitions are expected to bring in significant revenue to the UK through the value of tickets, hospitality, travel, accommodation, food and beverage and retail alone.
39. Women's football will also have an important opportunity for growth both at the top levels of the game and at grassroots level. Over the coming months, The FA will be reviewing the impact of *The Gameplan for Growth* strategy for the women's and girls' game. Launched in March 2017, the strategy pledged to tackle targets to double participation, double the game's fanbase and create a high-performance system and world-class talent pipeline for England teams to achieve consistent success on the world stage. After four hugely successful seasons and hitting the ambitious goals set, the strategy is now concluding, and in the coming months The FA will outline its continued support for women's and girls' football with the launch of the 2020-2024 strategy, and women's football will continue to be prioritised within a smaller budget. Prior to Covid-19, WSL attendances had increased by 210%, audiences by 40% and The FA had secured a record-breaking partnership with Barclays; the organisation is committed to building on this progress in both the grassroots and elite game.