

Title: CEO Report	Meeting: Annual General Meeting
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LondonFA

Introduction

Like all of you I am sure the 2020-2021 season will not be one to forget in a hurry. It has been a severely disrupted season, as we have all had to respond to the various rules, restrictions, and lockdowns because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As I write this report, we are all valiantly trying to salvage our various competitions following the FA's extension of the grassroots football season up to the end of June.

I write this report cautiously optimistic that the enormous challenges we have all faced over the past season may not be repeated for the 2021-22 season. None of us can predict the future of course but with COVID-19 infections falling and the success of the vaccination programme, we are now planning for a full and successful grassroots football season for 2021-22 and feeling more positive than we have since the start of the pandemic.

Two things are very important to highlight. Firstly, that football has never been so important to so many people. I speak from personal experience when I say that the opportunity to get back out on the pitch and get active again playing the game we love, with friends, has been transformative for me after a tough start to the year. Secondly, the resilience of this great game and the tireless work of the army of volunteers that make it happen is exceptional. We have all been inspired by the amazing work that has been carried out by our clubs and leagues in response to the many measures put in place, making sure that grassroots football is played in as safe an environment as possible.

2020-21 Season Summary

Over this past season, I can safely say that we never expected to face the scale and variety of challenges that we have experienced. Although the previous season had been curtailed, what has followed this season has been a real rollercoaster of hope and anxiety. As restrictions were eased over the summer of 2020, we saw a very encouraging increase in demand for affiliated football in London. This is a continuation of the growth across the men's and women's game in London that we have been able to drive over the past two years. Alas, as the virus escalated over the winter months, we then had to adapt to further lockdowns and a wide variety of complicated rules and restrictions, with only limited football being played to date in 2021. On 29th March 2021 all organised sport was permitted to return and with an extension to the football season up to the end of June 2021 granted by the FA, there is still hope that some of the competitions across London can be completed

Alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, on 25th May 2021, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States, by a white police officer, Derek Chauvin, whilst under arrest. This incident sparked protests across the world and further emphasised the continued racial inequality in our society.

Over the course of the year the London FA Board and staff team have regularly reviewed our strategy and priorities as these seismic events unfolded. We strongly believe that our vision, mission, headline goals and objectives are more important now than ever before. Football will be an incredibly powerful force for good as we learn to live with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and our equality, inclusion and diversity plans have gained even greater prominence. These strategic goals and objectives are also now very well aligned to the FA's new strategy – Time for Change 2020 - 2024 and their specific grassroots football strategy – Survive-Revive-Thrive, 2020 – 2024. Our strategy can be viewed on our website [here](#).

What has been clear over the course of this year, however, is that the order in which we deliver our objectives is changing dramatically. In response to the events described on the previous page we have prioritised our plans to become a more efficient business (Goal D in our strategy) and this has been driven by a decrease in our income of approximately one third. This decrease has largely been because of long-term changes to the delivery of coach education and reductions in our FA grant, due to the pandemic. In response to these changes we have restructured the business, created greater efficiencies by modernising our customer service and discipline processes and reduced the size of our staffing team. These changes ensure that we approach next season in a strong and sustainable position to continue to deliver on this strategy. Further detail on the specific measures we have taken to safeguard our finances and support the game in London are detailed in the Finance Report.

Equality, Inclusion & Diversity

A very significant priority for us over the past season has been to accelerate our inclusion and diversity work, in particular our work on racial inequality.

We have started this process by transforming our hiring processes and further modernising our governance arrangements, to ensure that our people fully represent the communities that we serve. We are compliant with the Sports Code for Governance launched in 2016 and are working towards reaching the new FA Code of Governance for County Football Associations in the coming year. Equality, diversity, and inclusion are central to these two codes of governance.

This process has already resulted in the appointment of a new Board, Council, Youth Council and Senior Management team. At its highest levels, the London FA is now much more representative of our wonderfully diverse city. We've also set up a specific Racial Equality Group, drawn from our Board, Youth Council and staff team, with the purpose of identifying the issues surrounding race in football in London and delivering an action plan to address these issues.

It's a good start but we know we have so much more to do. We're lucky to have such a fantastic and diverse football community in the capital and it is vital that we listen to these communities. At London FA we know we don't have all answers and so have launched a consultation on racial equality with our members and several key expert partners. This consultation will be followed by the creation of a racial equality action plan that we are determined will lead to real and lasting changes.

Alongside this, over the past year we have also been working with the FA to pilot a new Regional Discipline Officer programme to improve the management of discrimination cases, have invested in some great training for our staff, Board and Council and are transforming how we capture inclusion and diversity data across our workforce, to better monitor the progress we are making.

This is about the London FA engaging properly with its grassroots clubs through open, honest and safe conversations. We've got a lot to learn - and with the help of our members - we pledge to keep learning. To keep fighting racism and discrimination, and to emerge a better, stronger, more welcoming football association, and a voice for all our communities.

Conclusion

In summary, we are pleased with the progress we have been able to make against several of our strategic goals this season and in particular with the way in which the grassroots football community has responded to the many unprecedented challenges it has faced. We want to extend our sincere gratitude for everything our members do to deliver grassroots football in this great city and we're very much looking forward to working with you as we all prepare for next season.

June 2021

Paul Bickerton, London FA CEO