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LondonFA

Introduction

Like all of you I am sure the 2019-20 season will not be one to forget in a hurry. It was unfortunately curtailed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the first part of this report will focus on the work carried out over the course of the season before COVID-19 and how we responded to the onset of the virus.

The second part of this report will cover briefly our plans for the coming season, and I will expand on this at the AGM itself. It is clear to me that COVID-19 is something that we now need to learn to live with and adapt to, rather than just recover from, as it will be with us for some time. I am very confident that as grassroots football gets up and running for the 2020-21 season in London, we can do this successfully, albeit taking on board the many challenges that the upcoming season will present us with.

Report

2019-20 season

The focus for London FA at the start of this season was to develop and set out a new long-term strategy for the Association, grow the numbers of people participating in football across the capital and to drive an increase in the diversity of our coaching and refereeing workforce.

Following an extensive consultation period, to include the London FA Board, Council, staff and the wider members, alongside many of our professional partners such as Local Authorities and professional football clubs, the new London FA Strategy 2020–2025 was published at the start of this year.

The strategy has a vision to '*harness the power of grassroots football to enrich more lives in London*' and it will do this by focusing on the following four headline goals:

1. Create safer environments for people to thrive
2. Lead the growth of structured football in London
3. Develop a workforce that is as diverse as the city itself
4. Improve the business to better serve our members

The full strategy can be accessed on our website [here](#).

We have already made good progress across several of the objectives. Following a long-term decline in the number of men playing affiliated football in London over the past few years, we were able to successfully reverse this decline this season. The number of male affiliated players grew from 54,594 in 2018-29 to 71,219 this season. This remarkable increase is a testament to the work of the volunteers across several of our largest leagues, who are providing an increasingly modern and high-quality playing experience which is attracting many more players and teams. The increase is also partly due to our work with several small-sided providers across London, to encourage people to play football across a wider range of different formats.

Very encouragingly we also a 38% increase across the female game and a 20% increase across the disability game. This increase was also supported by the work we have done with our club network to raise standards across the game, most notably through our Charter Standard programme. The percentage of clubs achieving charter standard status over the course of the season grew from 41% to 70% across our Youth charter standard programme and from 18% to

35% across our Adult charter standard programme, a very sizeable increase when you consider the amount of clubs and teams that are affiliated to us in London.

Finally, we were also able to train many black and minority ethnic (BAME) and female coaches and referees this year. 522 BAME coaches and 115 female coaches came through our programme, alongside 92 female referees and 292 referees from a BAME background. A key feature of this education programme was our 100FC project, a three-year project to recruit, develop and support 100 new female coaches each year through a fully funded coaching pathway.

Funded by London FA and Wembley National Stadium Trust, the programme has been designed to overcome long term barriers for female coaches, focussing not just on the qualification and more on a holistic approach to practical learning and development. It aims to harness the power of 100 women all learning and developing together within our grassroots clubs, Wildcats/Just Play centres to become a driving force for female football across the capital now and in the future.

Alas this great work across our football network in London by the London FA staff and volunteer community was curtailed when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020. The season was postponed initially and then cancelled, with many leagues opting to conclude their competitions via the points-per-game format.

More detail on the financial impact of the pandemic is set out in the Finance Report and we have been encouraged recently by the importance placed on grassroots football by the government, who are allowing league football to restart again this month. The future remains uncertain; however, we do have a clear plan for the season and remain optimistic that we can adapt to the virus and will experience plenty of football in 2020-21.

2020-21 season

The plans for the 2020-21 season do not represent a fundamental change to the London FA Strategy 2020-25, which was approved by the Board in January 2020. We believe that our new strategy is more relevant than ever as we learn to live with COVID-19. We are confident and can already see through affiliation and referee registration that the demand for grassroots football remains very strong.

The plans for the upcoming season do however recognise that the delivery of our strategy will be delayed as we support the grassroots game in London to get back on its feet following the COVID-19 pandemic for the 2020-21 season. Our objectives to deliver as a more stream-lined and efficient organisation are more important now than ever, alongside the need to further diversify our grant income and prioritise our inclusion and diversity work.

The primary focus for the organisation over the next six months will be on managing the staffing changes internally and the basic administration of the game, ensuring that our member clubs and leagues have everything in place to resume activities safely and are supported should the situation change (either through further local or national restrictions).

Alongside the support to the grassroots game in London to restart safely, a very limited number of additional activities have also been identified as a priority this year. The first of these is the acceleration of our inclusion and diversity plans, as set out in the 2020-25 strategy. Also identified is the continued governance reforms developed by the Governance Working Group and approved by the Board in March 2020. This includes the process of appointing / reappointing Board and Council members in 2020. I will expand on all these plans in the meeting itself and very much look forward to seeing you all.

June 2019

Paul Bickerton, London FA CEO