

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STRATEGY

NORTHUMBERLAND
FOOTBALL
ASSOCIATION
LIMITED



**100%
INCLUSIVE**



Strategic Summary

Northumberland FA is committed to developing a culture in Grassroots football that is positive, inclusive and supportive, helping all participants to reach their full potential through having equal opportunities in and equal access to football.

To demonstrate this commitment, Northumberland FA was proud to achieve the Foundation Level of the Equality Standard for Sport in April 2022, with work underway to ensure we progress through Preliminary Level in 2023.

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is crucial to ensuring that we have clear aims and objectives to grow inclusivity in grassroots football. Building upon our Equality Policy, this Inclusion Strategy provides an overview of Northumberland FA's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion priorities, and details the work we have done to identify key priority areas.

Northumberland FA is committed to promoting opportunities for all and as such, prioritises inclusion as a key element in all of our activities. However, we also recognise that in some instances, some populations require more support to eliminate exclusion from sport.

In addition to this, there are some areas which require increased focus from us, based upon the results and feedback from research and insight we have gathered in 2022.

Our ultimate aim is to create an environment that is '100% Inclusive', removing all barriers to participation for everyone, no matter what challenges this entails.

We believe that football is for everyone and our key strategic aim is to ensure that this is reflected in our work and delivery.

Northumberland FA is committed to developing a fully inclusive football environment that uses the power of football to inspire, unite and create opportunities for all.



Foreword

Andrew Rose-Cook, Chief Executive

Two years ago we launched our ambitious grassroots football strategy which pledged our commitment to using the power of football to inspire, unite and create opportunities for everyone. Since then we have invested time to carry out robust research and forge strong partnerships with organisations who can help us reach those people and communities who, for a variety of reasons, are not currently well represented in the game.

The result is this document which I hope will act as a roadmap to help us negotiate the way ahead. We are extremely grateful to everyone who has taken the time to help us shape this vital piece of work and look forward to pushing forward, with their help, in our commitment to ensure football is 100% Inclusive.



Dean Buckle, Head of Inclusion

I'm absolutely delighted to be able to announce the launch of this strategy, which will make a real difference to the communities we serve.

Over the years, grassroots football has grown to be part of the fabric of our society and has so many positive impacts on our local community. I'm incredibly proud of our clubs, many of whom have become pillars of their communities. Through football, grassroots clubs help young people and adults to become active, to stay active and to make lifelong friendships.

In addition, we have seen a growing trend in clubs doing so much more than that; waiving the monthly subscriptions for those who fall on hard times, providing free meals to children during holiday periods and opening up during the winter to provide warm spaces for the local community. This, in my opinion, is what truly makes grassroots football so special.

However, we must acknowledge that there are several existing and emerging challenges to participation, as detailed in this strategy. The economic challenges are likely to worsen, impacting more and more people.

Therefore, we must take positive action, we must be proactive and we must be innovative, working together with various stakeholders in the region to help eliminate the barriers faced by our communities in accessing services. '100% Inclusive' seeks to do just this and I look forward to seeing its impact in the coming months.

Research and Insight

In February 2022, Northumberland FA conducted an equality survey of players, coaches and referees over the age of 18, participating in football in our county area. The survey received 1109 responses. In the survey, we asked questions that identified which protected characteristics an individual had.

The survey was fully anonymised and designed to give us an insight into the individuals taking part in grassroots football, along with helping us to identify those not taking part. Specifically, the research was designed to help us identify areas where populations appeared to be underrepresented.

The Equality Survey ran for a period of 12 weeks, closing in May 2022. Initial analysis identified key plots and trends which have influenced this strategy.

In addition to the equality survey, it is important that we consider societal factors across Newcastle Upon Tyne, Northumberland, and North Tyneside. Therefore, Northumberland FA has conducted research into the societal challenges faced by people in the North East of England, as these inevitably lead to economic and social exclusion.

We feel this is a key area that must be factored into our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy, in order to enable us to accurately assess our key priorities within this strategy.

In addition to the above, Northumberland FA operates an Inclusion Advisory Group, who have been consulted on this strategy. Finally, the board members of Northumberland FA have also been consulted and given the opportunity to provide feedback and input into the development of our ED&I Strategy.



**Committed to ensuring
football is
100% Inclusive**

Our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion priorities

To support the delivery of our strategic aims, this strategy has been created as a direct result of the research and insight conducted into the equality profile of football in our area.

Northumberland FA has carefully considered which of the protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) need to be prioritised in this strategy to help ensure that we are able to develop the game towards our aim of being '100% Inclusive'.

In addition, Northumberland FA has also considered what we believe to be the '10th protected characteristic', this being people described to have low socio-economic status, a key issue in the North East of England.

While we are committed to ensuring that football is '100% Inclusive', we have identified three key priority areas where Northumberland FA will have an increased level of focus along with targeted schemes, programmes and support to ensure that these key priorities receive the increased level of engagement, focus and initiatives required to influence participation and eliminate the barriers preventing inclusion.

The three key priority areas identified are as follows;

- **Support for those suffering from poor mental health and physical health**
- **Support for those in low socio-economic areas**
- **Take action to increase participation for ethnically marginalised communities**

The next section of this strategy explores how and why we chose these 3 key focus areas, along with information on the actions we will take to ensure we positively influence and impact each of these priorities.



Support for those suffering from poor mental health and physical health

Why?

The equality audit highlighted that over 10% of all participants in football have a long term physical or mental health condition. We must also consider that the survey did not identify those suffering with conditions that aren't long term, while we also know that a significant proportion of people will be suffering with undiagnosed illness. Additionally, Newcastle Upon Tyne is in the bottom 4% for health in England (ONS estimates).

Therefore, it would be reasonable to cautiously estimate that approximately 20% of participants in football will be suffering with physical or mental health problems at any given time, a figure that translates to thousands of people.

Our priority in this area will be to form partnerships with organisations who can support participants in football by gaining quick access to quality mental health support services, along with links to companies who can support people in their physical health as and when injury and disability occurs. Examples of this will be forming partnerships with physio services and insurance services that provide income support and replacement when injury causes inability to work.

Positive Action Plan:

- To identify 5 partner organisations working in Mental Health to whom we can refer participants of football as and when required.
- To shine a spotlight on the fantastic work these organisations do, helping to promote positive mental health. We will do this through social media promotion, having the organisations as named partners and by gifting the sponsorship of at least two County Cups per season to the organisations.
- To offer space in our new HQ for the provision of social inclusion events, such as Walking Football, so that we can also be part of the solution and give our partner organisations another space to help people get active.
- To work with grassroots clubs and fund Inclusion Hubs, giving children with all forms of disability access to football.
- Partner with a physiotherapist/sports injury specialist to offer discounted physio services to grassroots players recovering from injury.
- Partner with an optician to offer discounted prices on sports glasses.



Using the power of football
to inspire, unite and create
opportunities for all



We believe that football is
for everyone

Support for those in low socio-economic areas

Why?

The Northeast of England is amongst the most deprived areas in the country. Across the 3 areas we represent, a combined figure of approximately 40,000 children are considered to be in poverty. This represents 30% of all children in the area. Specific breakdowns of these figures are as follows;

- In Newcastle Upon Tyne, 14,646 children (aged 0-16) were living in (relative) low-income families in 2018-19, equivalent to 28% of all children in Newcastle. In 2020, the percentage of pupils in Newcastle who were on free school meals was 31.8%, compared to 17.3% nationally.
- In Northumberland, 20,493 children (aged 0-16) were living in low-income families in 2017-2018, equivalent to 31.4% of all children.
- In North Tyneside, 31.4% of children are living in poverty. An estimated 5641 are on free school meals.

In addition to these figures, North East England currently shows the greatest growth in child poverty across the UK, while rising costs through inflation continue to add more and more pressure onto families. In the coming years, this will only heighten, preventing more and more families from having the financial means to access football.

Finally, research conducted by the Aspen Institute in America shows that children in low socio-economic areas are 6 times more likely to quit sport - this is driven in part through families' inability to purchase the required kit to allow for continued participation. There is no doubt that children in the UK face similar challenges and poor outcomes. This project seeks to positively influence this figure.

Positive Action Plan:

- To provide fully and part funded courses for people in low socio-economic areas.
- To provide free holiday camps and meals for children.
- To partner with 'Grassroots', launching a low-cost (and in many instances, free) kit and boot recycling scheme.
- To inspire children in low socio-economic areas, via direct engagement in our Create your own Football Club project.
- To liaise with and encourage our clubs to set their price points for monthly subscriptions at the lowest possible sustainable rate.
- To issue grant payments through our SCARF Fund, which can support families who are struggling financially to afford football.





Take action to increase participation for ethnically marginalised communities

Why?

Our equality survey highlighted that 95% of respondents describe themselves as White British, while 98% have either no identified religion or are of Christian denomination. These figures do not align with census demographic numbers.


In addition, we know through our community work that there are significant health inequalities and poorer health outcomes for people from ethnically marginalised backgrounds.

We are committed to ensuring that football in our area is welcoming to all people. However, we recognise that we have work to do to ensure that we fully understand the barriers that prevent people from ethnically marginalised backgrounds participating in grassroots football. To enable us to take effective actions in this area, we must first understand what prevents participation.

To achieve this, we believe that effective networking with specific stakeholders is a key factor in increasing our understanding of barriers, which will then allow us to properly understand how we can remove these.

Therefore, Northumberland FA will focus on the following;

Positive Action Plan:

- To be present at multicultural events, such as Newcastle MELA.
 - To deliver a football project specifically designed for refugees.
 - To highlight work done by Grassroots clubs to promote inclusion, such as Whitley Bay Juniors' multicultural tournaments.
 - To maintain our membership of HAREF, engaging with and learning from other member organisations.
 - To provide fully and part funded courses for people from ethnically marginalised communities.
 - To work with 'Kick it Out' to develop Equality Standard clubs.
 - To continue to ensure we actively seek to join any other relevant networks and groups who seek to take positive action in this space.
 - To undertake a full review of our recruitment processes, ensuring that we adopt and develop a fully inclusive recruitment process.
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Committed to
removing all
barriers to
participation for
everyone



Positive,
inclusive,
supportive



Summary

In addition to the above, it's also important to note that we will ensure that our work in this area is thoroughly scrutinised. We will do this by adhering to the equality standard process and ensuring that Northumberland FA has an Inclusion Advisory Group made up of experts in these 3 key areas of focus.

Finally, we want to be clear that despite having our key focus areas, we will continue to do all we can to shine a spotlight on all of the protected characteristics, across all of our platforms and communications. We are committed to ensuring that grassroots football is a safe place for all and a place that truly is '100% Inclusive'.





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