



For All



**ENGLAND
FOOTBALL**

A THRIVING GRASSROOTS GAME

THE FA'S GRASSROOTS MID-STRATEGY REVIEW
2024-2026

HALF TIME REFLECTIONS

Our current 2024-28 strategy was developed following in-depth consultation with the grassroots game. This provided us with invaluable insight which shaped the priorities we are now focused on.

At the halfway point of our strategy, the grassroots game is in a stronger position than ever before. Over the past two years, we have seen continued growth, with more players, teams, coaches and volunteers helping football thrive in communities across the country.

This progress has only been possible through the collective efforts of County FAs, leagues, clubs, volunteers and partners, who continue to play such an important role in supporting the game at every level. Together, we have focused on building strong foundations for the future - improving access to football opportunities, supporting the club network, and ensuring that more people can enjoy the game in safe, welcoming and inclusive environments.

We also continue to listen carefully to the challenges facing grassroots football. For example, demand for quality facilities continues to grow as the game grows, volunteers are stretched, and there is still more work to do to improve behaviours across the game. These are important issues and they are challenges we are tackling with a clear focus and long-term commitment.

Looking ahead, the next two years present a significant opportunity to build on the momentum we have created. With continued investment, strong partnerships, and a shared ambition across the game, we are well placed to drive further growth and deliver lasting improvements for players, clubs and communities.

The grassroots game is moving in the right direction, and we remain committed to ensuring football continues to thrive for future generations.



James Kendall
FA Director of Football Development

THE FRAMEWORK FOR OUR GRASSROOTS STRATEGY 2024–28

Our purpose: **Inspiring positive change through football – *by* uniting communities, tackling inequalities *and* improving the health of the nation.**

OUR FIVE PRIORITIES



OUR THREE DRIVERS

SUPPORT THRIVING COMMUNITY CLUBS

CONNECT & SERVE PARTICIPANTS

PROGRESS THE GAME'S GOVERNANCE

STATE OF THE GAME

RECORD PARTICIPATION

1.6M+
AFFILIATED PLAYERS

124,500+
TEAMS

STRONG RETENTION

82%
REFEREE RETENTION
(HIGHEST EVER)

RECORD NO.
VOLUNTEERS, COACHES &
REFEREES
(↑11%)

RAISING STANDARDS

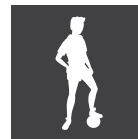
10,800
GOOD QUALITY PITCHES

390+
NEW 3G PITCHES

PARTICIPATION

MALE

(1.4M PLAYERS)



(↑2%)

FEMALE

(255K PLAYERS)



(↑15%)

DISABILITY

(26K PLAYERS)



(↑25%)

TWO SEASONS OF PROGRESS BUILDING SOLID FOUNDATIONS DELIVERING IMPACT



Priority 1:

IMPROVE PLAYING CHOICE AND OPPORTUNITY

Our 2028 ambition:

To create new and varied playing opportunities to give everyone a chance to play the game, in a way that suits them best.

What we **HEARD:**

“Life is changing and people don’t just want to commit to a team. They want to explore football in different ways, such as drop-in sessions where they can get their football fix in a way that suits their life circumstances.”

Male Player, 30-35

What we have **ACHIEVED:****Record Participation**

with over
1.6 million players and **124.5K teams**
(↑4%) (↑10%)

Mixed Adult Football

Mixed Adult Football Format launched as part of The FA affiliated game

Walking Football game plan

launched and partnership agreed

Future Fit ready

to launch to the Youth Game

Bringing our **WORK TO LIFE:****CASE STUDY**

Comets Disability Football

**Purpose**

Increase participation and create positive environments for disabled children to play football and feel a sense of belonging.

Delivered

12,670 Comets sessions delivered within grassroots football during the 25/26 season.

Impact 25/26

- **478 Comets opportunities** within grassroots football
- **240 new schools trained** to deliver Comets in Schools
- **750 teachers, volunteers and coaches** trained

Next

Expand delivery within both grassroots football and school settings as well as focus on player transition from school to community Comets provision.

Our **FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO SEASONS:**

1. Future Fit ready to introduce a new 3v3 entry format and maintain smaller formats for the youth game.
2. Grow Walking Football through stronger partnerships, increased provision and more local playing opportunities.
3. Expand sessional football through Book Football enhancements and improved safeguarding support for providers.



Priority 2:

DELIVER EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS TO PLAY

Our 2028 ambition:

To ensure every woman and girl who wants to play football has an opportunity to do so in a safe and enjoyable setting, and in a way that suits their lifestyle.

What we **HEARD:**

“The growth in the women’s and girls’ game is brilliant to see – but more support is needed for the game to be truly equal.”

Female parent, 35-40

What we have **ACHIEVED:**

90% of schools
in England

offer equal access to football in PE lessons,
around **2.6 million young people**

20,000 opportunities

for women and girls in the community,
supporting 250,000 players

Over 27,000

more females playing the game
(**↑12%**)

Bringing our **WORK TO LIFE:****CASE STUDY**

Diversifying Women & Girls' Game

**Purpose**

Increase participation in under-represented communities through targeted, place-based delivery.

Delivered

13 local plans, multi-agency partnerships mobilised
and **£948k+** co-investment secured.

Impact (Year 1)

- 232 new sessions
- 3,475 participants
- 822 volunteers
- 171 match officials

Next

Scale Year 2 delivery, strengthen workforce/club pathways, embed insights into long-term County FA strategy.

Our **FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO SEASONS:**

1. Continue to meet **90%** of schools offering equal access to football in PE lessons and expand equal opportunities in extracurricular provision.
2. Grow inclusive opportunities through priority place delivery and new local partnerships.
3. Evolve football offers to better suit the ages and life stages of females.



Priority 3:

BUILD MORE AND IMPROVE EXISTING FACILITIES

Our 2028 ambition:

To increase the quality and quantity of grassroots football pitches and facilities across England, to better meet the demand.



What we **HEARD**:

“ Pitches are improving and there are now some great ones, so fewer matches are postponed, but there are still many more which need work to get to a good standard. ”

Male player, 20-25



What we have **ACHIEVED**:

10,000+
quality grass pitches supported nationwide
and
390+
new 3G pitches built

£30million
investment to **deliver 35** Lionesses Futures Fund 3G projects, to super-charge women and girls' football.

**Launched the
£6 million**
HERE to Play Fund, supporting new teams/sessions and improved facilities for women and girls



Bringing our **WORK TO LIFE**:

CASE STUDY

Kent Grass Pitch Investment



Purpose

Improve pitch quality, increase playing capacity and reduce cancellations across Kent.

Delivered

£1m+ investment secured to improve grass pitches across Kent, supporting clubs, leagues and local partners to enhance playing conditions.

Impact

- 62 pitches improved
- 17 sites enhanced
- 570+ teams benefiting
- 5,000+ players supported

Next

Continue investing in local facilities, support sustainable pitch maintenance and expand access to quality playing environments across the county.



Our **FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO SEASONS**:

1. Keep raising grass pitch quality with focused investment and sustainable maintenance support.
2. Accelerate the development of more 3G pitches in the communities with the greatest need.
3. Targeted investment to support women and girls and the growth of Thriving Community Clubs.



Priority 4:

TACKLING POOR BEHAVIOUR

Our 2028 ambition:

To see a decline in cases of poor behaviour of any kind, and to increase reporting of discrimination, ensuring enjoyment is at the forefront of playing, volunteering or officiating grassroots football.

What we **HEARD**:

“ We all have a role to play in tackling poor behaviour. There is a collective responsibility on everyone in the game to manage their own behaviour, challenge others when they step out of line, and a responsibility for clubs, leagues and the County FA to punish those that don't meet the standard. ”

Male coach, 40-45



What we have **ACHIEVED**:

Doubled

the number of participants

that now feel The FA is doing enough to tackle poor behaviour

...

Record 1 million

people joined the Silent Support Weekend

creating more positive touchlines for young players allowing coaches to be heard and players to better communicate with each other

...

More discrimination cases are being reported

a sign of growing trust in the reporting system and the sanctions being issued

Bringing our **WORK TO LIFE**:

CASE STUDY

Enough is Enough Campaign

ENOUGH IS
ENOUGH

Purpose

Help more people understand the action perpetrators face, and in doing so, feel that The FA does enough to tackle poor behaviour and takes this issue very seriously.

Delivered

Over 16,000 sites nationwide displayed materials showing the sanctions in place, including the 100 worst-behaving clubs.

Impact

- **21% increase** in perception (20% - 41%)
- **Winners of Transformational Impact Award** at Football Business Awards

Next

Keep sharing monthly sanctions across the game and add new plans to promote good behaviour.

Our **FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO SEASONS**:

1. Roll out a standardised Behaviour Improvement Programme across all County FAs using local reporting data to target and reduce poor behaviour.
2. Develop the Behaviour Hub into a best-in-class asset hub for clubs, leagues, referees, and CFAs.
3. Drive recognition of positive behaviour via a Community Shield tour to Clubs that set the highest standards of behaviour.

Priority 5:

DEVELOP A VALUED NETWORK OF VOLUNTEERS, COACHES AND REFEREES

Our 2028 ambition:

To grow the number of grassroots volunteers, coaches and referees – and ensure they all feel valued and supported to fulfil their roles in the game.

What we **HEARD**:

“Our volunteers put so much hard work and effort into their roles... it is so important that we support them to stay in the game.”

Male Club Chair, 60-65



What we have **ACHIEVED**:

170,000+

volunteers engaged

to ensure the game keeps running

(↑20%)

...

186,000+

registered coaches

to continue the development of the game

(↑9%)

...

37,000

registered referees with **10,000 recruited** and **27,000 retained**

Bringing our **WORK TO LIFE**:

CASE STUDY

FA Leadership Academy



Purpose

Develop and diversify the next generation of football leaders, volunteers and changemakers.

Delivered

130 young volunteers supported through mentoring, funding and practical projects, helping them build skills and influence in grassroots football.

Impact

- **130 young volunteers** engaged across 2 seasons
- **20+ County FAs** represented
- **100% completed** a community project
- **Engaged over 2200 new young players**, coaches, referees and volunteers into the game via their volunteering projects post residential
- **Thousands of participants** positively influenced

Next

Expand the programme nationally, grow alumni networks and create more pathways into leadership roles across grassroots football.

Our **FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO SEASONS**:

1. Increase representation of women and disabled volunteers across the grassroots workforce including leveraging Euro 2028 opportunities.
2. Grow our workforce by recruiting up to 1,000 club coaching leads to support the recruitment and development of coaches in thriving community clubs.
3. Increase women referee retention by improving the environment and support structures available to them.

Driver 1:

THRIVING COMMUNITY CLUBS

Our 2028 ambition:

To support a network of thriving community clubs to provide a brilliant football offer to their local communities, to grow in a sustainable way, and to be well-run.

What we **HEARD**:

“It can be challenging, time-consuming and costly to run large grassroots clubs, more support is needed for the people in these roles.”

Female Club Secretary, 30-35



What we have **ACHIEVED**:

500 3★

Thriving Community Clubs achieved

⋮

50 new club development officers

supporting **1,700 clubs**

⋮

Howdens installed Kitchens

to 400 Clubs generating additional revenue and new roles for clubs.

Bringing our **WORK TO LIFE**:

CASE STUDY

Richmond Rovers - Cheshire FA



The club lacked the governance and legal structure needed to progress its ambition for a club-led 3G facility and permanent home. The intervention focused on strengthening leadership and establishing robust governance foundations.

Delivered

Club Development Review completed June 2025
FA Club Consultant support focussed on:

- Legal status - transitioning to CIO structure
- Leadership structure - distributing workload
- Business planning - 3G project timeline
- Club Impact Calculator - to showcase value to the community and support funding applications

Impact

- New Chair
- Transition to Community Interest Organisation (CIO)
- **£3.2 Million in social value** – FA Club Impact Calculator completed
- **3G Facility project** – Collaboration with nearby secondary school on

Next

- Formalise CIO structure
- Secure funding using Club Impact Calculator
- Progress 3G project, building a home for Richmond Rovers

Our **FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO SEASONS**:

1. Expand and strengthen locally delivered club support services.
2. Provide targeted support to help more clubs achieve 3-star status.
3. Improve the digital tools, services and insight that help clubs develop and operate more effectively.

Driver 2:

CONNECT AND SERVE

Our 2028 ambition:

New online services which are personalised, easy to access and help participants to fulfil their roles and find new opportunities.

What we **HEARD**:

“The FA’s digital systems are definitely improving, volunteers are spending less time on online admin which is great. In future, I would love for the different platforms to be more connected and even easier to use.”

Female Club Secretary, 35-40



What we have **ACHIEVED**:

Doubled our digital engagement

with Grassroots Participants by providing more timely, relevant and personalised communications

...

500k
Record number of Match Day users
getting a better game day admin experience

...

**Guidance articles supporting
administrative tasks have generated
1.7 million**
views, helping strengthen
customer service

Bringing our **WORK TO LIFE**:

CASE STUDY

Streamlining DBS Checks



Purpose

Reduce the time taken for grassroots volunteers to complete a DBS check.

Delivered

Digital document ID checks rolled out in new FA Portal based DBS process.

Impact

Average DBS completion time reduced from 30 to 14 days, for 135k Grassroots Volunteer Checks processed.

Next

All grassroots volunteers requiring a DBS (265-300k) will have completed their check through the new system.

Our **FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO SEASONS**:

1. Providing faster, more effective digital support so people can resolve issues and get back to football.
2. Improving access to grassroots football information so people can quickly find what they need.
3. Strengthening our digital products to better support the evolving needs of the grassroots game.



Driver 3:

PROGRESS THE GAME'S GOVERNANCE

Our 2028 ambition:

To better serve all football participants through the highest governance standards, at all levels in the grassroots game.

What we **HEARD**:

“There are some big challenges facing grassroots football – making sure it is safe and well run is the most important of them all.”

Female League Chair, 40-45



What we have **ACHIEVED**:

50 County FAs

Governance Code Compliant

ensuring stronger boards, greater diversity of thinking and better processes

50 County FAs

Safeguarding Compliant

providing a safer environment for all across the game

A new CFA EDI Standard launched

strengthening expectations and supporting more inclusive environments across grassroots football

Bringing our **WORK TO LIFE**:

CASE STUDY

The FA's centralised Discipline service for County FAs



Purpose

To manage County FA Discipline on behalf of the network

Delivered

Management of County FA Discipline including investigations, hearings and administration for 19 County FAs

Impact

- **32% coverage** of the service
- Clearly defined agreed ways of working
- All regulatory SLAs met and exceeded
- All project delivery targets met and exceeded

Next

- **Increase service coverage to 40%** – by onboarding 4 new County FAs for 2026/27
- **Achieve further cost efficiencies** by introducing FastTrack and reducing the cost for CFAs to reboard and onboard for 2027/28

Our **FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO SEASONS**:

1. Maintain compliance of all CFAs with The Code for Governance (V3) through a robust compliance framework.
2. Successfully pilot a league Code of Governance and establish a plan for wider league adoption.
3. Drive stronger financial control environments across CFAs, leagues and clubs.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM OVER THE NEXT TWO SEASONS

OUR AMBITION FOR GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL BY 2028



GROWING THE GAME FOR EVERYONE, MORE OPPORTUNITIES, MORE EQUAL

1.8 million affiliated players – more women, girls and disabled people playing than ever before

75% of people playing the type of football they want to play

90% schools delivering equal access in curriculum



CLUB-LED

1,000 Thriving Community Clubs – better support for clubs through local expertise and digital services



BETTER FACILITIES

12,000 quality grass pitches – more 3G pitches and improved local facilities



CONNECTED DIGITALLY

A **connected digital ecosystem** making football easier to find, join and manage through strengthening our products and improving access to information



POWERED BY GREAT PEOPLE

400,000 workforce – a larger, more diverse network of volunteers, coaches and referees feeling engaged and valued



SAFER AND MORE INCLUSIVE

50 County FAs delivering even stronger safeguarding, governance and behaviour standards across the game, driving a more positive and respectful culture across grassroots football

SERVING THE GRASSROOTS GAME IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR CFAs



ALONGSIDE OUR TRUSTED PARTNERS

Commercial partners:

Support from the business community is vital to expand the scope of key programmes:



National delivery partners:

The game's infrastructure and general development is supported by:



Educational delivery partners:

Within the education sector, grassroots football would not happen without:



Disability delivery partners:

Key to providing opportunities for people who are disabled to play football are:



Inclusion delivery partners:

To ensure grassroots football is accessible to everyone and is used to combat societal issues, we work with:



THANK YOU

WITH THANKS TO EVERY ONE OF OUR PARTNERS FOR YOUR SHARED
AMBITION, COMMITMENT AND COLLABORATION. TOGETHER, WE ARE PROUD
TO SUPPORT ALL THOSE WHO TRULY POWER GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL.



For All

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