



TO GROW, GUIDE AND GOVERN

THE FA REFEREEING STRATEGY 2023-26
YEAR 2 REVIEW

It is with great pride and a shared sense of purpose that we present this Year 2 Review of The FA Refereeing Strategy 2023–2026. As the heads of the Refereeing Department, which oversees operations, development, and technical functions, respectively, we are privileged to lead a team that continues to push the boundaries of what is possible for refereeing in England.

The last twelve months have marked a period of significant advancement, grounded in the three strategic pillars of Experience and Environment, Diversity and Inclusion, and Performance and Development. Across each of these areas, the progress has been tangible and meaningful. This report captures not only the breadth of that work but also the depth of commitment from referees, volunteers, County FAs, and our partner organisations.

Within Experience & Environment, we have continued to prioritise the well-being and recognition of match officials. The third annual Referee Recognition Awards, with over 1,000 nominations, provided a powerful platform to celebrate outstanding individuals and clubs who make a positive impact on refereeing. The expansion of the BodyCam pilot – now covering 4,500 matches – along with increased visibility through our digital channels, and youth-focused initiatives such as the rollout of the under-18 armband, all demonstrate our commitment to improving the day-to-day reality of refereeing across all levels of the game.

In Diversity & Inclusion, the Reflective and Representative campaign has now exceeded its headline target, delivering a net increase of over 4,000 Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage referees since 2023. This is a milestone that speaks volumes, not only about the effectiveness of our recruitment activities, but also about the mentoring, retention, and talent identification work now in place. The launch of FA Women's CORE, bursary schemes, PARA support, and the inclusive curriculum modules reflects our belief that every individual should see themselves reflected in refereeing and feel they belong.

Under Performance & Development, we have delivered a wide range of interventions to support the growth and progression of referees at every stage of their journey. Highlights include over 20,000 match official and observer appointments at Steps 2-4, the delivery of more than 150 development events since December, and the continuation of CORE in a talent identification process.

Our coaching infrastructure has scaled significantly, including a record-breaking 584 in-person coaching visits for Steps 5 and 6, and the continued rollout of CPD and induction events nationwide. The new online learning platform, featuring bespoke e-learning modules and digital assessments, marks a significant step in modernising our educational offer.

Looking ahead, the next phase of this strategy will be defined by not only the continuation of what we have started but also ensuring we set ourselves up to sustain the positive change which we have commenced. We are entering the design stages of a national Refereeing Curriculum and DNA. This long-term framework will underpin how we educate, develop, and assess referees across the country. This work will align standards and expectations while allowing for local delivery and contextual relevance. Alongside this, we will undertake a redefinition of the refereeing pathway – simplifying access, improving clarity of progression, and ensuring that support structures reflect the evolving needs of match officials at every level.

In doing so, our aim is precise: to ensure that refereeing in England is not only inclusive and aspirational, but also technically excellent and structurally sound. We remain committed to developing a sustainable model that supports lifelong involvement in refereeing, whether as an official, developer, or administrator. On behalf of the Refereeing Department at the Football Association, we would like to express our sincere thanks to every individual and organisation who has contributed to this year's progress. Your efforts continue to shape the future of refereeing – a future we are proud to build together.

Peter Elsworth

Head of Referee Operations

Nathan Magill

Head of Referee Development





EXPERIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

We will ensure the safety and continued enjoyment of referees at all levels by reducing abuse and making referees feel truly valued on and off the pitch.



DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

We will build a culture that provides opportunities for all in refereeing by actively addressing barriers to inclusion.



PERFORMANCE & DEVELOPMENT

We will provide the tools and resources to help referees at all levels perform to their maximum ability.

FOCUS AREA 1

EXPERIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

We will ensure the safety and continued enjoyment of referees at all levels by reducing abuse and making referees feel truly valued on and off the pitch.



Launch of FA Refereeing
TikTok and Instagram channels



Over 1,000 nominations for
Referee Recognition Awards



Celebrate 24/25
social media campaign



Major updates to FA Refereeing
website to streamline information



4,500 matches as part of
BodyCam pilot



15,000 Under-18 match officials
supplied with armbands

REFEREE RECOGNITION AWARDS 2025

In May 2025, the third annual Referee Recognition Awards was hosted at the National Football Museum. The awards saw over 1000 nominations and 10 award winners and highly commended match officials. The evening had many highlights, including the celebration of the phenomenal career of Darren Cann, a plethora of FIFA caps being presented (including a standing ovation for the late Gary Willard) and a number of special guests to present the awards.



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
Geoff Ogier



FA SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD
Darren Cann

INTERNATIONAL CAPS PRESENTED

Natalie Aspinall 2007 - 2024	Lisa Benn 2022 - 2023	Marc Birkett 2008 - 2024	Melissa Burgin 2020 - 2023	Andy Hogg 1998 - 2001	Sian Massey-Ellis 2009 - 2024	Harry Lennard 2017 - 2024	Craig Pawson 2015 - 2024
Lisa Rashid 2011 - 2024	Gavin Sartain 2011 - 2015	Jane Simms 2012 - 2017	Jeremy Simpson 2008 - 2010	Keith Stroud 2003 - 2005	Rebecca Welch 2015 - 2024	Richard West 2008 - 2010	Gary Willard 1996 - 1999



CLUB RECOGNITION
AWARD
Harrison Fage



CHAMPIONING DIVERSITY
AWARD
Folu Aladelusi



INSPIRATIONAL ROLE MODEL
OF THE YEAR
Adrian Francis



POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT
AWARD
Eversley & California F.C



REFEREEING IN THE COMMUNITY
AWARD
Gary Lambert-Snaith



NEWCOMER
OF THE YEAR
Mackenzie Beaumont-Gardner



OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION
TO REFEREEING
Lewis Skinner



REFEREEING VOLUNTEER SUPPORT
OF THE YEAR AWARD
Richard Sipson

FOCUS AREA 2

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

We will build a culture that provides opportunities for all in refereeing by actively addressing barriers to inclusion.



4,144

Black, Asian & Mixed Heritage
Match Officials
(+17.5% from 2023/34)

380

Black, Asian & Mixed Heritage
Women Match Officials
(+14.2% from 2023/34)

3,425

Women Match Officials
(+9.11% from 2023/34)

170

Match Officials registered for
one of six FA CORE Talent ID events



Support provided to
Para football fixtures and
EE FA Disability Cup Final Match Officials

80

Match Officials registered for
Women's CORE trials



Launch of 'Our Whistle'
Referee Course

463

Women's pathway observer
appointments



BAM Women Match Officials
invited to Premier League
U15 Tournament

553

Further bursary schemes offered,
totalling 1063 since August 2023



Launch of FA Women's CORE
for season 2025/26

EMERGING TALENT PROGRAMME / WOMEN'S PATHWAY

- 103 referees involved in ETP
- 7 ETP officials promoted to PGMOL
- 8 Female match officials travelled to Florida for the Girls Academy Championships
- 60 coaching visits for 3w-2w match officials



Percentage of female match officials appointed to fixtures within FA Women's National League:

44%

Tier 3 Referee

42%

Tier 3 Assistant Referee

45%

Tier 4 Referee

43%

Tier 4 Assistant Referee



A ROYAL VISIT

His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, Patron of the Football Association, visited one of The FA's Refereeing Departments training programmes back in March.

The course was part of our Reflective and Representative campaign which aims to recruit 1,000 people from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds into referee roles over the next three years, and was held at Sporting Khalsa FC.

The courses, part of our landmark three-year refereeing strategy, combine theory and practical training to support those who are taking their first steps into officiating.





REFLECTIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE CAMPAIGN

RECRUITMENT

31 targeted courses have been delivered in year 2 of the campaign (56 campaign total).

- With 553 match officials accessing The FA's refereeing bursary scheme from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds (1,063 - Overall number since the scheme was launched).
- The target of achieving a net increase of 1,000 BAM referees by 2026 has already been surpassed, with 4,144 referees from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds registered.

RETENTION

- Launched a new mentoring programme in partnership with BAMREF to provide mentoring support to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage match officials progressing through the grassroots pathway.
- In year 2 we have seen over 200 match officials mentored under this project.

REPRESENTATION

- In May 2025, the campaign launched 6 FA CORE Talent ID Showcase Events to identify the next generation of match officials from Black, Asian & Mixed Heritage populations for our FA Centre of Refereeing Excellence (CORE) programme.
- We had 170 referees in total attend across the events nationally.
- 50 new referees identified and inducted to be part of our FA CORE programme next season (2025/26).
- All other match officials have been given the opportunity to join the County FA CORE programme.

FOCUS AREA 3

PERFORMANCE & DEVELOPMENT

We will provide the tools and resources to help referees at all levels perform to their maximum ability.



16,903

Match Official appointments
at Steps 3 and 4



First FA Core Conference
planned for July 2025

39

England youth and development team games
officiated by CORE, ETP or high performing
Match Officials this season

151

Match Officials invited to assessment days
with 50% of Match Officials being promoted
as a result of the assessment day

63

Development events for
Match Officials held since
December 2024

104

Development events
currently planned for season 25/26



DEVELOP THE DEVELOPERS

RDO DEVELOPMENT

- 4 Regional network days to support sharing of ideas and key updates – focus on practical delivery
- 1 Development Day at SGP focus on talent ID (19 CFAs represented 48 attendees)
- Weekly updates
- x10 Monthly calls focusing on updates

REFEREE DEVELOPERS

- Re-vamped national training programme – 6 modules to complete
- 30 attendees on National Training
- 5 Regional CPD events for Referee Developers – New course overview/delivery and practical training (112 registered)
- Continued Referee Developer support via consultant team visits
- Advanced Referee Developer Training alongside FIFA – 30 attendees 2.5 days at SGP
- Re-launch of the face-to-face FA Referees Course

FUTSAL DEVELOPMENT

FUTSAL

- x2 National training camps 34 attendees at each
- x1 exchange programme with Denmark FA – Referee & Observer
- x6 Online CPD calls for all levels
- Virtual mentoring scheme increased course conversions
- x1 New FIFA Referee
- Coaching programme, which also aligns with Partially Sighted games



CENTRE OF REFEREEING EXCELLENCE

CORE X

- 3 in-person CORE X Camps delivered
- 500 hours of learning for CORE X match officials
- Over 70 coaching sessions delivered to CORE X match officials

20

Match Officials
selected to attend
IBER Cup

5

FA CORE pre-season
residential camps

32

Quarterly Meetings

64

Match Officials selected for
Premier League tournaments

8

Match Officials selected
to officiate Premier League
Cup Finals

9

Officials travelled to
Florida to officiate in the
National Academy
Championships

1010

Coaching Visits

337

Match officials attended
one of 16 trial events

44

FA CORE match officials
promoted in season
2024/25

STEP 3 / 4 REFEREE DEVELOPMENT

COACHING UPDATE

68% of non FA CORE referees have had at least 1 Match Day Coaching or Match Day Developer visit this season, with 37% of referees having at least 2 and 9% having at least 3.

CLUB COLLABORATION

100% of all clubs that have requested feedback on a referee's performance, and who can provide footage of the incidents, have had feedback provided.

INCORRECT RED CARDS

100% of overturned Red Cards have resulted in a post-decision review with the match official concerned to identify any opportunities to learn from their error.

ROADSHOWS 2025

51.2% of referees not in FA CORE attended a L3 Roadshow event this year. This is a 16% increase from the 2023/24 season.

ASSISTANT REFEREE CPD

4 AR CPD events (online) took place in March 2025 with over 200+ Assistant Referees scheduled to attend at least one event.

NEW L3 REFEREE INDUCTION

87 newly promoted Level 3 match officials attended an induction day.

OBSERVER CPD

300+ Step 3-6 observers attended the end of season review.





STEP 5 / 6 REFEREE DEVELOPMENT

- 584 in-person matchday coaching visits for referees outside of The FA CORE programme, a record-breaking number.
- 752 individual 20-minute check-in calls to provide tailored support and guidance.
- 4 induction days delivered for nearly 400 newly promoted referees, with a focus on both practical and technical development.
- A national development roadshow reaching 500+ referees through face-to-face engagement.
- A range of online webinars covering physical training, nutrition, wellbeing and resilience, attended by over 1,000 officials.

STEP 2 REFEREE DEVELOPMENT

- 1,631 matches officiated by a Level 2 match official.
- A minimum of 3 Quality Assurance reports for each Step 2 Observer.
- 335 matches covered by an FA Senior Coach, an increase of 284 coaching visits compared to 23/24 season.
- 95.25% Accuracy of all Match Changing Situations.
- Club Average mark up from 77.908 in season 23/24 to 78.091 in season 24/25, an increase of 0.183.
- Over 20 Level 2 Referees received appointments in FA competitions from the Quarter Final Stage onwards (including The FA Sunday Cup Final).
- 9 Referees identified and included in the PGMOL talent identification pathway.
- Two Step 2 Observers promoted to the PGMOL list of Observers through The FA/PGMOL Pathway.
- Introduction of 4th Officials on all Step 2 matches for the 2024/25 season.
- Introduction of communications kits on all Step 2 matches in the 2024/25 season.
- Over 500 clips shared for review and Analysis with FA Senior Coaches.
- 225 club reports provided with feedback over the course of the season.
- Introduction of Data packs, provided weekly to all Level 2 Referees.
- Full match review between Referee and Coach following each match.
- Introduction of Hudl and WY scout for implementation at Step 2.

OBSERVER DEVELOPMENT

- Number of completed observations – Steps 3-6 - 5,603.
- Accredited observers – 398, of whom 336 completed one or more observations.
- Reports submitted in an average of 2.69 days (2.87 last year).
- 56 newly accredited L4 observers – 19 ‘promoted’ from L4 to L3 (over 150 mentored games completed during the respective processes).
- 476 observers accredited to operate on the Step 5/4 promotion scheme (summer 2024).
- Match Official Feedback Programme – 97k responses - overall satisfaction of 81.23% (81.67% last year) – feedback issued to observers in November/May.



ONLINE LEARNING

Year 2 of The FA Refereeing Strategy marked a step into digital learning for match officials operating across the Semi-Professional game, with the launch of a comprehensive online platform. This platform introduced a selection of targeted learning resources designed to elevate officiating standards:

- 4 e-learning modules tailored specifically for Referees, covering:
 - Reporting Discrimination
 - Foul Recognition
 - Participant Behaviour
 - Positioning
- 3 specialised modules developed for Assistant Referees, focused on:
 - Optimising Positioning
 - Offside
 - Deliberate vs Deflection

In addition, 7 Laws of the Game online assessments were introduced for both Referees and Assistant Referees.

In partnership with Kick It Out, a dedicated equality diversity and inclusion curriculum was also launched to promote inclusion and cultural competence among match officials. This encouraged greater awareness of discrimination and bias within the game and provided practical strategies for fostering an inclusive, respectful matchday environment.

LOOKING AHEAD: 2025/2026 CURRICULUM EXPANSION

The 2025/2026 season will see the early stages in the rollout of the refereeing curriculum, with a renewed focus on developing progressive, role-specific content that supports officials at every stage of their journey – from grassroots to the professional game.

PROGRESSION PATHWAY

LEVEL 5-4

A total of **427 referees** attended the Level 5 to 4 Seminar Evenings hosted across the country.

Promotion Outcomes

Out of **234 candidates nominated**, **165 referees** were successfully promoted from Level 5 to Level 4.

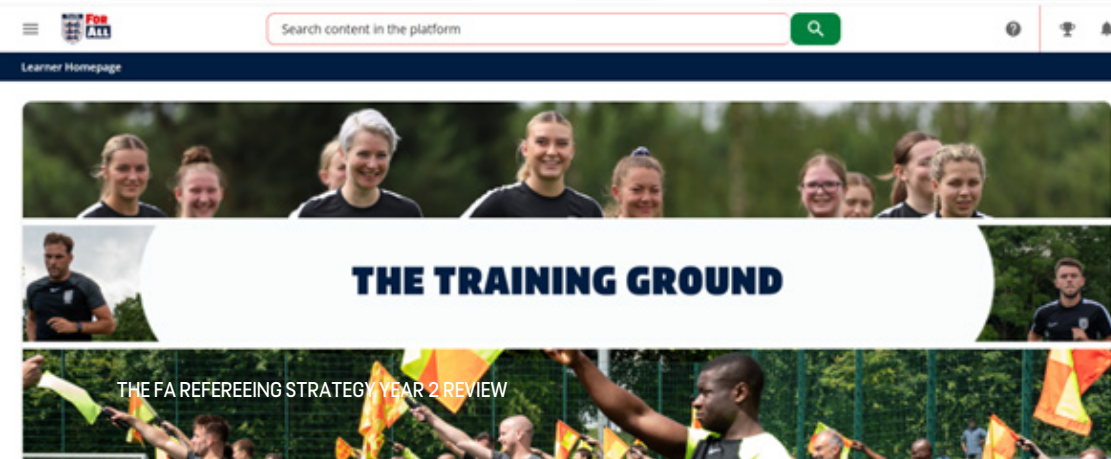
To ensure that promotions reflect readiness for the higher demands at Level 4, several criteria have been adjusted:

- The observation mark has increased to 71.5.
- **Scheme Removal Protocol:** Candidates who have not completed Online Learning or LOTG within one month will be **removed from the promotion scheme**.
- **New Development Day:** A **full-day development event** will be introduced for all referees progressing through the 5 to 4 pathway. This initiative aims to provide deeper learning and support ahead of promotion.

LEVEL 4W-3W

A total of 36 referees have been promoted to Level 3W.

- Make the pathway more accessible without compromising standards.
- Offer enhanced support for match officials pursuing dual pathways.



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS



10,860

Match Officials recruited in the 2024/25 season

46% more than targeted

24,573

referees retained from season 2022/23

A record **high of 82%**

39,926

total number of registered match officials

The highest ever achieved

1,689

referees were promoted across
Levels 5-7 during the 2024/25 season
This is a 13.9% increase on season 2023/24

773

more referees converted than last season,
totalling **7330**

OUR YEAR-BY-YEAR TARGETS

FOCUS AREA	MEASURE	AS AT 31 MAY 2023	AS AT 31 MAY 2024	2025 TARGET	2026 TARGET	CURRENT POSITION
Environment	Attain and maintain a satisfaction rating of 70% from our match official workforce (46% in May 2022).	Satisfaction: 66%	Satisfaction: 74%	Satisfaction: 70%	Satisfaction: 70+%	78%
	Improvement in satisfaction scores from other key stakeholders (adult players, parents of youth, club/league officials, volunteers).	67%	65%	72%	75%	78%
Diversity	Achieve a net increase of 1,000 Black and Asian referees by 2026.	1,800	3,527	2,500	2,800	4,144
	Achieve a net increase of 1,000 women referees by 2026.	2,500	3,139	3,578	3,900	3,425
	Ensure the proportion of referees from under-represented ethnicities operating within the men's professional game is equal to the proportion of Black and Asian people nationally.	Black/Asian: 8% Overall vs 3% men's Pro Game (PG)	Black/Asian: 9.47% Overall vs 5.29% men's PG	Black/Asian: 9% Overall vs 7% men's PG	Black/Asian: 10% Overall v 10% PG	Black/Asian: 10.54% Overall v 6.78% PG
	Ensure the proportion of women referees operating within the men's professional game is equal to the proportion of women referees nationally.	Women: 8% Overall v 2.5% men's PG	Women: 8.43% Overall v 2.47% men's PG	Women: 9% Overall v 7% men's PG	Women: 10% Overall v 10% men's PG	Women: 8.71% Overall v 3.97% men's PG
Standards	25% reduction in the average length of time it takes match officials to reach the men's professional game from completing the course.	14.34 years	12.57 years	13 years	11 years	13 years
	Mandate the new Referee Course qualification for all men's and women's Professional Game academy.	N/A	N/A	Pilot	Implementation	N/A
Key BAU indicators	Number Referees Overall (1-7+Y+T+D)	31,000	37,248	N/A	N/A	39,296

“To be appointed to referee
The Adobe Womens FA Cup Final
was a dream come true.

I see it as the pinnacle of my
domestic Career. The 18th May
was a truly humbling experience.

To walk out in front of 75,000
people it was a true honour.
Thankfully the game went how
we would have hoped for it too,
and we were then able to enjoy the
experience of ‘Cup Final Weekend’
with our families.”

Stacey Fullicks

Adobe Women's FA Cup Final Referee





“Being chosen to Officiate the 2025 Emirates FA Cup Final at Wembley was more than a career milestone - it was an incredible honour. With pride in every step and the FIFA badge on my chest, I represented The FA, the refereeing community, and the spirit of the game on one of football’s greatest stages.

It was a privilege to stand there on behalf of over 37,000 referees across the country and my colleagues and peers at PGMOL, whose dedication to the game often goes unseen. This moment belongs to all of us – a celebration of passion, perseverance, and professionalism.”

Daniel Robathan
Men’s FA Cup Final Assistant Referee



The Football Association
Wembley Stadium
London HA9 0WS
T: +44 (0)800 169 1863
F: +44 (0)800 169 1864
W: TheFA.com