



A CALENDAR AND GUIDE TO EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL 2026-2027



**ENGLAND
FOOTBALL**

INTRODUCTION

Across the country, people from a range of backgrounds, cultures and communities take part in football in different ways. This could be playing, coaching, refereeing and volunteering to name a few. The diversity of these people is one of the best things about the beautiful game.

The FA, England Football and the County FA network are working to address under-representation in football and to ensure it is inclusive through the delivery of:

- [The FA Strategy 2024-2028](#)
- [FA EDI Strategy](#)
- [FA Grassroots Strategy](#)
- [FA Women and Girls Strategy](#)
- [FA South Asian Inclusion Plan](#)
- [FA Refereeing strategy](#)
- [The FA Disability Football strategy](#)
- [FA Learning](#)

Throughout the 2026–2027 season, The FA will continue to introduce new strategies and supporting documents to help drive positive change across grassroots football. In addition, we run a variety of campaigns and initiatives that support our ambition to create the best possible grassroots football environment for everyone. Keep an eye on our website and communications channels for the latest updates, new resources, and opportunities to get involved in our ongoing campaigns.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE AND CALENDAR?

The FA's calendar and guide to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in grassroots football should be used to view the many ways in which football can bring people from all backgrounds, cultures and communities together. This is by no means a definitive list of all key celebrations, but it is a general guide to some of the EDI moments for awareness across the grassroots landscape. If you are involved in running the game, whether through a club, league or facility, we always recommend speaking directly to the people who may observe any one of the dates contained in this document to understand their personal preferences and perspectives and to continue to enhance knowledge sharing. Some dates within this calendar may affect participation in football activities for certain individuals and communities. As this can have a wider impact across grassroots football, it is important to understand these considerations, engage in open dialogue with communities, and plan accordingly to promote inclusive participation.



PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS & FA RULES

EQUALITY ACT 2010

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society. There are nine protected characteristics (see image right). The basic framework protects people from direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation regardless of whether the victim holds multiple characteristics or is perceived to have or is associated with someone who has a protected characteristic.

FA RULE E 3.2

An aggravated breach of FA Rule E3 is when a participant is charged with insulting, abusive or improper behaviour, or brings the game into disrepute, while also including a reference, whether express or implied, to any or more of the following: ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion or belief, gender reassignment, sexual orientation or disability.

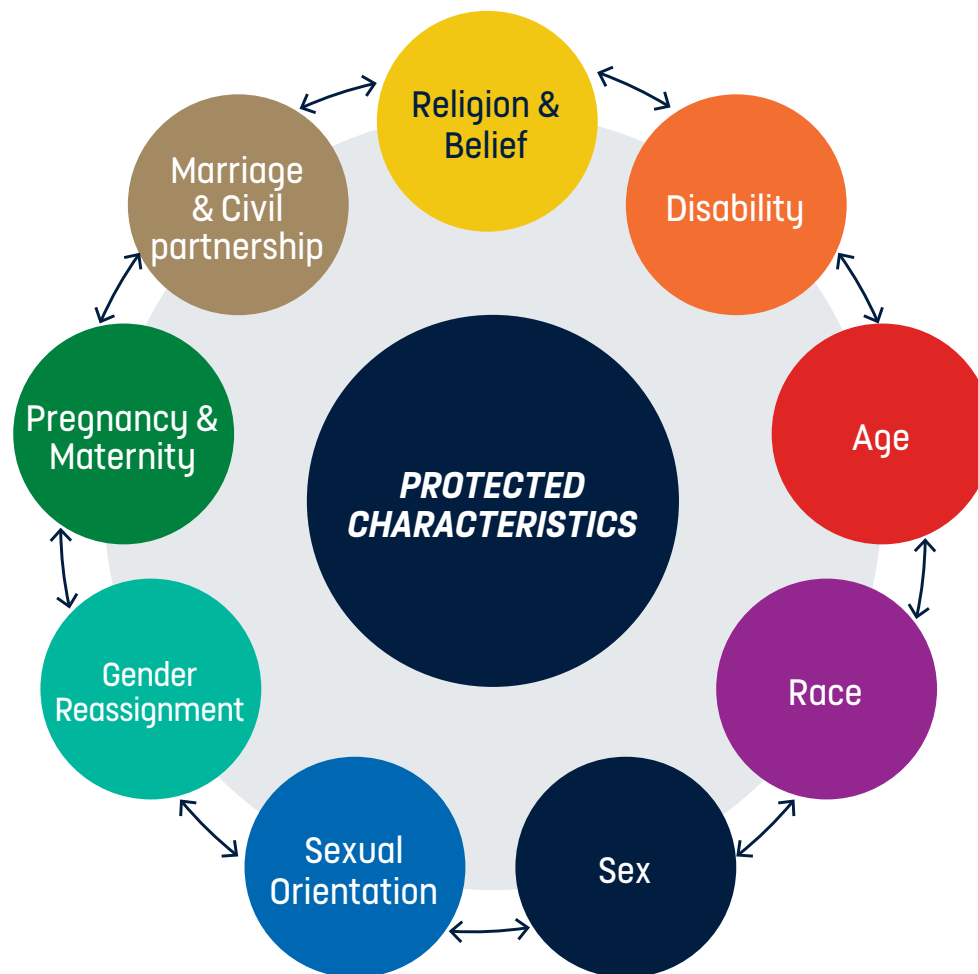
RULE B5 FOOTBALL AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

(a) A Participant cannot be compelled to play football on bona fide occasions where religious observance precludes such activity, save where the Participant:

- (i) has consented to do so on such occasions;
- or
- (ii) is registered as a player under written contract, which shall be taken as consent to play on such occasions unless otherwise provided for in the contract.

(b) Annually, when planning programmes, Competitions shall define and notify agreed dates of such occasions.

**E3(2) does not cover Pregnancy & Maternity/ Marriage & Civil partnership.*



EDI CALENDAR

August 2026 – January 2027

	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
Religion and Belief	28/08: Raksha Bandhan (Hinduism)	11/9 - 13/9: Rosh Hashana (Judaism) 20/9 - 21/9: Yom Kippur (Judaism) 25/9 - 2/10: Sukkot (Judaism)	2/10 - 4/10: Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah (Judaism) 11/10 - 20/10: Sharad Navratri (Hinduism)	Islamophobia awareness month (Islam) 8/11: Diwali (Sikhism & Hinduism) 24/11: Guru Nanak Jayanti (Sikhism)	4/12 - 12/12: Chanukah (Judaism) 25/12: Christmas Day (Christianity)	15/1: Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh (Sikhism) 17/1: World Religion Day
Disability		6/9: Colour Blindness Day 21/9 - 27/9: International Week of the Deaf 23/9: International Day of Sign Languages	ADHD awareness month Dyslexia awareness month 6/10: World Cerebral Palsy Day 10/10: World Mental Health Day 8/10: World Sight Day		3/12: International Day of Persons with Disabilities	4/1: World Braille Day
Age	12/8: International Youth Day		1/10: International Day of Older Persons	20/11: Children in Need Day		
Race and Ethnicity		East & South East Asian Heritage Month	Black History Month			
Sexual Orientation			11/10: National Coming Out Day			
Sex, Gender Identity and Gender Reassignment			18/10: World Menopause Day 26/10: Intersex Awareness Day	November 20/11: Transgender day of Remembrance		

Some dates are provisional, based on the lunar calendar and/or sighting of the moon. The FA recognise that in the case of most of the faiths concerned there are various ways of spelling the same word. This is because of the range of languages (and alphabets) of the original terms. Some dates may also vary and the date of local celebrations may differ.

In this calendar we have only highlighted the six largest faiths in England by population and recognise there will be other faiths not mentioned. All Jewish Festivals begin at sunset and end on nightfall on the dates highlighted.



EDI CALENDAR

February – July 2027

	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY
Religion or Belief	8/2 - 9/3: Ramadan (Islam) 10/2 - 27/3: Lent (Christianity)	9/3: Eid Al-Fitr (Islam) 22/3: Holi (Hinduism) 22/3 - 23/3: Purim (Judaism)	14/4: Vaisakhi (Sikhism) 21/4 - 29/4: Passover (Judaism)	2/5: Orthodox Easter Day (Christianity) 16/5: Eid al-Adha (Islam) 20/5: Vesak Day (Buddhism)	6/6: Islamic New Year (Islam) 10/6 - 12/6: Shavuot (Judaism)	
Disability		1/3: International Wheelchair Day 3/3: Dyscalculia Awareness Day 15/3 - 19/3: Neurodiversity Celebration Week	2/4: World Autism Day	3/5 - 9/5: Deaf Awareness Week		
Age		16/3: Young Carers' Action Day		9/5: National Children's Day UK		25/7: World Day For Grandparent's and the Elderly
Race or Ethnicity	6/2: Lunar New Year	21/3: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination		21/5: World Day for Cultural Diversity	Gypsy, Roma & Traveller History Month 20/6: World Refugee Day 22/6: Windrush Day	1/7 - 31/7: South Asian Heritage Month
Sexual Orientation	Football v Homophobia Month of Action LGBT+ History Month				Pride Month	14/7: International Non-Binary People's Day
Sex, Gender Identity and Gender Reassignment		7/3: Mothering Sunday 8/3: International Women's Day 31/3: International Trans Day of Visibility		17/5: International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia	20/6: Father's Day	



RACE & ETHNICITY

KEY DATES TO CONSIDER

1 July - 31 July 2027

South Asian Heritage Month

Celebrating the history and achievements of British South Asians.

OCT 2026

Black History Month

Celebrating Black history and the impact of Black heritage and culture on the UK.

6 FEB 2027

Lunar New Year

A festival that celebrates the beginning of a new year on the traditional lunisolar Chinese calendar.

21 MAR 2027

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Observing a theme of eliminating racial discrimination across the world.

JUNE 2027

Gypsy, Roma & Traveller History Month

Through celebration education and awareness, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History month helps to tackle prejudice, challenge myths and amplify the voices from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community.

SOUTH ASIAN SHIELD BRINGS FOOTBALL COMMUNITY TOGETHER AT ST. GEORGE'S PARK

More than 300 people from across the country came together at St. George's Park for the South Asian Shield, a landmark event delivered as part of The FA's EDI strategy, A Game Free from Discrimination.

The event celebrated the contribution of South Asian communities to the game, bringing together players, supporters, role models and football leaders for a day of football, networking, learning and celebration at the home of England's national teams.

The day began with a fixture featuring supporters and fan groups from the Fans for Diversity network. For many participants, it was their first visit to St. George's Park.

Attendees then gathered for a conference at the Hilton Hotel, where they heard about the work being delivered through Build, Connect, Support to increase opportunities and representation across the game. The audience also heard inspiring stories from current and former South Asian footballers involved in The FA's 21st Century Ballers initiative, alongside former England international Emile Heskey, who reflected on his journey to the highest level of the game.

The celebrations concluded on the pitch with two pre-season fixtures showcasing clubs with strong ties to South Asian communities.



Newly promoted Isthmian League side Punjab United faced Sporting Khalsa from the West Midlands, while East London's Sporting Bengal United took on Bradford-based Albion Sports.

The South Asian Shield was more than a football event. It was a celebration of community, culture and progress, bringing people together to build connections, share experiences and highlight the role models driving greater representation across the game.

This landmark event embodied the aims of The FA's A Game Free from Discrimination strategy, demonstrating football's power to unite communities and inspire the next generation.

FURTHER GUIDANCE & ORGANISATIONS TO CONSIDER

- [Kick It Out](#)
- [Show Racism the Red Card](#)
- [South Asian Heritage Month](#)
- [Black History Month](#)
- [Football Unites Racism Divides](#)
- [The Frank Soo Foundation](#)
- [United Nations](#)



RACE & ETHNICITY

THE FIRST 11 BLACK LIONESSES

Show Racism the Red Card's (SRtRC) First 11 Black Players heritage project has always been about ensuring the historical record reflects the true diversity of English football. Having produced 10 powerful exhibitions focused on the men's game so far, this edition turns to the women's game, celebrating the first 11 Black footballers to represent the Lionesses.

The Lionesses' pop-up exhibition travels to SRtRC educational events nationwide, bringing these vital stories to communities, schools and fans. Through 11 bold banners, we showcase each player's defining England moments, their cultural heritage, and the barriers they broke in a sport that often failed to recognise them.

The exhibition was launched with three of the First 11 trailblazers: Kerry Davis, Mary Phillip and Rachel Yankey OBE. Davis made history in 1982 as the first Black player to wear the Lionesses' crest, amassing 90 caps and 43 goals, a record that stood for decades.

Her impact was so significant that she also features in Liverpool FC's own First 11 exhibition, marking the first time in this project that a female player features in a club's timeline. Phillip went on to become the Lionesses' first Black captain, while Yankey who earned 129 caps between 1987 and 2013 became the first Black England player to make a century of appearances.

Proudly supported by The FA and the PFA, this exhibition forms a vital part of SRtRC's anti-racism work. For more on their campaigns, visit theredcard.org



GENDER

KEY DATES TO CONSIDER

26 OCT 2026

Intersex Awareness Day

A day to highlight the human rights issues faced by intersex people.

NOV 2026

November

Raising awareness of men's mental health and wellbeing issues.

8 MAR 2027

International Women's Day

Commemorating the cultural, political and socioeconomic achievements of women.

7 MAR 2027

Mothering Sunday

A traditional day to honour mothers.

20 JUNE 2027

Father's Day

A traditional day to honour fathers.

THE FA RISING LEADERS PROGRAMME

The Rising Leaders is a learning and development programme delivered by The FA for ethnically diverse young women aged 16–19 who are passionate about coaching football and developing as leaders. The programme is designed to inspire confidence, build leadership capability, and equip participants with the skills and self-belief to become role models and changemakers within their communities, both on and off the pitch. Whether participants are aspiring coaches or already actively involved in coaching, Rising Leaders supports them to grow their confidence, strengthen employability skills, and explore pathways into volunteering, coaching, and future roles within football.

<https://www.englandfootball.com/participate/women-and-girls/rising-leaders>



FUNDING

The FA offer funding support for some of our most popular coaching courses, helping to make football more accessible for everyone. Through our partnership with Chase, eligible learners can apply for fully funded places on the Introduction to Coaching Football, UEFA C Diploma, and UEFA B Diploma, with the full course cost covered.

We also offer a Partially Funded Places Programme, designed to support individuals who may face financial barriers to getting involved in coaching. Successful applicants receive an 85% reduction in course fees, paying only the remaining 15% themselves.

As part of our commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive coaching workforce, these funding opportunities help remove cost as a barrier to accessing grassroots and professional football coaching qualifications. Further information on available funding and eligibility criteria can be found on the England Football Learning website.

Chase Fully Funded Places

Partially Funded Places Programme



GENDER



REPRESENTATION IN MATCH OFFICIALS: PROGRESS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Over the past three years, FA Refereeing, in partnership with the County FA network, has significantly increased the representation of women and girls (W&G) in officiating, in line with the national strategy To Grow, Guide and Govern. The strategy set a clear ambition to increase W&G referee numbers by 50% while embedding greater diversity and inclusion across the refereeing pathway.

Progress has been substantial, with the number of W&G match officials increasing from 2,605 in 2022–23 to 3,700 in 2025–26. This growth has been driven by consistent delivery across the County FA network, with most County FAs now offering women-only referee courses. These provide inclusive and supportive entry points that build confidence and reduce traditional barriers to entry and are often supported by bursaries or funded places to ensure cost is not a barrier to participation.

Alongside recruitment, County FAs have strengthened development and retention through structured mentoring, local referee networks and targeted progression opportunities, including talent programmes and development events. These initiatives provide ongoing support for newly qualified referees, helping them transition into officiating and progress through the pathway.

National programmes delivered locally, such as Our Whistle, have further enhanced this work by providing tailored training, mentoring and equipment to women and girls, particularly those from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage communities. At the same time, FA Refereeing has increased the visibility of female officials through initiatives such as the Referee Me video series, showcasing role models across all levels of the game and inspiring future referees.

Together, this combination of national leadership and local delivery has driven sustained improvements in recruitment, retention and progression, helping to create a more diverse, inclusive and representative refereeing workforce.



RELIGION AND BELIEF

KEY DATES TO CONSIDER

CHRISTIANITY

25 DEC 2026

Christmas Day

Held on the 25th of December commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ.

26 MAR 2027

Good Friday

A holiday commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

28 MAR 2027

Easter Sunday

A date commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

29 MAR 2027

Easter Monday

A religious observance of an angel meeting the women who arrived at Jesus's tomb.

ISLAM

8 FEB - 9 MAR 2027

Ramadan

Muslims around the world fast during daylight hours as well as praying, giving to charity and strengthening family ties.

Please see Ramadan guidance document.

9 - 10 MAR 2027

Eid-al-Fitr

Marking the end of a month of fasting and a time of celebration.

16 MAY 2027

Eid-al-Adha

A major Islamic festival celebrating faith, sacrifice, charity, and community.

HINDUISM

8 NOV 2026

Diwali Deepavali & Bandi Chhor Divas

A celebration and festival including fireworks and lamps symbolically marking triumph of light over dark.

SIKHISM

15 JAN 2027

Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh

Marking the birth of the tenth Sikh leader to honour and remember a great warrior, poet, philosopher and spiritual master.

14 APR 2027

Vaisakhi

A spring festival celebrating the founding of the Sikh community.

BUDDHISM

20 MAY 2027

Vesak Day

Commemorates the birth, enlightenment and death of Siddhartha Gautama, who is commonly known as Buddha.

Find out more about a Buddhist festival celebrating the Buddha and doing the impossible

JUDAISM

20 - 21 SEPT 2026

Yom Kippur

Meaning the Day of Atonement. It is celebrated ten days after Rosh Hashanah.

25 SEPT - 4 OCT 2026

Sukkot/Shmini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

Sukkot a Hebrew word meaning Booths or Huts refers to the Jewish festival of giving thanks to the fall of harvest.

11 - 13 SEPT 2026

Rosh Hashana

The Jewish new year festival.

FURTHER GUIDANCE & ORGANISATIONS TO CONSIDER:

Muslim Chaplains of sport

Maccabi GB

Hindu Forum of Britain

Sikh Press Association

The Carob Tree Project

Community Security Trust

Faith Forums 4 London

Ramadan Tent Project

Sports Chaplaincy

The Church of England

Nujum Sports

The FA Faith & Inclusion



RELIGION AND BELIEF

INTERFAITH WITH ASHRAF WALLACE, WEST RIDING COUNTY FA

I joined West Riding FA three years ago after careers in the banking and charity sectors. While those experiences helped shape my understanding of people, organisations and communities, football offered a unique opportunity to drive meaningful change through equality, diversity and inclusion.

A key focus of my work has been promoting faith inclusion and interfaith understanding across football and our wider communities. One of the highlights of my time at West Riding FA has been helping to develop and deliver our Many Traditions, One Community, One County event. The event brings together people from different faiths and backgrounds to celebrate Eid,

Easter, Passover and Vaisakhi, creating opportunities for dialogue, learning and shared understanding.

Alongside this, we have delivered Ramadan workshops, produced guidance and resources for clubs and leagues, supported local Ramadan leagues, and provided anti-Semitism awareness training for staff and board members. We have also strengthened inclusion within our own organisation through the introduction of a contemplation room and improved ablution facilities, ensuring our workplace better reflects and supports the diverse needs of our communities.

Building relationships with faith communities has been an important part of this journey. Working alongside organisations such as Leeds Maccabi and attending

Shabbat celebrations have provided valuable opportunities to learn, build trust and demonstrate support across different communities.

For me, EDI is about bringing people together through understanding, respect and meaningful engagement. By creating spaces where people can learn from one another and celebrate their different traditions, we can help ensure football remains a game where everyone feels welcome and valued.



DISABILITY

KEY DATES TO CONSIDER

06 SEP 2026

Colour Blind Awareness Day

Raising awareness that colour blindness affects 1 in 12 males and 1 in 200 females.

21 - 27
SEPT 2026

International Week of the Deaf

An annual celebration of the Global Deaf community.

OCT 2026

Dyslexia Awareness month

Dyslexia Awareness month takes place globally and aims to amplify the message and raise awareness world-wide.

06 OCT 2026

World Cerebral Palsy Day

A day for people to celebrate and support those living with Cerebral Palsy.

10 OCT 2026

World Mental Health Day

A day to raise awareness of mental health issues and mobilise efforts in support of mental health.

08 OCT 2026

World Sight Day

Raise awareness to focus attention on the global issue of eye health.

03 DEC 2026

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

The day is about promoting the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.

01 MAR 2027

International Wheelchair Day

Wheelchair users celebrate the positive impact a wheelchair has on their lives.

10 - 16
MAY 2027

Mental Health Awareness Week

A week to focus on achieve good mental health across the UK.

COMETS

A safe place for Disabled Children aged 5-11 to kickstart their football journey

Comets is a recreational, pan-disability football programme for disabled boys and girls aged between 5 and 11. Pan-disability is the largest format of disability football, which sees players with a broad range of impairments and health conditions play together.

Comets offers a new, flexible and inclusive way of playing, one that's all about playfulness, friendships and having fun. More than anything, Comets is football that breaks the old rules and replaces them with a brand new one: **JUST BE YOU.**

Comets is currently running at a range of locations across England, but more sessions are being added all the time.

To find out more visit <https://www.EnglandFootball.com/play/Disability-Football/Comets>

DISABILITY TRAINING & TOOLKIT FOR CLUBS: JOURNEY TO INCLUSION

Is your club ready to open its doors and welcome more disabled people? Perhaps you already have a disability offer in place and are looking to expand? Or maybe you're yet to offer disability football and are worried about how to do so? The good news is, we have everything you need! From promoting your offer and welcoming new players on their very first visit, to embedding disability in your club culture, both on and off the pitch.

It's time for change. Simply use our online toolkit or book onto one of our face-to-face workshops to join us in providing more football opportunities for disabled people.

To find out more visit <https://www.EnglandFootball.com/play/Disability-Football/Training>

To see Comets and disability Training for Clubs: Journey to Inclusion in action, watch this [video](#).



DISABILITY

HOMELESS OPEN OPPORTUNITIES FOOTBALL (HOOF) LEAGUE – LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND CFA

The Homeless Open Opportunities Football (HOOF) League was launched as a partnership between Leicestershire & Rutland County FA, Turning Point, and Falcon Support Services to provide accessible football opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and those affected by mental health challenges.

The league supports recovery and wellbeing by offering a structured, inclusive football environment, recognising that many participants live with long-term mental health conditions and learning or social disabilities.

Leicestershire & Rutland County FA provides facilities, league affiliation and long-term development oversight. Turning Point offers funding and guidance on supportive delivery, while Falcon Support Services coordinates matchdays and engages local services to take part.

The league follows a pan-disability football format, delivering monthly small-sided, festival-style matchdays. In 2024/25, six local services entered teams, providing opportunities for 109 participants to play, with half attending more than half of the fixtures. In 2025/26, six teams are already affiliated, with 85 players registered for the season 2025/26, including 28 players engaged through a partnership with HMP Leicester, delivering transition sessions for prison leavers facing homelessness.

The HOOF League also creates clear progression pathways into mainstream and pan-disability football, as well as opportunities to move into officiating and coaching roles. To date, four participants have qualified as referees and are now officiating in local grassroots football, supporting progression into employment and greater independence.

Monthly feedback from participants highlights consistent improvements in mental and physical health, increased confidence, stronger social connections, and positive recovery outcomes.

Key outcomes:

- 109 players engaged in 2024/25
- 6 teams affiliated for the 2025/26 season
- 2025/26 season HOOF League: 85 Players Registered
- 2025/26 season HMP Sessions: 28 Players (Proxy due to GDPR from the prison)
- Monthly festival-style matchdays delivered
- Pathways created into mainstream and pan-disability football
- 4 participants qualified as referees, supporting employment and independent living

- Positive impacts reported on mental and physical health, confidence and recovery
- Successful partnership established between Leicestershire & Rutland CFA, Turning Point and Falcon Support Services
- Ongoing plans to deliver referee and coaching qualifications for up to 24 participants



SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SEX, GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER REASSIGNMENT

KEY DATES TO CONSIDER

20 NOV 2026

Transgender day of remembrance

Remembering and honouring the lives of trans and gender-diverse people reported murdered in the last 12 months.

FEB 2027

Football v Homophobia Month of Action

The month of action calls on football to tackle homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the game.

LGBT+ History Month

A month long observation of LGBT history, increasing visibility and raising awareness of matters affecting the LGBT community.

31 MAR 2027

International Trans day of Visibility

A day to increase the visibility of trans people across all communities.

17 MAY 2027

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia & Biphobia

Aiming to coordinate events that raise awareness of LGBT rights worldwide.

JUN 2027

Pride Month

Pride month is celebrated each year in the month of June to honour the 1969 Stonewall uprising in Manhattan.

LONDON 11s LEAGUE – AMATEUR FA

The London 11s League was established in response to demand from women's and non-binary teams seeking an 11-a-side competition that reflected their values and provided a genuinely inclusive football environment.

The league actively welcomed new teams, ensuring its growth remained rooted in principles of inclusion, diversity, and equal opportunity. Fixtures were played on Saturdays at central London venues, offering accessible and consistent participation opportunities for women and non-binary players.

By creating a structured and supportive environment, the league helped remove barriers to participation and enabled more people to engage with football. A key strength was its commitment to making the game accessible regardless of experience, background, or ability. This attracted a diverse mix of teams, from newly formed groups to more established sides.

While maintaining a competitive format, the league placed equal emphasis on respect, enjoyment, and community. This balance allowed both recreational and competitive teams to thrive, fostering a positive football culture.

Beyond matchdays, teams became part of a wider football community built on fair play, development, wellbeing, and belonging. Organisers worked proactively to ensure participants felt safe, valued, and able to engage fully both on and off the pitch.

The London 11s League provides a strong example of inclusive football delivery, combining structured competition with a clear social purpose. By supporting participation growth and community development, it demonstrates how football can be a powerful vehicle for inclusion and positive social impact.

The league's impact was further reflected in the 2025/26 season, when Whippets FC were crowned league champions and also received the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Award at the Amateur FA Annual Awards, recognising the club's outstanding commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive football environment.



FURTHER GUIDANCE & ORGANISATIONS TO CONSIDER:

- [Football v Homophobia](#)
- [Stonewall](#)
- [GFSN](#)
- [Pride Sports](#)



SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SEX, GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER REASSIGNMENT

FOOTBALL UNITED – BE PART OF SOMETHING SPECIAL

Football United is more than a football team; it is a celebration of inclusion, diversity, friendship and unity. Built on the belief that football should be accessible to everyone, Football United brings together people from different backgrounds, ages, identities and abilities who share a passion for the game. Whether you have played for years, are returning after time away, or are stepping onto the pitch for the first time, Football United provides a welcoming environment where everyone can contribute, connect and play.

Football United is led by The FA's Community of Practice Ambassadors, including team manager Sophie Cook, a trans advocate and former RAF service member. Sophie was instrumental in bringing together Football United's inaugural fixture against the RAF, a match that perfectly demonstrated what the team stands for. Although the result did not go Football United's way after taking a 2–0 lead, the day was defined by much more than the scoreline. It was filled with laughter, camaraderie, new friendships and a shared sense of purpose. Players came together not only to compete, but to champion the values of respect, inclusion and community.

Reflecting on the team's launch, Sophie said: "We were thrilled to see so many individuals from every corner of the country register their interest in representing Football United. With players representing eight of the nine protected characteristics, the team is a truly unique reflection of the diversity that exists across our communities and within the game."

As Football United looks ahead to a programme of fixtures during the 2026/27 season, we are inviting more people to join the journey. Everyone is welcome, regardless of experience or ability. Whether you would like to play, volunteer, support from the sidelines or help shape the future of the initiative, there is a place for you within the Football United family.

To find out more about upcoming fixtures, events and opportunities to get involved, please contact EDICOP@thefa.com.



KEY DATES TO CONSIDER

12 AUG 2026

International Youth Day

A day to raise awareness of the need to ensure the engagement and participation of young people.

1 OCT 2026

International Day of Older Persons

This year the World Health Organisation has themed the day around Ageism through the ages.

20 NOV 2026

Children in Need Day

A day to raise money for young people experiencing disadvantage through poverty, disability, illness, distress, abuse, neglect, and behavioural or psychological difficulties.

16 MAR 2027

Young Carers Action Day

Organised by Carers Trust, it aims to raise awareness of young carers and the incredible contribution they make to their families and local communities.

9 MAY 2027

National Children's Day

The day is all about the importance of a healthy childhood.

FA LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The FA Leadership Academy is a 12-month learning and development programme for Youth Leaders in football aged 16-24 which kicks off with a 4-day residential event. Over their 12-month learning and development journey, participants are supported to unlock their full potential whilst implementing a project that aims to deliver positive change in their local football community.

This video provides a summary of the 4-day residential

<https://youtu.be/PTNhBSizJE>



CLUB MAKER

The FA Club Maker is a new initiative, that supports young people in taking their first steps into volunteering in the game. The aim is to introduce young people to the number of roles available to them off the pitch.

To access the course online or via your County FA please visit:

<https://www.EnglandFootball.com/participate/volunteer/Learning-and-Development-for-Volunteers>



AGE – YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERING

As the largest stakeholders in the grassroots game, we know young people between the ages of 14-24 are already leading in local football communities. Whether you aspire for a career in football, want to develop new skills, or want to help others to enjoy the game, find out how to get involved.

FA YOUTH COUNCIL

The FA National Youth Council has existed since January 2012. The team is made up of 16 young volunteers who undertake various roles within football to ensure that all young people have meaningful and inclusive opportunities to develop themselves and positively influence the football community. The FA National Youth Council believe that young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they possess the energy, skills and ideas to change football and the wider community for the better today. No decision about young people should be made without young people. The FANYC has representation on The FA Council and the Football development committee.

COUNTY FA YOUTH COUNCILS

A County FA Youth Council is a team of young people, typically between the ages of 16 and 25, who are the voice of the youth for their respective counties. This is where the County FA involve young people in a meaningful way, allowing them to provide equal weight and value to their ideas and suggestions. Please contact your County FA to find out about your local Youth Council and explore other great initiatives including the FA leadership academy and The FA youth leadership network.

<https://community.thefa.com/youth-leadership-volunteering/w>

- Youth Leadership and Volunteering Hub

<https://www.Englandfootball.com/participate/volunteer>

- England Football Volunteering



OPPORTUNITY - WALKING FOOTBALL

MONTY TOWERS: PROVING YOUR PASSION FOR FOOTBALL NEVER RETIRES

What I love most about walking football is that it proves your passion for the game never has to retire. That is why I am so passionate about encouraging others to get involved. Although other commitments now mean I only play once a week, my focus is on creating opportunities for others to experience the benefits the sport has given me.

The support from the local community has been incredible. Inspired by that support, I made it my mission to give something back by creating new sessions and helping establish a brand-new team. The aim was simple: to provide more opportunities for people to play football, stay active, socialise, and improve their wellbeing. Walking football offers all of this and, despite its name, is much quicker and more competitive than many people expect.

True Inclusion: Breaking Down Barriers

"If you are thinking about trying it, just take that first step," I always tell people. "Our sessions are welcoming, inclusive, and suitable for all abilities. You won't just find a sport here; you'll find a community."

Whether it is helping older players continue enjoying the game they love or providing an accessible starting point for people who have never played football before, there is a place for everyone. Our players range in age from 22 to 80, demonstrating the unique ability of walking football to bring generations together. Our oldest player, Eddie Lackenby, is 80 years young, while my son Owen, now 22, has been part of the walking football community since he was just 10 years old.

The opportunities extend beyond playing. Many participants contribute as volunteers, organisers, and advocates, helping to shape the future of grassroots football and strengthen their local communities.

In just one year, we have built a brand-new club, grown our membership, and begun competing in leagues and tournaments. I also helped co-create a new summer league alongside Janette Hynes MBE, whose vision helped create a format that brings younger adults and veteran players together in the same competition. The league has been a great success and is now in its second year.

Walking football demonstrates the power of inclusion through sport. Regardless of age, background, gender, or footballing experience, everyone has something to contribute. It tackles social isolation, promotes physical and mental wellbeing, builds lasting friendships, and creates stronger, healthier communities.

Monty Towers is head coach at Riverside walking football team in Middlesbrough



OPPORTUNITY- JOINING THE COUNTY FA WORKFORCE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT, CHLOE WHITWORTH

I'm proud to be a product of the opportunities that exist within football to develop young leaders and future professionals. My journey through the FA BUCS Women's Leadership Programme, the FA Leadership Academy and the FA National Youth Council played a significant role in shaping the person and professional I am today.

Through these experiences, I was given opportunities to develop my leadership skills, contribute to important conversations about the future of the game, and connect with people from across the football landscape. They challenged me to think differently, broadened my understanding of the role football can play in society, and gave me the confidence to pursue a career within the game. Looking back, they were instrumental in helping me take my next step into the County FA network.

Today, I work as a Senior Delivery Officer (EDI) at Devon County FA, where I have the privilege of helping create opportunities for people from all backgrounds to engage with football and feel a sense of belonging within the game. Working in equality, diversity and inclusion allows me to combine my passion for football with my commitment to creating positive change within communities.

Since joining Devon FA, I've had the opportunity to lead and support a range of initiatives focused on inclusion, participation and community engagement. One of the highlights of my first few months was delivering our Ramadan Football Festival. The event brought together more than 40 participants from diverse backgrounds for an evening centred around football, learning and community. Participants shared Iftar together, took part in CPD opportunities and enjoyed a football tournament that created meaningful opportunities for connection and understanding. Seeing people come together through a shared love of football while learning from one another's experiences was a powerful reminder of the role the game can play in building inclusive communities.

Another standout moment was leading Devon's first England Football Your Game event at St James Park. The event welcomed 55 young people aged 16–24



and was designed to showcase the variety of opportunities available within football beyond playing. Throughout the day, participants took part in networking opportunities and workshops focused on coaching, youth leadership, volunteering and club administration.

Alongside these events, I have also supported the delivery of the Devon FA Disability County Cup Finals and The FA Journey to Inclusion Workshop, both of which have contributed to strengthening inclusive opportunities and environments across grassroots football in Devon.

What has stood out most during my time at Devon FA is seeing the impact that intentional inclusion can have. Whether through engaging with faith communities, creating opportunities for young leaders, supporting disabled participants, or working alongside grassroots clubs, football has an incredible ability to bring people together and create a sense of belonging.

Football should be a game where everyone feels they belong, and I'm grateful to now play a part in helping make that vision a reality.



REPORTING DISCRIMINATION

To ensure our national game is inclusive, we all have a responsibility to step up and blow the whistle on discrimination. Here's how:

THE GRASSROOTS GAME, DISABILITY GAME, WOMEN'S PYRAMID AND THE NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM

IF YOU'VE BEEN THE VICTIM OF OR WITNESSED AN INCIDENT OF DISCRIMINATION:

Report it via The FA website.

For more info on reporting discrimination - <https://www.thefa.com/inclusion-and-anti-discrimination/reporting-discrimination>

For more info on Sanctions and discipline - <https://www.englandfootball.com/participate/behaviour/sanctions-and-discipline>

Report it to Kick It Out through their [online reporting form](#) or via their reporting app available on both [iOS](#) and [Android](#).
Alternatively, email Kick It Out at report@kickitout.org

For grassroots football - complete the online form you'll find [here](#), which also goes to the County FA. You can also contact the County FA directly.
A full list of County FAs and contact details can be found [here](#).

Please note: If the incident occurs outside 'organised' football (i.e. in competitions not affiliated to the County FA), the County FA can still advise on what your next steps should be).

REPORTING DISCRIMINATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

Whether it's in connection with professional or grassroots football, if you see a post on social media you believe is discriminatory, there are three ways to report it. These are:
By contacting the site on which the post exists – see more information below.

By contacting the police, either:

- In person
- By calling the local police on 101
- By completing the online reporting form you'll find [here](#)
- By calling 999 if you are in an emergency





**ENGLAND
FOOTBALL**