

# THE FA WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL GAME STRATEGY 2021–24



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**FOR ALL**



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# Working together to be at the global forefront of women's professional sport



The FA and the clubs of the Barclays FA Women's Super League and FA Women's Championship are delighted to share this Women's Professional Game Strategy for England.

The document sets out our collective ambition to develop the best women's leagues and competitions in the world. This sets the direction that we will work towards.

We will do this by prioritising three goals: producing world class talent, maximising and engaging audiences; and growing the commercial revenue and financial sustainability of the game.

To do this, we need to build the best platform for the game to succeed and for women's football to thrive. This relies on collaborative leadership, with The FA and the clubs working together to deliver on our joint aspirations.

The new Barclays FA Women's Super League and Championship Board is fully committed to providing collaborative governance of the women's professional game in line with the intentions of this strategy.

We are in an exciting time for women's sport and football. In particular the announcement of the new domestic rights partnership with Sky and BBC is a seminal moment in the women's game and one that enables us to significantly grow audiences and revenue to secure a bright long-term future for our game.

We look forward to working with our clubs and other stakeholders to deliver a world class product, attract large audiences and fill our stadia with engaged, passionate fans.

The quality of the on-field product is fundamental to our success. We want a balance of the very best English and overseas talent showcasing dynamic, exciting and competitive football, supported by a world-class elite performance workforce, enabling the players to maximise their full potential.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dawn Airey". The signature is stylized with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Dawn Airey**

Chair of the Barclays FA Women's Super League and Championship Board





# Time to prioritise the growth of the women's game



This strategy represents a critical step in the development of the women's game. It was important to us that the plans for future growth were developed with the insight and commitment of the clubs and The FA.

We recognise that the path to long-term success relies on our collective investment in a shared vision. We have great ambitions for the women's game in this country. We are proud to have launched the first fully-professional women's football league in Europe and created the semi-professional FA Women's Championship.

These developments, and the investment of the clubs, have changed the landscape of women's football in this country, offering women and girls a genuine career path in the sport they love.

To continue that positive trajectory, we need to focus on stimulating growth. This strategy focuses on ensuring women's football truly breaks into the mainstream with high awareness and interest, large audiences and full stadia.

One of my priorities is ensuring that the development of the game is sustainable. This means growing the

value of media rights, sponsorship and matchday revenues. Even with the immense challenges of Covid we have announced a record breaking multi-million pound domestic TV rights agreement, sold the rights in territories across the world and seen an increasing number of brands investing in the game at national and club level.

I really believe our higher purpose of 'Inspiring Positive Change' will attract brands who want to make a difference in society and in communities across the country.

By showcasing strong, athletic, healthy role models excelling in their sport we can inspire young girls and women to take up active lifestyles and all its associated benefits. Now that's a powerful mission to get behind and help deliver - making a real difference for this and future generations of females.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kelly Simmons'.

**Kelly Simmons**

Director of Women's Professional Game, The FA





## OUR PURPOSE

# INSPIRING POSITIVE CHANGE

The strategy for the women's game in England is guided by a higher purpose – to use football to inspire positive change.

With this in mind, we will utilise the platform of the women's professional game to:

- Showcase female role models and their achievements;
- Inspire females to take up the game and all its associated benefits; and
- Promote women's football as a tool for gender equality and societal change.









## OUR GOAL

# TO BUILD THE BEST PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S LEAGUES AND CUP COMPETITIONS IN THE WORLD

Our aspiration is for the Barclays FA Women's Super League (BFA WSL) and the FA Women's Championship (FA WC) to be the most competitive, watched, attended and followed women's football leagues in the world.

We will benchmark other women's sports leagues, identify best practice and set ambitious targets to achieve these aims. Looking further ahead, by 2030 we want to create the first sustainable professional women's football leagues in the world:

Two leagues of 24-28 professional clubs, showcasing dynamic, exciting football underpinned by a world-leading, inclusive talent pathway. We want matches played to full stadia, watched by global audiences, with every club creating a passionate fanbase.

In turn, we envisage the professional game producing powerful and positive role models to inspire the next generation of girls to become active through football.

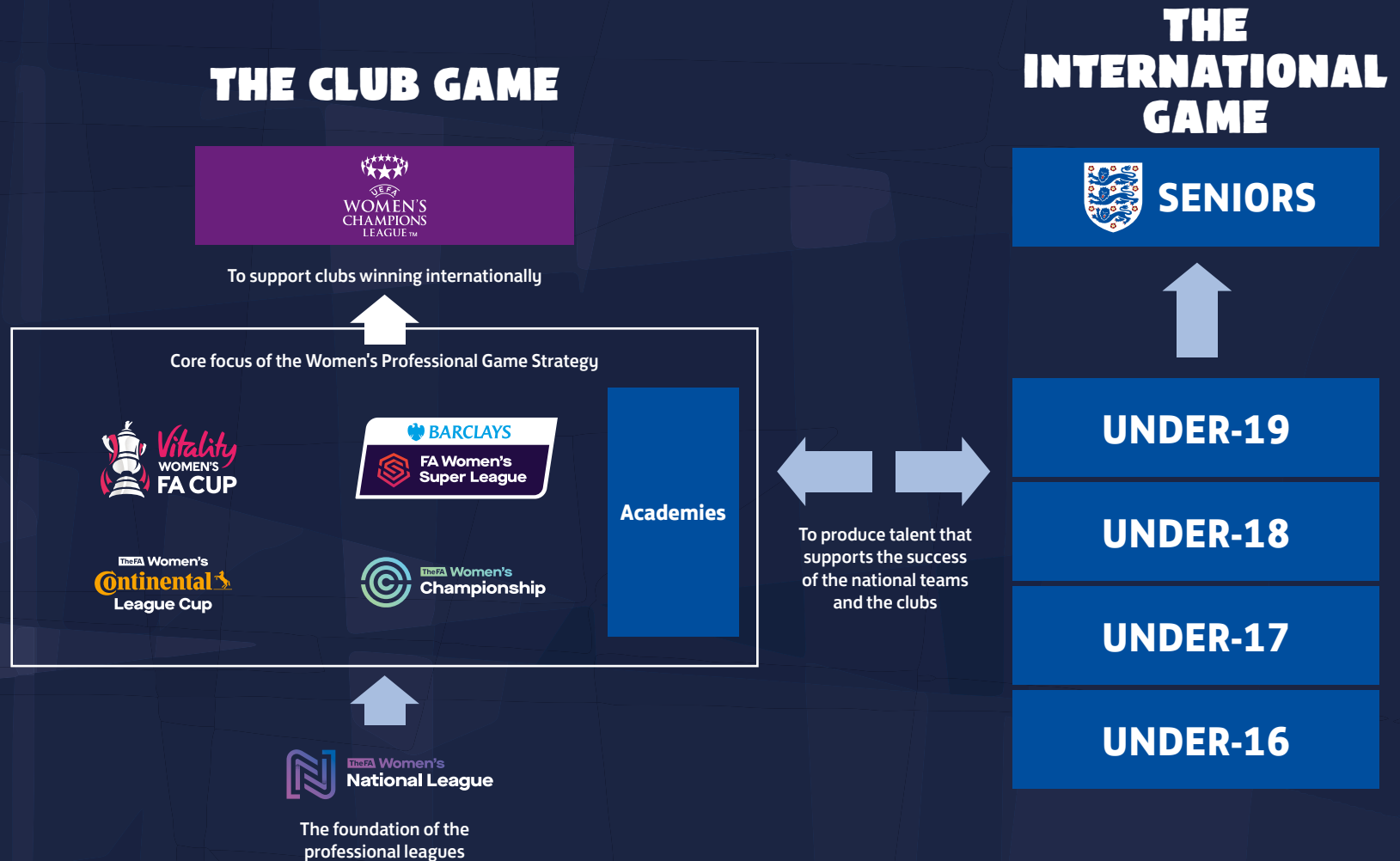




Context:

## THE ELITE FEMALE PLAYER PATHWAY

The Women's Professional Game sits within the wider football ecosystem, domestically and internationally. We want a system that produces club and England success, where The FA and clubs collaborate to produce world-class players and playing opportunities that lead to on-pitch success for club and country.



# The principles on which we'll achieve our 2024 goal



## 🕒 **PLAYER-CENTRIC**

Players are at the heart of the professional game's activities. Their needs are front and centre of its design, including providing a duty of care to prepare players for life after playing.

## 🕒 **AGILE**

The FA and clubs will be able to respond quickly to changes in the market that affect the demand and context for the women's game.



## ⚽ **VALUE-DRIVEN**

The women's professional game will preserve and promote the spirit and values of women's football, its history and its athletes.

## ⚽ **COLLABORATIVE**

Clubs, The FA and their stakeholders will work collaboratively to govern the league, understanding each others' individual needs and sharing knowledge to make decisions aligned around a central vision for the game.

## ⚽ **CLUBS AND ENGLAND WINNING**

The FA and clubs will work in close partnership to develop world-class English talent to support future club and England success.

## ⚽ **BRAVE**

The women's professional game will find new ways to elevate its appeal, innovate and engage audiences to differentiate itself from other sports and be a leader in the industry.

## ⚽ **FUTURE-FOCUSED**

The women's professional game will focus on building a strong commercial platform while managing its cost base to drive long-term sustainability.

## ⚽ **ACCESSIBLE**

The women's professional game will be the most accessible professional sport in the world for fans, partners, participants and all other stakeholders engaged with the game.







# OUR THREE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- 1 PRODUCE AND ATTRACT WORLD-CLASS TALENT**
- 2 MAXIMISE AND ENGAGE AUDIENCES**
- 3 GROW COMMERCIAL REVENUE AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**



Strategic objective 1:

## **PRODUCE AND ATTRACT WORLD-CLASS TALENT**

Players are at the heart of this strategy. The elite level of women's football has progressed rapidly in England and we plan to continue this upward trend by optimising all aspects of the player pathway. We recognise the need for a world-class performance environment, with the best coaches, performance staff and player facilities, to drive future player performance on the pitch while looking after players' wellbeing off it.

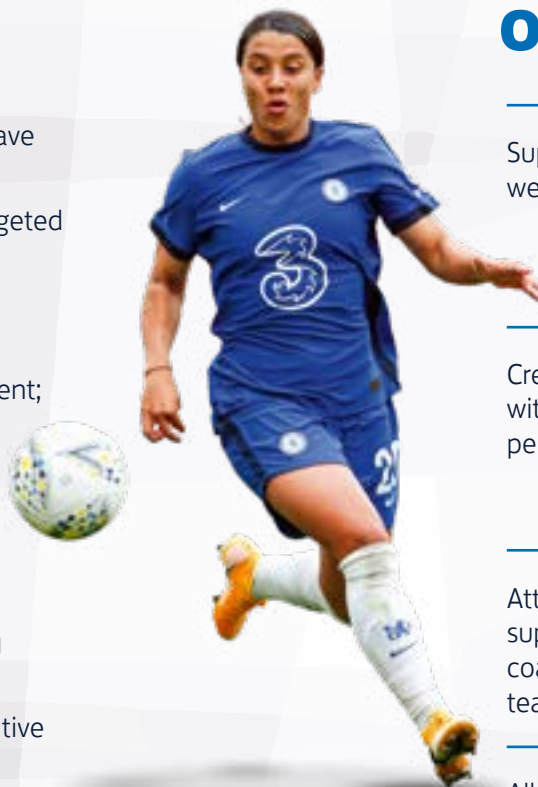
The strictest safeguarding standards, adhering to all FA policies, procedures and protocols, will be complied with at all levels of the women's and girls' professional game, with particular focus on club Academies and talent pathways.



# Measures of success

## By 2024 we want to see:

- > All Managers/Head Coaches in the BFA WSL have The FA Level 5 (UEFA Pro) Coaching Licence;
- > All Managers/Coaches in the FA WC have a targeted professional development programme;
- > 50% of head coaches/managers are female;
- > All women's clubs have senior leadership for performance services and technical development;
- > All clubs have a long-term playing philosophy for performance and player development;
- > Players through the player pathway and in the league are of a higher quality across agreed benchmark measures;
- > The player pathway is diverse and consistently producing first-team players for clubs;
- > The BFA WSL and FA WC are the most competitive leagues in the world.



# How we'll achieve our 2024 objective:

Support the welfare and wellbeing of players

Develop world-leading research and insight on elite performance

Create a world-leading environment within clubs that optimises performance and development

Optimise and diversify the youth player pathway

Attract, recruit, develop and support high-performance coaches and multi-disciplinary teams

Promote and support dual careers

All clubs to sign up to the Football Leadership Diversity Code and establish targets for female and Black, Asian and minority ethnic coaches

Introduce homegrown rules, player protection and compensation to incentivise youth investment



Strategic objective 2:

## **MAXIMISE AND ENGAGE AUDIENCES**

The popularity of women's football in England has never been greater. Pre-Covid we saw record-breaking attendances at games. Now we need to focus on widening our appeal to a greater audience through broadcast and social media innovations. We want to increase the number of fans, whether coming to matches and/or watching broadcast coverage – and continuously improve their experience.



# Measures of success

## By 2024 we want to see:

- The BFA WSL is broadcast globally with the highest audiences across women's sports leagues;
- The BFA WSL media rights deal increases audiences and revenues;
- FA Player subscribers increase;
- The Vitality Women's FA Cup (VWFAC) is broadcast globally with growing audiences;
- BFA WSL and FA WC fans are highly engaged, acting as advocates for the sport;
- FA WC audience growth on FA Player and digital channels;
- Growth on all social channels with BFA WSL becoming the most-followed women's league in the world;
- Growth in BFA WSL, FA WC and VWFAC attendances.

# How we'll achieve our 2024 objective:

Deliver our brand positioning strategy

Deliver a broadcast strategy that maximises reach and delivers revenue

Develop a deep understanding of the women's game football fan

Broaden the reach and quality of media coverage

Increase exposure and brand awareness of the women's professional game

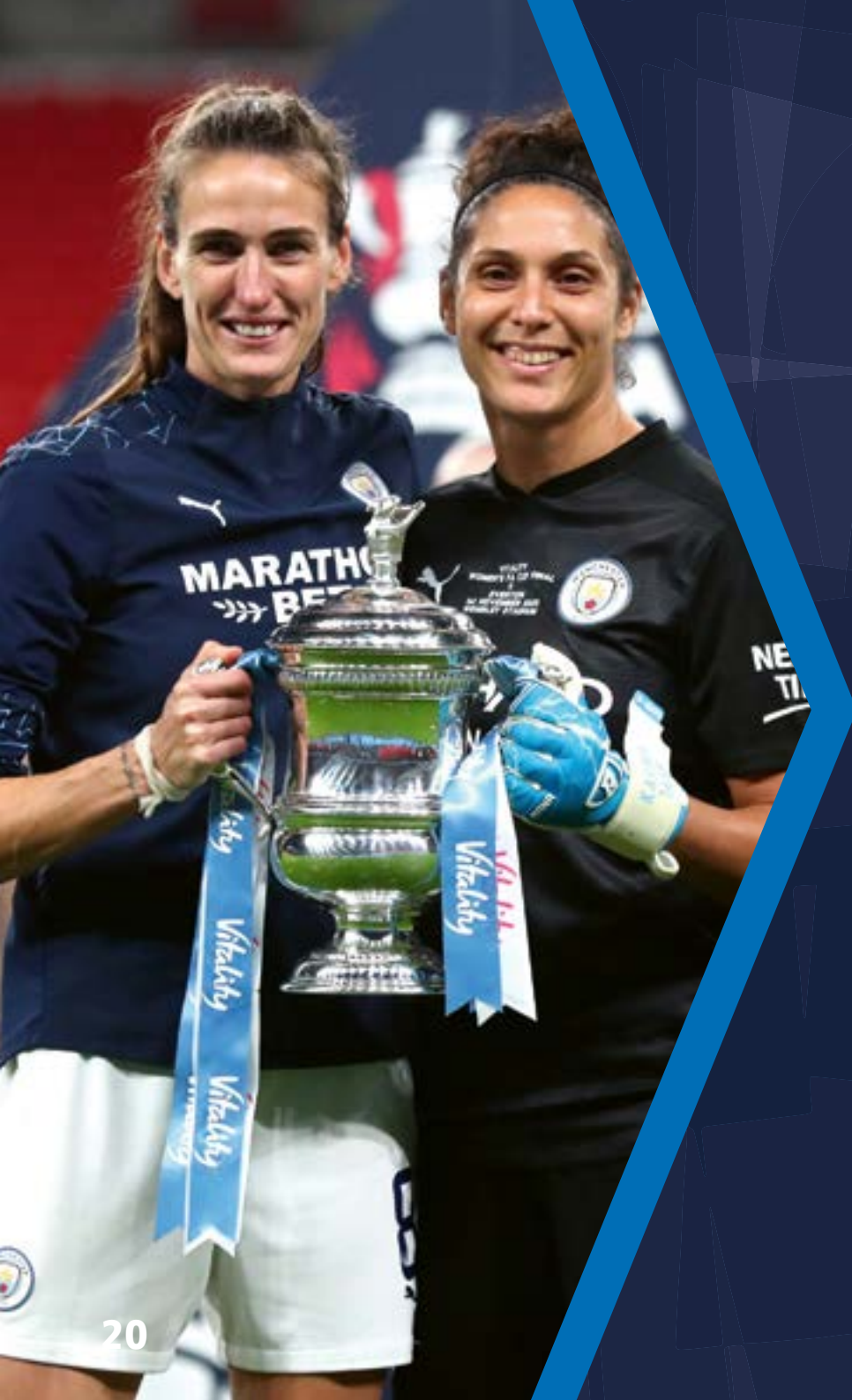
Remove barriers and increase demand to attend women's matches

Work with fan groups to improve the fan matchday experience

Broaden the reach and engagement of social channels



FA Player: The FA-run platform that provides access to all aspects of the women's game



Strategic objective 3:

## **GROW COMMERCIAL REVENUE AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Increasing revenue and managing cost is critical to the long-term success and sustainability of the women's professional game. Recent deals, including Barclays title sponsorship of the FA WSL, have demonstrated that commercial interest in women's football has grown.

Women's football needs more partners who are committed to the future of the game and want to be part of the sport's development. This will provide the necessary support for the leagues and clubs to continue to grow.



## Measures of success

By 2024 we want to see:

- The leagues are financially sustainable within five years;
- Clubs are investing for growth in the short term but working towards sustainability for women's teams within 10 years;
- Women's clubs have committed partners, either as part of wider club deals with allocated values and activation budgets, or with dedicated deals;
- The BFA WSL has a commercial partner portfolio comprising title partner and three to four secondary partners who add value through financial investment and marketing support;
- A lead partner is secured for the FA WC;
- The Vitality Women's FA Cup has a clear plan for revenue growth.



## How we'll achieve our 2024 objective:

Ensure the leagues and clubs have a roadmap for financial sustainability

Promote competitive balance and financial sustainability

New investment will be targeted at driving future revenue growth

Increase matchday, retail and service-based revenue opportunities

Secure partners to grow the game



# OUR THREE ENABLERS

- 1 COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP**
- 2 PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE**
- 3 IMPROVED STADIA AND FACILITIES**





## Enabler 1:

# COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

For women's professional football to fulfil its potential, the direction of the game must be set collectively between the clubs, stakeholders and The FA. The women's game is still in its infancy and collaborative leadership is critical to ensuring decisions are aligned among clubs and with The FA. Women's football also needs to advocate for its value and its place within club and stakeholder strategies, ensuring that the game receives the support that it needs to grow.

## How we'll achieve our 2024 goal:

Agree the best future ownership structure to maximise the growth of the leagues

Influence and consult external football stakeholders to promote and advance women's football

Establish representation for the women's game in club governance structures

Provide world-class league administration and operations



## Enabler 2:

# PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE

To support a world-class professional game, there has to be a professional workforce that upholds the standards required to deliver an elite level sport. By focusing on developing a highly skilled and qualified workforce, women's football can continue to develop on and off the pitch.

## How we'll achieve our 2024 goal:

Define and implement a holistic 'people strategy' for each club to ensure the best people are in the right roles, in the most appropriate structure

Partner with the PGMOL (Professional Game Match Officials Limited) to develop the quality of officiating in the women's professional game

Leverage internal and external partnerships to maximise the resources available to women's clubs

Embed a culture of inclusion, respect and professionalism within the women's professional game





### Enabler 3:

## IMPROVED STADIA AND FACILITIES

The infrastructure that supports the women's professional game is fundamental to enabling the women's game to increase its professionalism, attract and retain regular fans, generate commercial revenue through broadcast and sponsorship and allow players to improve and thrive.

### How we'll achieve our 2024 goal:

Raise standards across stadia for the professional delivery of broadcast, media and commercial operations

Deliver the optimum training environment for players, coaches and wider workforce

Deliver a unique, outstanding and comprehensive in-stadium fan experience

Maximise funding opportunities and increase facility investment

# TIMELINE TO SUCCESS



## 2020/21

- Review of future league ownership project initiated;
- FA Blueprint for Success produced;
- Domestic media rights partnerships agreed for 2021-2024;
- Partnership concluded to sell overseas media rights;
- Dual Career guides launched;
- Player Pathway Strategic Review underway;
- Increase in player pathway graduates in matchday squads;
- Launch of the Coaching Excellence initiative.







## 2021/22

- New domestic media rights partnership with Sky and BBC begins;
- New partnership for referees/officials with PGMOL;
- New UEFA Women's Champions League format begins;
- Capital grants programme to improve facilities;
- Introduction of homegrown player quota rules;
- New standard women's professional player contract in conjunction with the PFA;
- Launch new brand positioning strategy.

## 2022/23

- New player pathway implemented;
- Capital grants programme to improve facilities.

## 2023/24

- Average BFA WSL attendance 6,000, FA WC 1,000;
- Sell out Wembley Stadium for the Vitality Women's FA Cup Final;
- BFA WSL the most-followed women's football league in the world on social media channels.





# ENDING WITH STARTING POINTS

Overleaf are our starting points and our 2024 targets. Understandably, the 2024 targets are subject to review in light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.





## HEADLINE TARGETS:

Target	Starting point	Success measure
Average attendance for the BFA WSL	3,092	6,000
Average attendance for the FA WC	410	1,000
Sell out Wembley Stadium for the Vitality Women's FA Cup Final	2018/19: 43,264 2019/20: No attendance due to Covid-19 pandemic 2020/21: Final to be played December 2021	A sell-out Wembley for the Vitality Women's FA Cup Final
The most-followed women's football league in the world on social media	#2	#1
One English club winner of UEFA Champions League and England win the FIFA Women's World Cup	English Club UEFA Champions League positioning – runners-up FIFA Women's World Cup 2019 – 4th	English Club UEFA Champions League winners FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 winners
Lead partnerships sold for BFA WSL, FA WC and VWFAC	BFA WSL and Women's FA Cup title partnerships sold	100% sold
% players transitioning from Academies into BFA WSL/ FA WC senior teams	TBC*	TBC*
% increase in player progression measures	TBC*	TBC*
% increase in the number of players from the most deprived wards in the country	TBC*	TBC*

*\*To be set post Player Pathway pilot years (2021/22)*

# THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

The women's game in England has attracted a range of partners, whether commercial, broadcast, non-commercial or national delivery partners.

All are vital to achieve our central mission to build the best professional women's sports leagues and competitions in the world.

You will see more names added to the roster as this strategy unfolds.

## Commercial partners:





## Broadcast partners

In addition, the reach and popularity of the game is boosted by our valued broadcast partners:



## Non-commercial partners

Furthermore, the game's infrastructure is part-funded by dedicated non-commercial partners:



## National delivery partners

The game is also flourishing thanks to several national delivery partners, without whom we could not implement various development programmes:





**FOR ALL**

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## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you'd like to be part of the journey towards The FA's goal of building the best women's professional sports leagues in the world, please email: **[womens.football@TheFA.com](mailto:womens.football@TheFA.com)**  
The person most relevant to your enquiry will then respond.