The FA Women's Super League 2014-18

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Be part of a bigger, better, brighter future

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Foreword

There are three key reasons why there has never been a better time to set new goals for the women’s game in England.

Firstly, the London 2012 Olympic Games demonstrated the quality and depth of women’s football. The Games provided renewed momentum for the nation’s largest team sport for females and right now, media interest in women’s football is at an all-time high.

Secondly, St. George’s Park in Burton-upon-Trent, this country’s first national football centre, has just opened. In time, it will produce better coaches and in turn, better players – male and female.

Thirdly, 2013 marks the 20th anniversary of when The FA took over the women’s game. The FA will also celebrate its 150th anniversary – with a continued commitment to develop every aspect of the game, for everyone.

The new goals for women’s football have been set out in a recently-published FA strategy, ‘Game Changer’, which will guide the women’s game from 2013-18.

‘Game Changer’s’ key strategic objectives are:
• To expand The FA WSL
  From eight to a maximum of 20 clubs across two divisions.
• To create an Elite Performance Unit
  Devoted to the women’s game, based at St. George’s Park.
• To deliver a new commercial strategy
  Generating significant new revenues for women’s football.
• To grow participation
  Becoming the second-largest team sport in the country, after men’s football.
• To grow the fanbase
  Using innovative digital media techniques to engage our target audiences.

To support the overall women’s game, The FA will also create a new women’s league and competitions unit to oversee the development of The FA WSL, The FA Women’s Cup and the complete women’s football league pyramid.

The second division of The FA WSL will be launched in 2014 and this document explains the structure and sustainability behind it – and how your club can apply.

We look forward to receiving your application – and together building a bigger, brighter and better future for women’s football.

Michael Game
FA Board Member and Chairman, The FA WSL
2012 has been an extraordinary year for women's football, even considering the growth in strength and support it has seen in recent years. UEFA and FIFA continue to run successful international tournaments and the international game is developing apace. The FIFA Women's World Cup has just been expanded to 24 teams to acknowledge the growth in standards throughout the world. The FA Women's Super League was launched in 2011 as part of The FA's commitment to create winning teams, increase participation and create a clear pathway to develop players. A new, semi-professional summer league with eight teams playing from March to October, The FA WSL provides a direct connection between the England teams and top-quality club football. It has revolutionised the women's game in this country and has delivered four significant benefits: • A rise in domestic playing standards; • Improvement in playing and other career opportunities for talented players; • Growth in the profile of the game, including increased TV and media coverage; • An uplift in commercial investment. The FA WSL is now preparing to expand. After being closed for the 2011, 2012 and 2013 seasons, it will open to new clubs in 2014 and The FA WSL second division will be launched. Current and new clubs are invited to apply. The future success of the league will depend on the quality and commitment of the best players, coaches and great English clubs wanting to be part of The FA WSL. We encourage all those with a passion for women's football and for excellence - and who share our vision for the future - to apply. This brochure tells you how.
The FA WSL objectives

In its vital leadership role, The FA will help raise standards in the women’s game at every level. It will work in partnership with clubs and other key partners (e.g. in education) so that women’s football and its elite competitions thrive.

The FA will use the FA WSL to gain greater exposure for the women’s game and financially sustain semi-professional women’s football in this country. Greater success internationally, increased participation and new commercial investment will be three clear outcomes.

**FA WSL objectives**

- To raise the profile of women’s football by offering high quality, competitive football at the top of the women’s game in this country;
- To help create winning England teams;
- To attract and retain England’s most talented players;
- For clubs to create more playing and non-playing employment opportunities for elite players so that they can become full/part-time athletes;
- To create clear and effective player pathways that link Centres of Excellence to The FA WSL, and beyond to England selection opportunities;
- To support sustainable women’s clubs forging powerful partnerships that strengthen their infrastructure and performance on and off the pitch;
- To gain greater media exposure for the women’s game, attract more commercial and partner investment and financially sustain semi-professional women’s football in England;
- To grow the fan base, increase attendances and grassroots participation through commercial and community programmes and the use of FA WSL ambassadors;
- For clubs to own modern, family and fan friendly home grounds at the heart of the community.
How The FA WSL will work
The FA is committed to creating a summer football pyramid by launching a second division of The FA WSL. The pyramid will showcase the best English female footballers and drive England forward as a leading football nation. A maximum of 20 FA WSL licensed ‘beacon’ clubs will be selected across the two divisions who will work with FA Centres of Excellence to provide pathways for English talent.

The FA WSL first division (FA WSL1) is expected to remain at eight semi-professional clubs (maximum of 10, quality permitting), to concentrate talent and maintain competitiveness. Each FA WSL club will be licensed to ensure minimum standards are maintained.

The FA WSL second division (FA WSL2) will be launched in 2014 with a maximum of 10 clubs selected and licensed to different standards to FA WSL1 clubs but with the same fundamental objective to raise standards in the women’s game.

FA WSL2 clubs are likely to be a mix of amateur and semi-professional clubs committed to narrowing the gap with FA WSL1 clubs – both on and off the pitch. All clubs are required to submit an application if they wish to become a part of The FA WSL. Any club can apply for a place in either division for the 2014 season and it will be the strength of their bid that determines if and where they are placed.

The current eight licensed FA WSL clubs will be required to reapply for a 2014 licence and all applications, old and new, will be reviewed as part of the same process.

Promotion and relegation will be introduced between FA WSL1 and FA WSL2 at the end of the 2014 season, with one club being promoted and one relegated. Otherwise, The FA WSL summer of football will be stand-alone and separate from the winter pyramid. There will be opportunities for winter clubs to apply to The FA WSL as the league expands and develops and should a club ever need to be replaced. All new entrants will have to prove themselves via an application process to give the league and clubs the best possible chance of success.

Any English affiliated club can apply for a place in either division for the 2014 season and it will be the strength of their bid that determines if and where they are placed.
The FA WSL1 and FA WSL2 will run from March to October inclusive, starting in 2014 and only breaking for senior FIFA and UEFA approved international competitions.

The summer schedule will continue to build the unique identity of women’s elite football, growing the fan base and encouraging competitiveness, attracting broadcasters and commercial partners in an uncluttered calendar. It also helps England players prepare and peak for tournaments as a summer league aligns better with the international calendar.

All clubs will play home and away fixtures against their opposition in the relevant division as well as competing in The FA WSL Continental Cup and The FA Women’s Cup.

The schedule aims to give all clubs at least 20 domestic league and cup fixtures per season, with UEFA Champions League and England international competition in addition.

The schedule will be flexible enough to include midweek, evening games to help secure the best spectator attendances possible.

All FA WSL1 and FA WSL2 clubs will be required to have a reserves team, which will play in The FA WSL reserve league, comprising all 18-20 FA WSL clubs but split into two regional divisions. Further details of The FA WSL reserve league fixture programme for 2013 will be provided as soon as possible.

In time this will develop into a youth/talent competition, transitioning players aged 17 plus, exiting the Centres of Excellence. This will be part of the talent pathway under the leadership of the Head of Elite Women’s Development.

Longer term plans for the transition of this league to a youth/talent competition will be announced once the Head of Elite Development has been appointed and he/she has had a chance to assess the optimum way forward.
Partnerships

Whilst FA WSL women’s clubs are required to contract with The FA in their own right to participate in the league, The FA encourages all FA WSL clubs and applicants to develop effective partnerships to strengthen their applications.

Since launching the FA WSL in 2011, we have witnessed a number of women’s clubs forging successful partnerships which have improved the performance of the club both on and off the pitch. Clubs are encouraged to engage with committed partners to help increase efficiencies and strengthen their infrastructure with, for example, men’s football clubs, commercial sponsors, facility and education providers.

Partnerships with men’s clubs have proven to be very successful in the 2011 and 2012 seasons, where clubs share the values and the same ambition to grow the game for mutual benefit. Such committed partnerships will fast track the development of professional women’s football in this country.

There are many benefits that clubs can experience through the right type of partnership including:

- Financial benefits e.g. through third party grants and new commercial revenues;
- VIK (value-in-kind) deals e.g. kit, training equipment, facilities, medical services, etc;
- Increased profile, marketing and PR experience and support;
- Efficiencies on expenditure e.g. back office infrastructure and services;
- Additional personnel on hand to provide experience, guidance and support;
- Access to wider and new fan base and community networks.
Facilities

The long-term vision is for FA WSL clubs to own their home grounds: modern, family-friendly and at the heart of the community, welcoming 1,000 plus spectators to live games week in week out. The FA will work with clubs over the next decade to help achieve this.

To play in the FA WSL, clubs are required to secure facilities that meet the minimum ground grading criteria, as set out in the application pack. A new grading structure is being introduced for the women’s game, which identifies the different levels of ground grading requirements for different leagues.

Clubs participating in FA WSL1 will need grounds that meet the FA Women’s Super League Grade A. This is broadly in line with the men’s National League System ‘Grade C’ category.

Clubs participating in FA WSL2 will need grounds that meet the FA Women’s Super League Grade B. This combines elements of the men’s National League System ‘Grade D’ and ‘Grade E’ categories.

Clubs are strongly encouraged to secure facilities with pitches of the highest quality and to forge effective partnerships with facility providers. Appropriate usage agreements, pitch improvement and maintenance programmes will be important so that FA WSL grounds are kept in optimum condition all year-round.

Another important factor when considering applications is the location of a club’s ground and the potential fan base in the local area. Grounds with better access and in areas of higher population will be more likely to secure regular, higher attendances.
The FA will continue to support clubs selected for The FA WSL1 and FA WSL2 from 2014, and clubs are invited to apply for this funding as part of their application. Clubs must demonstrate in their applications that they can at least match fund any Club Development Fund award made to them by The FA e.g. through sponsorships,gate receipts and partnership income.

After the 2014 season, the Club Development Fund will be reviewed annually. The fund awards are predicted to taper down towards 2018. At that point clubs are expected to be sustainable and not be dependent on FA funds. Clubs should therefore forecast their maximum appropriately.

The Club Development Fund is available to support clubs in three key areas:

1. Management, commercial and marketing services;
2. Coaching, medical and other football-related support services;
3. Facilities.

Clubs can apply for a maximum amount in each area, as indicated in the table. The table identifies the ring-fenced items and amounts that the Club Development Fund is available to pay for. The award amount cannot be spent on anything other than that stated, and it is up to clubs whether they wish to apply for this specific funding.

Within area 1, The FA has specifically allocated funds towards key staff to ensure clubs have the appropriate resource to achieve the ambitions for the league. Any FA award made to fund General / Business Development Managers must be match-funded by the clubs to create a meaningful paid role in this key area.

Within area 2, money is allocated to help fund coaches, sports science, physiotherapy and other medical support services. It is imperative for clubs to provide quality coaching and safeguard talent.

Full details of the Club Development Fund and guidance notes are provided in the application pack.

The FA Club Development Fund

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>FA WSL1</th>
<th>FA WSL2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management, commercial and marketing services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General/Business Development Manager (match funded by club to £22,000 for FAWSL1)</td>
<td>£12,500</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Player Ambassador</td>
<td>£3,000</td>
<td>£0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match Promotion/Marketing Officer</td>
<td>£14,500</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total available</strong></td>
<td>£30,000</td>
<td>£10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Coaching, medical and other football-related support services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to coaches, sports science, physiotherapy and other medical support services costs</td>
<td>£15,000</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to reserve team costs</td>
<td>£10,000</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total available</strong></td>
<td>£25,000</td>
<td>£10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to home ground costs</td>
<td>£10,000</td>
<td>£7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to home ground pitch improvement/maintenance costs</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
<td>£2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total available</strong></td>
<td>£15,000</td>
<td>£10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To achieve league objectives and for clubs to become world-class with world-class players, clubs will need to exceed FA grant levels. You are strongly recommended to identify how you will achieve this beyond match-funding. The FA WSL is a semi-professional league with a mix of paid contract and non-contract players earning a living from the game, playing football and fulfilling off-pitch roles.

It is vital that clubs use any FA award and other revenues to develop the skills and infrastructure they require to generate income and become independent and sustainable entities. Financial information and plans demonstrating how clubs will use this funding to secure longer-term financial viability by attracting other income will be an important part of the application process.

After announcing the successful clubs which have applied for FA WSL membership, The FA will confirm recommended Club Development Fund awards and these will be finalised with clubs as soon as possible, at the same time as the club licences.

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Other FA support available

The FA will provide support to FA WSL clubs in a number of different ways:

- Central management and administration of the league;
- New personnel and a bigger, dedicated women’s league and competitions unit which will oversee FA WSL development and the complete women’s football pyramid;
- Investment into training guides, advice and best practice workshops;
- Working closely in partnership with clubs and other stakeholders via The FA WSL management committee (includes two club members);
- Management of sponsor and broadcast contracts to ensure continued promotion of The FA WSL;
- Dedicated FA WSL marketing representatives at The FA and responsibility for working with the workstream club marketing officer;
- Centralised marketing budget available for attendance-driving marketing activity.

The FA is committed to providing ongoing support and guidance to all interested parties through the application process. This will include providing an Advice Line to help with any queries, the details of which are on page 29 of this brochure.
The FA WSL is revolutionising the women’s game in this country, allowing fans, commercial partners and broadcasters to engage with the sport all year-round. Building on this success, ambitious commercial plans for 2014-2018 will take The FA WSL to the next level, for the benefit of all those involved.

In 2014, for the first time in FA history, there will be a distinct commercial programme for women’s football which will help establish a clear identity and maximise the impact for the women’s game in a crowded sports marketplace. The FA WSL will form the core of this commercial programme, allowing sponsors and broadcasters access to high-quality domestic women’s football.

Benefits of participating in The FA WSL

Clubs who participate in The FA WSL enjoy significant commercial and community benefits which include:

2. Audience
Football is the biggest participation sport for females in England with 1.3 million female players. Participation in The FA WSL gives clubs access to a new and enthusiastic family audience. This demographic gives participating clubs the opportunity to develop new relationships with partners, commercial sponsors and brands for women’s game throughout the UK economy.

There has been an increase in FA WSL attendances of 604% compared to the previous winter, 2010/11 domestic league. Research post-Olympics found that 65% of the general public would consider going to see a live women’s match, up 15% pre-Olympics. 40% of the general population is interested in The FA WSL, compared to 22% in the Europa League and 40% in The Championship.

3. Community
The FA WSL provides participating clubs a new and exciting route into their local communities. It offers the chance to engage with the many thousands of supporters of women’s football through schools, local clubs and County FA networks.

The FA has committed substantial investment in The FA WSL which includes helping clubs to develop and grow their community relationships. An effective community programme reaching out to girls and women is a highly valuable commercial asset for FA WSL clubs.

Interactive marketing campaigns using Twitter and Facebook channels have allowed fans to get behind the scenes of the new league, talking to players directly and being kept up to date with all league information.

The FA WSL won the Football Business Awards ‘Best Use of Social Media’ 2012. It was also nominated for the HICAA Digital & New Media Award 2012, as a result, FA WSL Twitter following increased by 172% from 4,108 to 11,194 since April 2012.

FA WSL commercial opportunities

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The application process for FA WSL1 and FA WSL2 will be open and transparent. Any new or existing club may apply, provided they are affiliated to an English County FA.

Applicants are required to submit their application in the form of a Club Development Plan which clearly demonstrates how the club will meet the minimum requirements. These minimum requirements are identified in the application pack and are grouped into four key areas. They are mirrored in a Club licence, which each successful FA WSL club will be required to enter into with The FA. Clubs will be monitored to ensure they perform to these standards. The four areas are:

1. Financial and business management;
2. Commercial sustainability and marketing;
3. Facilities;
4. Players, support staff and youth development.

The minimum requirements have been developed to advance league and club standards in line with the overall objectives for The FA WSL. Clubs are required to present:

- Accounts and financial forecasts;
- The club’s legal ownership and management structure details;
- Professional staff details, including management, marketing, coaching and medical personnel;
- Business development and marketing plan, incorporating target audience and past spectator attendances;
- Definition of the club’s regional catchment area, with details of maximum potential spectator base;
- Club Development Fund applications and how the club will match-fund this investment;
- Facility details and ground maintenance plans;
- Regional and youth development programme links.

A selection panel comprising independent members and FA representatives with relevant skills and experience will assess applications against minimum requirements. Clubs are encouraged to go beyond the minimum requirements in order to strengthen their Club Development Plan and increase their chance of a successful application.

All applications will be initially assessed against FA WSL criteria unless a club makes it clear it wants to apply specifically for an FA WSL2 licence. Clubs meeting FA WSL criteria will be considered for a place in the first division. Clubs that do not meet FA WSL criteria but do meet FA WSL2 criteria will be considered for FA WSL2. Clubs that do not meet the criteria for either division will not be eligible for a club licence.

Where there are competing applications from the same regional catchment area, the panel will assess the region’s capacity to commercially sustain more than one FA WSL club.

Clubs who present the strongest applications will be awarded a four-year club licence from the 2014 FA WSL season, subject to annual review, promotion and relegation.

The selection panel will assess clubs in April and the announcement of the successful clubs to form The FA WSL1 and FA WSL2 will be made by June 2013.
How to apply

An application pack is available for clubs wishing to apply for league status in 2014. This includes:

- Club Development Plan Minimum Requirements
- Club Development Plan Template
- Club Development Fund and financial guidance
- Ground Grading Minimum Requirements
- Terms and Conditions

This application pack can be downloaded from www.TheFA.com/FAWSL2014

Clubs must use the templates provided and be sure to address all items and questions. Clubs are requested to provide five copies of their application in landscape format on A4 paper in five separate binders. Please do not use plastic wallets or other stationery. The paper should be clean and accessible. Clubs should also save their application onto a memory stick and submit this with their hard copies.

All applicant clubs are deemed to have accepted the Terms and Conditions set out at www.TheFA.com/FAWSL2014 in full when submitting their application.

Clubs must deliver applications by 4pm on Monday 4 March 2013 by hand or by courier to: Tania Saunders The FA Women’s Super League Club Wembley Entrance The Football Association Wembley Stadium Wembley Middlesex HA9 0WS

NB: Please DO NOT POST applications to Wembley Stadium.

Countdown to launch

These are the monthly milestones for new applicants keen to join The FA WSL:

- December 2012: Applications packs available and Advice Line open
- 4 March 2013: Deadline by which applications must reach The FA
- April 2013: Adjudication by independent panel
- June 2013: Successful clubs announced
- July 2013: Club licences and Club Development Fund awards offered
- December 2013: FA WSL AGM
- March 2014: FA WSL1 and FA WSL2 2014 season commences

The FA Women’s Super League Advice Line:

Email: FAWSL@TheFA.com
Tel: 0844 980 0380
Visit: www.TheFA.com/FAWSL2014
The FA Women's Super League Advice Line:
Email:  FAWSL@TheFA.com
Tel: 0844 980 0380
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