

Shared Goals

The power of football clubs to connect diverse communities



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Future...



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About British Future:

British Future is an independent, non-partisan think tank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

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Executive summary

Why football matters

“In the sweep of its appeal, its ability to touch every corner of humanity, football is the only game that needed to be invented.”—Sir Bobby Charlton.

In a society that can often feel more polarised than any of us would want, football has a unique power to bring us together. As our nation’s favourite spectator sport, football is one of the rare cultural institutions able to reach all parts of our society. Indeed, a majority of people in England and Wales – across ethnicity, class, politics and age – supports a team. As a point of common ground across our differences, few other pastimes can connect us and spark conversations like ‘the beautiful game’.

Football clubs are also vital institutions within the communities in which they are based. Providing shared spaces for local residents to meet and mix, they occupy an important role in the social infrastructure of our towns and cities. As sources of local civic pride, football clubs are also often viewed as being among the defining symbols of an area’s local heritage, capable of building powerful narratives about local identity.

Combined, this marks football clubs out as having a distinct potential to help bridge many of our divides. Where clubs are able to welcome residents from diverse communities, a shared love of the local team can help connect fans across different backgrounds, creating moments of social contact. Decades of research has shown that this can help to break down stereotypes and foster greater trust and empathy.¹ Importantly, identifying with a local football club can strengthen shared and inclusive feelings of belonging. Toxic fringes still persist within football’s tribalism, reflecting a need for continued progress in tackling discrimination and promoting an inclusive culture in the terraces. Yet, when made accessible for all, these club loyalties – from wearing the same shirt to cheering the same team – also have a potency to forge shared, ‘more in common’ identities.

This report explores how football clubs, league bodies and policymakers can harness this potential to reach across and foster connection in communities. It draws on three stages of research:

- The project mapped out the reach of football clubs through nationally representative and ethnic minority focused opinion polls.
- It identifies good practice, among clubs and their foundations, for bringing communities together, through a desk review and six roundtable discussions.
- Lastly, Shared Goals then applied this research in practice. With two clubs, Brentford FC and Huddersfield Town FC, the project co-developed and piloted campaigns that strengthened

inclusive belonging among residents and fans. It presents the lessons from these, including the impact on fans' attitudes to the club, community and views on inclusion.

Football's audience is diverse, but there is appetite for further progress on inclusion and connection

Few institutions can match the audience power of spectator football. Nearly six in ten adults (57%) in Britain support a football team and nearly four in ten (37%) support their local club.

Importantly, interest in the sport stretches across most of our diverse society, including all ethnic groups (with 55% of Asian respondents and 70% of Black respondents supporting a team), social classes, ages and between men and women. Clubs' fanbases also span people with different political views and with differing attitudes on issues of immigration and race, marking clubs out as important messengers to increase confidence in our multi-ethnic society.

The research finds football clubs can help create a shared and inclusive sense of 'us'. Nearly four in ten people (37%) see their professional football club as an important part of their local identity, rising to 80% of those who attend live games. Similar percentages across ethnic groups see their football club as a strong part of their local identity. Seven in ten people who attend live matches and 44% of armchair fans agree that "I would feel I had more in common with somebody if I knew they supported my local professional football club."

The polling also highlights where more work is needed. Most people feel that their local football club is an inclusive place – but ethnic minorities are slightly less likely to feel that their local club is open to people from all backgrounds (55%) than the public as a whole (64%). Three in ten ethnic minority 'armchair fans' (30%) also say they would be interested in going to watch more live matches at their local club, but they worry that the atmosphere is not welcoming to people from different ethnic, faith or social backgrounds. Clubs could do more to bridge this gap and show that they are welcoming to fans from all backgrounds.

A growing number of clubs are demonstrating how to build inclusive belonging

The report finds that clubs are increasingly finding new ways to engage diverse audiences, while also harnessing their ability to bring fans of all walks of life together to encourage connection and common ground.

This has become a strong theme in many clubs' communications, helping increase a sense of shared pride in their team and local area. Campaigns such as My City My Shirt, led by Fans for Diversity, help give visibility to people from different backgrounds coming together, and can help to build respect for difference and normalise diversity in areas that have seen demographic change.

Clubs and community trusts are also exploring new methods to welcome under-represented groups to their stadiums and encourage new connections between fans. These include welcoming community parades such as Charlton Athletic's 'Red, White and Black Day', and new ways of inviting fans to the terraces, such as Blackburn Rovers' NextGen stand. The 'Club Connect' partnership between the British Red Cross and ten EFL clubs proactively connects fans to form friendships, matching people at risk of isolation with a 'buddy' to attend the game with.

Campaigns can shift fans' perceptions of local identity and inclusion

Shared Goals helped co-develop two pilot communications campaigns, in partnership with [Brentford FC](#) and [Huddersfield Town AFC](#). British Future held consultation focus groups with residents and fans of different backgrounds and different politics, before working with the clubs to produce campaigns that helped connect fans from all walks of life around a shared pride in their team.

We tested the impact of videos from these campaigns on the attitudes of fans through an A/B test. This found that videos projecting messages of shared club identity can help to positively change the attitudes of people toward their club and wider community. In Brentford, the video helped to strengthen a sense of shared local identity among viewers, for fans in Hounslow and the wider surrounds – a socially disconnected area with few other comparable community institutions. In Huddersfield, watching the video increased fans' sense of having a shared local identity that spans people of different ethnic and faith backgrounds. Those who watched the video also reported slightly more positive views on diversity and immigration than those not shown the clip.

Ongoing progress is needed to prioritise social connection and strengthen the evidence base

The report also assesses the challenges in taking this work forward. While clubs and foundations often engage in a range of outreach work, there can be a tendency to segment activity in ways that engage people from different backgrounds in separate, parallel projects. The report calls for more focus on connecting and bridging these groups, to encourage cross-cultural understanding

and social contact that can help strengthen trust and reduce prejudice.

As clubs become prominent messengers on themes such as race and inclusion, the report suggests that clubs should pilot campaigns to strategically reach and persuade those who are less positive about diversity. This could broaden support for clubs' efforts to create a welcoming stadium and promote integrated communities. It outlines how clubs can use upcoming occasions such as Windrush 80 and the 80th anniversary of VE Day to pursue these aims, through communicating about shared histories that celebrate their local residents and footballing heritage.

Recommendations

The report makes the following recommendations:

For clubs

1. Use the power of the badge: build inclusive identities into club communications

Building on campaigns such as Brentford's 'Bee Together' and Blackburn's 'One Rovers', clubs should feature inclusive, shared identities in their communications, through campaigns that demonstrate their fanbase as a place where everyone can feel connected and part of one community.

2. Consult audiences to test and strengthen your work

Clubs should regularly convene groups of local residents: to explore opportunities and barriers for attending games, to co-produce new ideas for making the stadium a welcoming space, and to test messaging for communications that can shift and grow attitudes to inclusion.

3. Platform different ways to enjoy the game and grow the audience

While football's audience is broad and ever-growing, our research highlighted the importance of finding ways for groups who may be anxious or wary of discrimination and aspects of fan culture to attend live matches.

Clubs should raise public awareness of family-friendly or inclusive spaces to attend a game, free from alcohol and swearing. The family stands and sensory zones now offered by many clubs can often create welcoming, accessible environments for fans to enjoy the game in an environment that may feel safer and more appealing.

Similarly, clubs should seek to raise the profile of their women's team to help expand an already eager and growing audience.

4. Connect outreach programmes and fan groups to promote social connections

Tailored schemes and activities can help to build trust and relationships with under-represented and marginalised communities. However, clubs should be wary of an approach that *only* engages these groups through separate, parallel projects.

Whether through joint events with fan groups, football tournaments that mix groups, or initiatives to link schoolchildren from different areas, clubs and foundations can complement their existing activity by increasing opportunities for positive social interactions that help people find common interests, strengthen understanding and dispel mistrust in communities.

5. Trial a ‘buddying’ scheme through tailored ticketing offers

Schemes such as the ‘buddying’ ticketing model trialled by the British Red Cross in partnership with the EFL² have shown how clubs can help to connect fans across social backgrounds and tackle social isolation among vulnerable groups. More clubs should seek to build on this in their ticketing offers: offering schemes to ‘buddy’ fans with other new attendees and offering opportunities such as food and football sessions to bond before a game.

For league bodies

1. Incentivise action on inclusive belonging and social connection through EDI frameworks

The Premier League’s EDI standard (PLEDIS) and the EFL’s Together EDI accreditation scheme are catalysing clubs to create more inclusive matchday experiences and to tackle prejudice. League bodies in England and Wales should also recognise the important and complementary role that clubs can play in facilitating social connection between people across different backgrounds. This can strengthen a feeling of welcome at the club for groups less likely to attend matches live, and can also play a wider social role in bridging ‘them and us’ divides.

By incorporating into their EDI accreditations requirements for clubs to promote inclusive, shared identity and belonging, as well as opportunities to drive social contact among fans of different backgrounds, the Premier League and EFL could incentivise wider uptake of this work across the leagues.

2. Develop a Belonging and Inclusion Index to benchmark clubs' progress and share good practice

EDI accreditation frameworks have created an important structure to nurture action. Yet clubs often struggle to benchmark their progress relative to others in comparable communities. While some of the more proactive clubs are driving work on inclusion and belonging to reach fans across all protected characteristics, many are prioritising particular groups while showing a weaker understanding of good practice with others.

A simple, accessible new platform could aggregate comparative data on clubs' progress in inclusion, equity and social connection, as well as platforming best practice as a blueprint for others. An opt-in Belonging and Inclusion Index that ranked clubs by their work could also help to deepen the incentive structure, creating a 'race to the top' for proactive clubs to claim the title of league leaders at promoting inclusion.

3. Develop a 'crossing divides' fund – targeting clubs in ten disconnected or divided areas – to support proactive efforts using football to bridge divides.

Promoting social connection across people from different backgrounds can be beneficial to all clubs. Those in areas with community tensions or social segregation can play a particularly important role in defusing polarisation and demonstrating the potential for people to live together well.

Funders such as the Premier League Charitable Trust could recognise and harness this potential. A new 'crossing divides' fund could look to support clubs in areas with sharper divides or segregation, to link people of different backgrounds through matchdays and sports. An initial fund could support ten pilots in different areas.

4. Elevate major 'all of us' moments and anniversaries to strengthen shared identity

The annual Windrush Day on 22 June marks an important moment of Black history and Commonwealth migration as an 'all of us' story: a fundamental milestone in the making of our shared, multi-ethnic society. League bodies and the FA can help run campaigns and encourage clubs to celebrate events such as these that connect us all through telling a fuller, more inclusive national story.

Activity could build momentum towards 2028, when a major campaign could connect Euro 2028, hosted in the UK and Ireland, with the 80th anniversary of the Windrush, the 50th anniversary of Viv Anderson becoming England's first black full international player, and the 30th anniversary of Hope Powell becoming England's first black manager. This would celebrate the contribution of England's Black players to the sport and support clubs to recognise the stories of their own players and fans over the years.

For government

1. Levelling up shared pride through football

Levelling up funds should be offered to football clubs to encourage campaigns and community-building activities that strengthen shared civic pride.

Current Levelling Up funding has provided investment to support struggling clubs with their stadiums and to offer community ownership grants.³ Yet despite ‘pride in place’ being one of the key missions of the levelling up white paper⁴, focus has largely been restricted to investment in grassroots facilities and upgrading sports venues.⁵

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) could look to go further in funding the work of clubs to create inclusive place-based identities. This could support local campaigns showcasing the diverse fans and football heritage of an area; and help foundations to expand projects that connect people across communities in disconnected or divided areas.

2. DCMS to support a ‘sport learning exchange’ for inclusion and belonging practice

Football has for many years led the way, relative to other spectator sports, in driving good practice on inclusion. Recent developments such as the Yorkshire County Cricket Club racism scandal have shown that there is a need for other major sports to catch up and invest similar strategic resources into creating inclusive cultures for all.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) could support the convening of clubs across the major spectator sports – starting with football, cricket and rugby – to enable sharing of transferable insights and strategies for promoting inclusion and social connection. Clubs could be linked with others in their region across sports through workshops that encourage capacity building and platform relevant case studies.

3. Welcome hubs in major clubs

Many football club community foundations have built strong relations of trust with people seeking asylum and refugees: from providing English language (ESOL) lessons and volunteering opportunities to support for free football sessions. The Home Office and DLUHC could build on this by funding Welcoming Hubs at football clubs that provide a ‘one stop shop’ for new arrivals. These could offer language support, sign-posting to key local services or volunteer programmes, and provide social connection opportunities such as matchday tickets, befriending schemes and activities that bring people together with other local residents.

4. Value football's distinct potential to broaden the reach of cohesion and anti-prejudice interventions

The findings of the recent inquiry by Sara Khan, Adviser for Social Cohesion, have highlighted the need for new preventative anti-prejudice initiatives that reach and build resilience among those at risk of being drawn into hostile groups.

This research has shown how the broad reach of football clubs spans all of society: from those confident about immigration and demographic change to those with anxieties and hostilities. Partnerships with football clubs could help facilitate these difficult conversations with target audiences to strengthen confidence in our diverse, modern society.

As DLUHC prepares its response to the Khan Review, policymakers should encourage closer working with football clubs, to strengthen the evidence base, partnerships and convening networks that can support work to tackle hatred in and beyond the sport.

Introduction: Why football matters

In an increasingly individualistic and fragmented age, the role of football in our society matters. Often called the ‘universal language’, football has a unique cultural reach. In England and Wales, 57% of adults support a club and 37% their local professional team, spanning audiences across people of different ages and ethnic, faith and social backgrounds.⁶ At a time when we are spending more time alone and online,^{7,8} and as society can feel increasingly polarised, few other institutions can boast an equivalent audience power capable of bringing people together across all walks of life.

Football clubs are also vital pillars of many communities. Providing sources of pride and heritage, they are often viewed as being among the defining symbols of an area’s local identity. Meanwhile the community outreach programmes of clubs and their trusts play an important but underacknowledged role in supporting people in their local area that others too often deem ‘hard to reach’ – from providing English language support to refugees to breakfast clubs for low-income families.

As visible symbols of shared identity, and as centres through which diverse groups in a community can meet or access services, football clubs hence have a distinct potential to bring communities together across divides. In disconnected or socially segregated areas – where there is less mixing and interaction between residents of different backgrounds – their terraces can provide spaces of common ground for people young and old and of different politics, ethnicities and faiths to meet, mix and understand one another. This is important for integration and community cohesion, with a long history of research demonstrating that social contact helps to reduce prejudice between in-groups (people similar to ourselves) and out-groups (people perceived as different to ourselves), breaking down ‘them’ and ‘us’ identities.⁹

It is in this context that this research report has explored how football clubs, and those working in the football sector, can harness this potential to drive social connection. The Shared Goals research set out to understand this in three ways:

1. Using nationally representative polling, and a representative poll of ethnic minority adults, we mapped how the public feel about and engage with football in Britain. We assessed perceptions of inclusion in the game, and the views on the role of football clubs in communities.
2. We interviewed staff from six football clubs and their community trusts, working in communities around England and Wales, to understand existing good practice of clubs crossing divides and connecting people from different backgrounds, as well as the types of support needed to strengthen this work.

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3. Importantly, we then put this research into practice. We worked with two clubs – Brentford FC in West London and Huddersfield Town AFC in West Yorkshire – supporting each club to consult fans and local residents to design a campaign aimed at bringing local people from different ethnic, faith and social backgrounds together around a shared sense of pride in their team and their area. We tested these campaigns to understand their impact on people’s attitudes: both toward their local community and to their attitudes to diversity.

This report presents findings and recommendations from the research. We hope it will be useful and relevant to all those working for and with football clubs and spectator sport to address issues of anti-prejudice, integration and social connection. Our recommendations also explore the lessons and role that policymakers and league bodies can play to advance and grow football’s work in this area.

The report reflects the analysis of British Future, an independent and nonpartisan think tank. The research was funded by Spirit of 2012, the London Olympic and Paralympic Games legacy funder.

Section 1 of the report outlines what we mean by social connection and the importance of this for the football sector and our wider society.

Section 2 explores in detail the public attitudes findings: unpacking views of national and ethnic minority audiences on football, inclusion, identity and integration.

Section 3 presents examples of existing strengths and good practice among football clubs, drawing on an evidence review and roundtable discussions with clubs.

Section 4 presents the two campaigns that put our research into practice, highlighting the lessons and evaluation findings.

Section 5 outlines some existing gaps and challenges to maximising the potential of football to increase social connection.

Section 6 lastly presents the conclusions and recommendations of the research: for clubs, league bodies and policymakers.

I. The case for social connection

Social connection plays an important role in shaping our sense of inclusion, cohesion and belonging. Broadly speaking, it refers to the relationships through which we connect with others, build understanding and work together. When it happens well, a large body of research shows that social connections between people from different ethnic, faith and social backgrounds can help to reduce prejudice, breaking down ‘them and ‘us’ identity boundaries to create common ground and a new sense of ‘we’.¹⁰

What is social connection?

Human beings are social animals and share a desire to connect with one another. Through this, we have a tendency to build communities and often to work together cooperatively in groups. The types of connection that we form together typically take three forms:

- **Bonding connections** – with people who we see as having similar qualities to ourselves (e.g. in terms of attitudes, demographics, or socioeconomic status).
- **Bridging connections** – relationships that span in-group out-group divides across society, bringing us together with people different to ourselves.
- **Linking connections** – between people and institutions, for example, between people and politicians, or people and business leaders.

Often in societies people gravitate toward forming ‘**bonding connections**’ with people we see as similar to ourselves: for example based on peer groups, cultural groups, support for political parties or the locality or country where we live.¹¹ These can help strengthen our sense of identity. Yet in certain conditions, particularly where people are under economic or social stress, bonding connections can create divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, where people strongly identify with their in-group (people we perceive as being like us) and hold negative views about members of an out-group (people we perceive as not like us), or see them as a threat.

Modern life presents challenges that can increase this tendency to form in-groups. Our time on social media platforms can feed us into ‘echo chamber’ bubbles with people who share our views, disconnecting us from others who might have different experiences or perspectives. Whereas, forty years ago, many people spent time together in the same high streets, community centres or pubs, or watched the same TV shows, today our society is also becoming more atomised. There are now fewer spaces and institutions that

can bring communities together to meet and mix. Left unchecked, this can risk the increase of polarisation in our society, as people see less in common with others outside their in-group, leading to biases and even prejudice.¹²

What can help reduce this risk of polarisation are ‘**bridging connections**’ – where we meet and interact across social divides with others different to ourselves. A strong body of evidence shows that meaningful bridging social contact between in-groups and out-groups can improve inter-group understanding. It helps reduce stereotyping and prejudice, and leads to greater empathy, trust and shared ‘more in common’ identities.¹³

These positive results can also be achieved through different types of bridging contact. The most effective is direct contact: enabling meaningful and sustained friendships with people from an out-group. Yet bridging social contact can be indirect (hearing about experiences second hand). It can also be contextual – we might learn about others outside of our social circle mixing between in-groups and out-groups, for example online or through media stories.¹⁴

When encouraged at scale, fostering more bridging contact can be key to healing our social and political divides, and to creating more confident, inclusive and connected communities.

What does this mean for football clubs and society?

Football has made significant progress in tackling prejudice and discrimination in the game over the last three decades. Difficulties still remain, particularly to tackle online racism, as well as ongoing instances on matchdays. However, the sport has seen substantial achievements in reducing the prejudice that was once commonplace in the 1980s, achieving marked shifts in fans’ behaviours, cultures and expectations. Around Britain, clubs are now articulating a shared vision of a game with zero tolerance for racism and prejudice.

As its journey against prejudice and discrimination has demonstrated, football has a distinctive power and potential to reach across the divides in our increasingly diverse and fast-changing society, to promote togetherness in the communities where clubs are based. Building on this ability to unite thousands around shared identities, interests and place-based pride, clubs can play an important potential role as hubs for bridging connections.

Applying a social connection approach to clubs’ fan engagement can make a significant contribution to advancing progress on inclusion, equity and diversity, building on the ongoing intersectional work in the sport to create welcoming, tolerant club cultures. Creating opportunities to bring diverse communities

together to form friendships and understanding, and sharing this with larger audiences, can support strategies not only to eradicate hatred and prejudice, but to raise the bar on a positive role for football in building inclusive belonging.

This approach can also help expand and develop the local social impact of clubs and their community foundations. Recent years have seen a hollowing out of many other community spaces, from youth clubs to public libraries.¹⁵ Meanwhile, our society can now often feel more divided than anyone would want, amid heated national debates from those with different views on issues from immigration to the Black Lives Matter protests. A commitment in football to driving social connection can form an important antidote to local or national tensions, helping create spaces to build common ground and respect for our differences. By using their audience reach, their terraces, and the many outreach programmes of their community foundations to bring people from diverse backgrounds together behind a common pride in their team, clubs can cement their role as important community institutions and help to grow their local profile.

2. The universal language? Opportunities and barriers to bringing audiences together through football

Football is comfortably our favourite spectator sport in Britain, boasting the highest viewing figures by some distance.¹⁶ This will to some extent give clubs an organic power to connect communities: sparking conversations about last night's game or a cheer when spotting fellow fans in team colours.

However, in order to harness their broad appeal to maximise social connections in their communities, clubs will need to reach and engage audiences across our diverse society, and to maintain their efforts toward creating a safe and welcoming environment in stadiums for fans from all walks of life.

To understand attitudes among the public toward football, we undertook two opinion poll surveys to map the reach of the sport. Firstly, a nationally representative poll of 1,260 people in England and Wales (Survey A) and secondly a poll in the same geography of 1,050 people from ethnic minority backgrounds (Survey B). The findings below set out who is engaging with football, their views on the role that clubs should play in their local communities to promote social connection, and perspectives on football's efforts to drive out prejudice and develop a more inclusive culture.

Football's audience spans most of our society

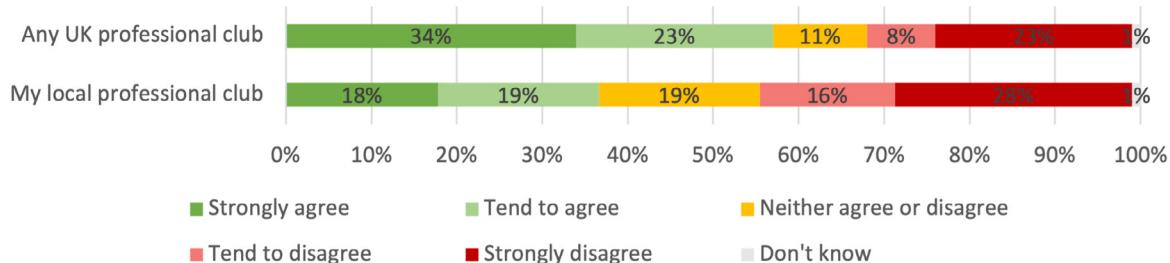
Few other cultural institutions can match the audience power of spectator football. While not everyone is a fan, our national poll finds that a majority (57%) of adults in England and Wales support a professional club, while approximately one in three (31%) do not.

A smaller but still substantial portion of survey respondents, over one in three (37%) then support their local professional team. Though, as we often heard in focus groups, many fans may hold allegiances to a 'second' or 'third' team in their local area, this considerable support base nonetheless highlights the important role that clubs play in local communities as spaces where local people hold shared interests and identities.

Figure 2.1: Extent of support for club football, including for local teams

Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statements: 'I support a professional football club in the UK' and 'I support my local professional football club.'

Survey A (Focaldata nationally representative survey of 1,260 adults in England and Wales, 20-31

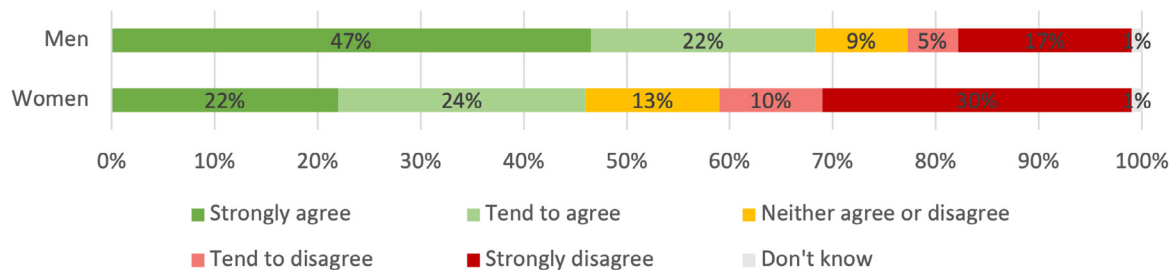


January 2023).

Our survey finds that the audience of spectator football skews male (69% of men support a team), although nearly half of women (46%) also support a club.¹⁷ These differences are more marked in support for a local team: 43% of men support a club in their area, compared to approximately one in three women (31%).

Figure 2.2: Support for club football among men and women

Q. 'I support a professional football club in the UK' and 'I support my local professional football club.'



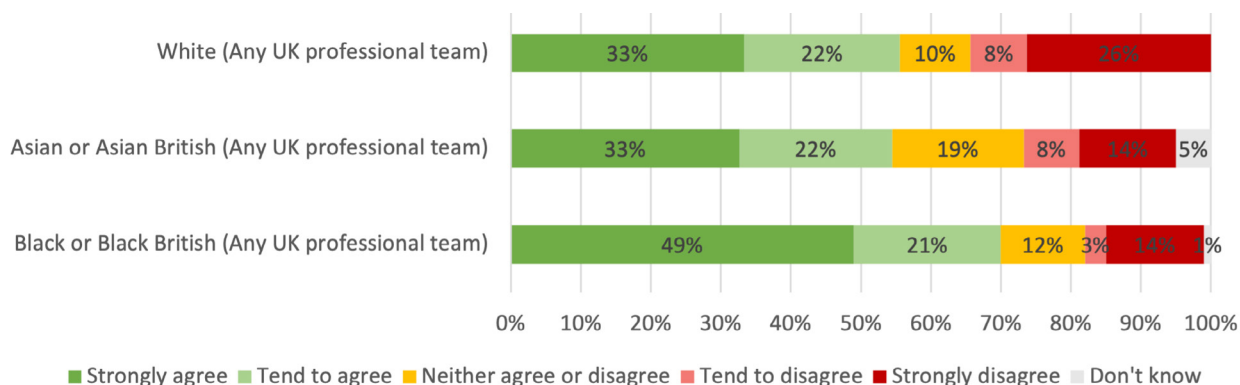
Survey A (Focaldata nationally representative survey of 1,260 adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023).

However, the audience of the sport is diverse, with strong reach across ethnic groups. A majority (55%) of white adults support a UK team¹⁸, as do an equivalent percentage of Asian respondents, 70% of Black respondents and 51% of mixed-race adults.¹⁹ Around one in three in all the main ethnic groups in England and Wales likewise share support for a local team.

The support base of football moreover spans socioeconomic groups (SEGs): with majorities in categories ABC1 (59%) and C2DE (53%) supporting a team, although those in less wealthy SEGs were slightly less likely, by ten percentage points, to support a local club.²⁰

Figure 2.3: Support for club football across ethnic groups

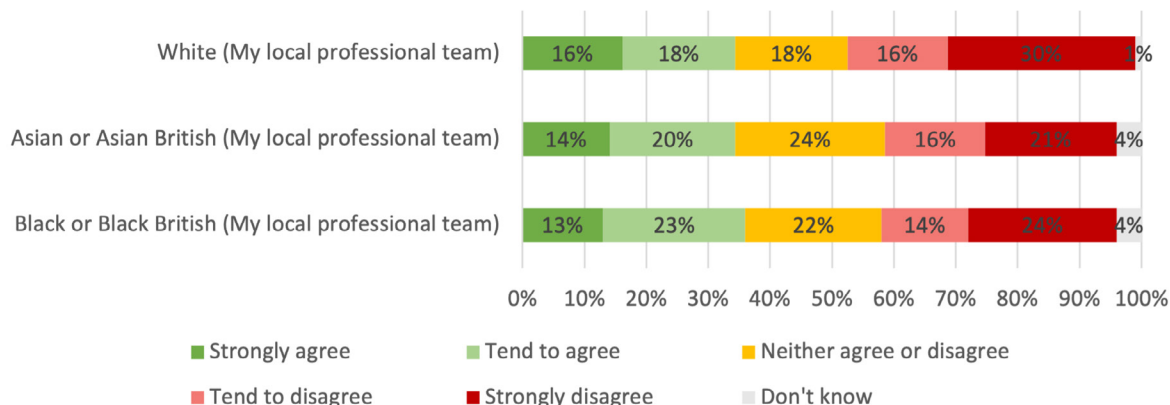
Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: ‘I support a professional football club in the UK.’



Results for white respondents drawn from Survey A (Focalddata nationally representative survey with 1,082 white adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023). Results for ethnic minority respondents drawn from Survey B (Focalddata survey of 1,050 ethnic minority adults in England and Wales, 20 Feb -3rd March 2023).

Figure 2.4: Support for local football clubs across ethnic groups

Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: ‘I support my local professional football club.’



Results for white respondents drawn from Survey A (Focalddata nationally representative survey with 1,082 white adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023). Results for ethnic minority respondents drawn from Survey B (Focalddata survey of 1,050 ethnic minority adults in England and Wales, 20 Feb -3rd March 2023).

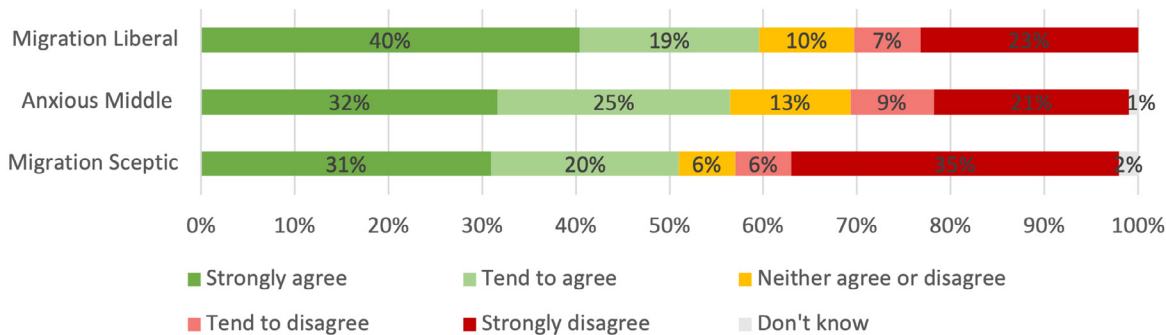
Football is also a sport that brings us together across our political differences. Similar percentages of both Labour and Conservative voters support a club.²¹ Its audience also comprises sections of the public with a mix of views on immigration and diversity, meaning that football clubs are distinctly positioned to reach and communicate across audiences both more confident and more anxious about our changing society.

British Future has found through over twelve years of research that the public can broadly be split into three categories based on their attitudes to immigration and demographic change: about a

quarter of us are ‘Migration Liberals’, approximately half fall in the ‘Balancer Middle’ (who hold balanced views on the pressures and gains of immigration), and another quarter are ‘Migration Sceptics’.²² A majority of adults in all three of these attitudinal groups support a UK team.

Figure 2.5: Support for club football, by immigration attitudes

Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: ‘I support a professional football club in the UK.’



Survey A (Focaldata nationally representative survey of 1,260 adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023).

While Migration Liberals and those in the Balancer Middle are slightly more likely to support a local club, one in three Migration Sceptics follows a local team. Our survey also found that football clubs had similarly consistent levels of support among audiences that gave confident, middling and more negative responses to the question of how ‘people of different races and ethnic backgrounds get along in the UK, including in your local community’. As we explore in Chapter 4, clubs can look to target these different attitudinal groups through campaigns that grow support for their inclusion efforts and also seek to shift attitudes more broadly in their local area: promoting strong, diverse communities where residents live together well.

Clubs are recognised as community institutions that bring people from different backgrounds together

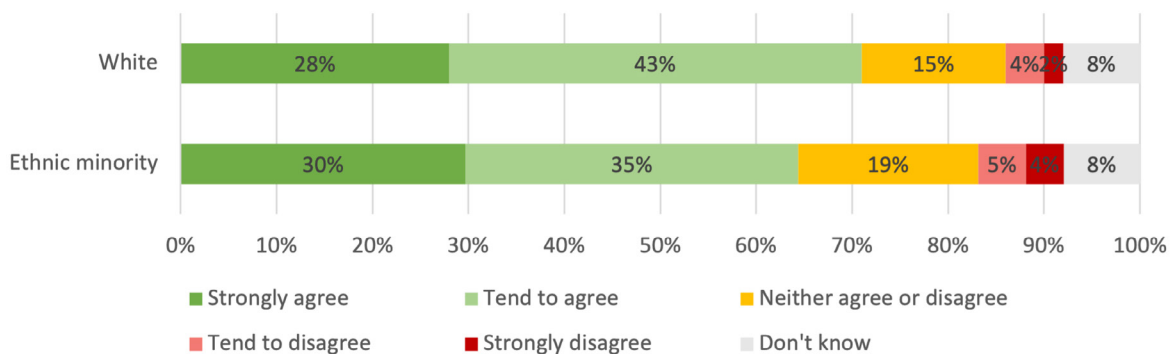
The polling also asked the public about their perspectives on the role that football clubs play in their local area. There was a strong recognition, shared by 71% of respondents, that clubs ‘bring people from different backgrounds together in the cities or towns where they are based, around a shared pride in their team’, with just 6% disagreeing.²³ This view of clubs as a shared space for communities to come together is widely held across all ethnic groups.

The statement is supported by large majorities among male and female respondents, all socioeconomic groups and all age groups. Importantly, it is also supported by respondents with different

views on immigration and race: including 65% in the Migrant Sceptic attitudes segment, 70% in the 'Balancer Middle' and 77% of Migration Liberals. This further reinforces how a shared love of the game across large sections of the public can endow football clubs with a unique power to communicate across divides, to broaden confidence in diverse communities.

Figure 2.6 : Does support for a football club help to bring people together?

Q. "Football clubs bring people from different backgrounds together in the cities or towns where they are based, around a shared pride in their team. (By 'different', we mean in terms of race, religion, social class"



Results for white respondents drawn from Survey A (Focaldata nationally representative survey with 1,082 white adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023). Results for ethnic minority respondents drawn from Survey B (Focaldata survey of 1,050 ethnic minority adults in England and Wales, 20 Feb -3rd March 2023).

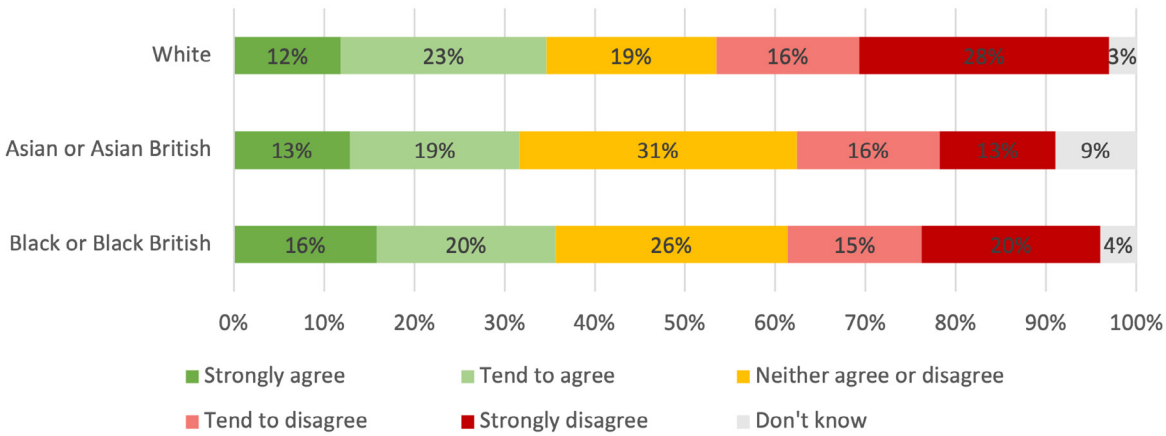
Just over one in three (37%) see their local professional club as being an important part of their area's identity. This view is not held by everyone: around four in ten also do not relate their local club to their sense of place. However, compared with many other local cultural institutions, from museums and art galleries to other sports teams, this reach is still considerable, positioning clubs as one of strongest symbols of place-based identity. Particularly in areas that are segregated or socially disconnected, where people from different backgrounds may have little interaction with one another, this holds significance for the power of football clubs to create a shared and inclusive sense of 'us'.

Among those who follow football, 80% of people who attend games live and 50% of respondents who follow football online or on TV view their club as a strong part of their local identity.

The identities built by clubs also appear to be widely shared across respondents from different backgrounds. Similar percentages across ethnic groups see their football club as a strong part of their local identity (see Figure 2.7). While clubs are a stronger source of local identity for male respondents (43%), one in three women connect football clubs with their sense of place (32%).²⁴ The association between clubs and local identities is higher for younger people, higher socioeconomic groups and voters on the liberal left of politics; however it still holds strong resonance across people of different ages, social classes and politics.

Figure 2.7: Football and local identity

Q. “The local professional football club is a strong part of my sense of local identity in the area I live.”

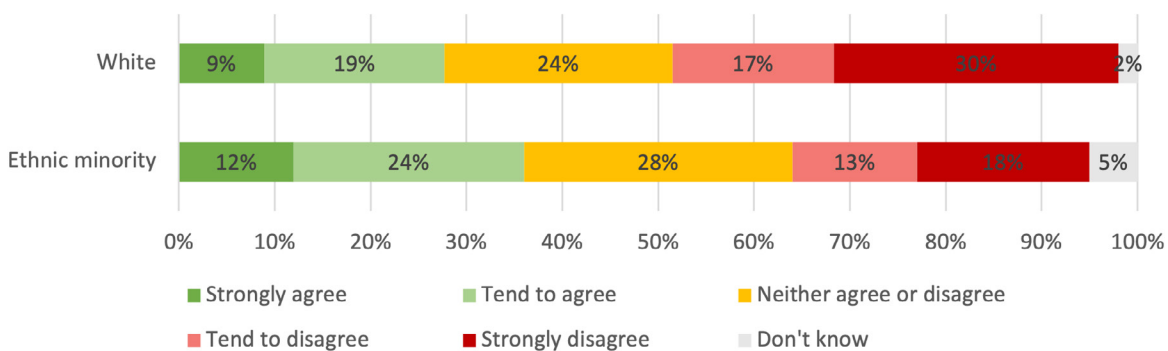


Results for white respondents drawn from Survey A (Focaldata nationally representative survey with 1,082 white adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023). Results for ethnic minority respondents drawn from Survey B (Focaldata survey of 1,050 ethnic minority adults in England and Wales, 20 Feb -3rd March 2023).

As well as representing important symbols for shared identity, the survey moreover finds that clubs can be useful ‘conversation starters’ and points of interest that can connect people across different backgrounds. One in three (32%) respondents to the national survey reported that they would have ‘more in common with somebody if they supported my local professional football club’, with similar levels of agreement across ethnic groups.²⁵ This rises to two thirds (68%) of those who attend games live and 44% who follow their local club online or on TV. This is not a view shared by all; however is nonetheless still considerable in an increasingly fragmented society where we spend less time in spaces that connect us across our different backgrounds and generations.

Figure 2.8: Club support helps create common ground

Q. “I would feel I had more in common with somebody if I knew they supported my local professional football club.”



Results for white respondents drawn from Survey A (Focaldata nationally representative survey with 1,082 white adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023). Results for ethnic minority respondents drawn from Survey B (Focaldata survey of 1,050 ethnic minority adults in England and Wales, 20 Feb -3rd March 2023).

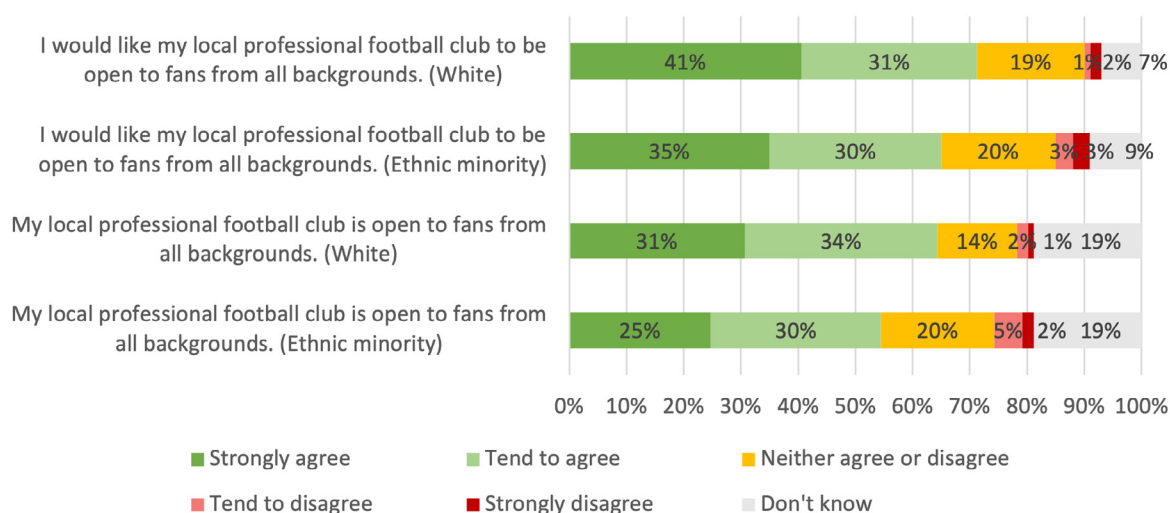
Some audiences remain concerned about prejudice, reflecting demand for further progress on inclusivity

The survey also posed questions on how the public perceive efforts in the sport to encourage diversity, equity and inclusion. While football clubs are successfully engaging audiences from a wide mix of backgrounds and with different political and social attitudes, the research finds that further efforts are needed to create inclusive atmospheres in stadiums and to persuade under-represented groups to come along to games live.

The poll finds that clubs are regarded by a majority across the public as being open to fans from diverse walks of life. We asked whether respondents felt that their local professional club *should* be open to fans from all backgrounds, and then whether in reality they believed the atmosphere of the club currently *is* open to all.²⁶ In the poll of ethnic minority respondents, 65% felt that their local club should be open to fans of all backgrounds; with 55% feeling this was the reality.²⁷ This showed a slightly lower confidence than among white respondents, where 72% felt that their club should be an inclusive and welcoming organisation, and 65% felt it was in reality.

Figure 2.9: Are local football clubs seen as inclusive?

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



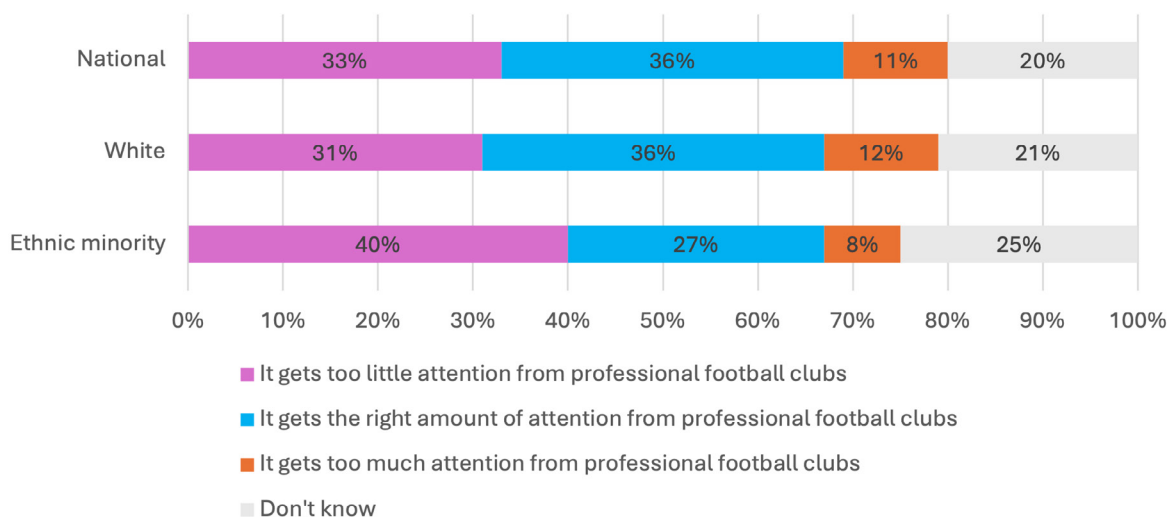
Results for white respondents drawn from Survey A (Focaldata nationally representative survey with 1,082 white adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023). Results for ethnic minority respondents drawn from Survey B (Focaldata survey of 1,050 ethnic minority adults in England and Wales, 20 Feb -3rd March 2023).

At the same time, the public remain divided on whether instances of racism and discrimination in football currently receive the right amount of attention from clubs. Among ethnic minority adults, the sense of unfinished progress is stronger: 40% want to see

instances of racism and discrimination receive more attention, while one in four (27%) feel clubs are currently taking the right response. Opinion is more mixed among white respondents, who were slightly more likely (36%) to feel that discrimination is getting appropriate levels of attention, while one in three (31%) feel that current efforts do not go far enough.

Figure 2.10: Are we giving enough attention to racism in football?

Q. Which of the following best describes how you feel about racism and discrimination in spectator football?



National = Survey A (Focaldata nationally representative survey of 1,260 adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023).

Ethnic minority = Survey B (Focaldata representative survey of 1,050 ethnic minority adults in England and Wales, 20 Feb -3rd March 2023).

Since the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, clubs have often navigated contentious debates about their anti-racism efforts. Some clubs have also encountered sections of fans who criticise statements such as players ‘taking the knee’ to oppose discrimination. Yet the national survey finds that only a small proportion, one in ten (11%), felt that racism and discrimination received too much attention. This was only 12% among respondents who attended football games live.

Older respondents aged 55+ were more likely (15%) than younger respondents aged 18-24 (9%) to feel that racism and prejudice received too much attention in the game.

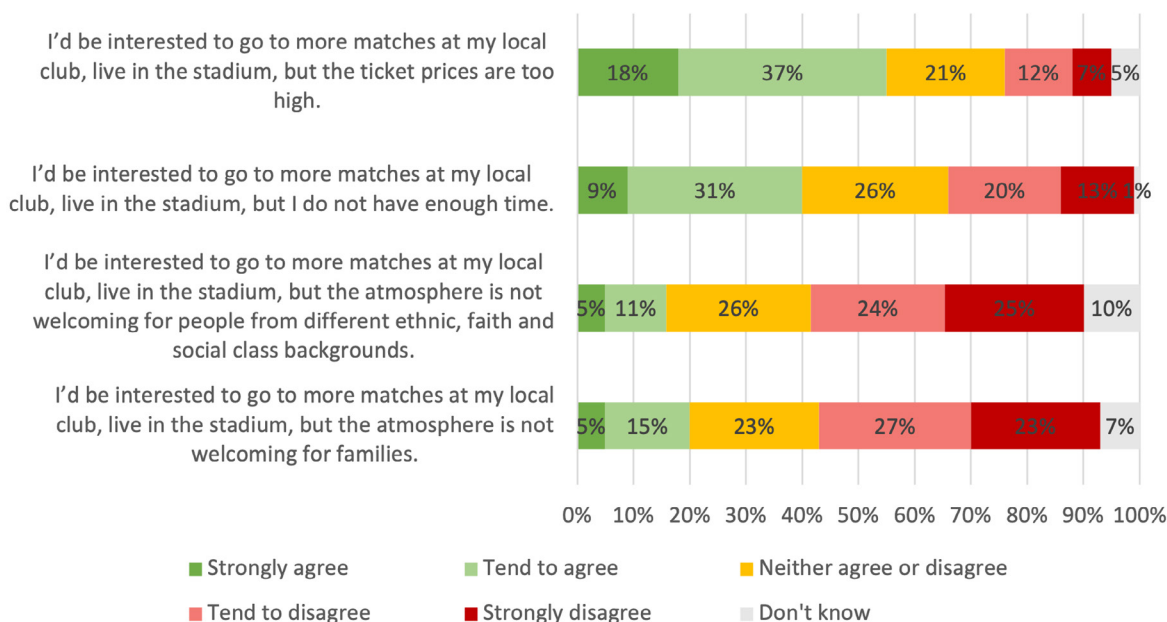
Respondents who said they ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ had opportunities to mix with people who have different backgrounds and political views were also twice as likely (20%) to feel racism received too much attention as those who mixed with others from different backgrounds sometimes (11%) or often (8%). Findings such as these highlight the impact of bridging social connections for increasing empathy toward others’ life experiences and to broaden support for proactive efforts in football to promote inclusivity.

The survey also explored in detail the reasons that were stopping people with an interest in football from attending games, to understand barriers and concerns about prejudice.

Figure 2.11: Reasons for fans not attending live games at the stadium

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

(Asked to armchair fans who do not attend games live)



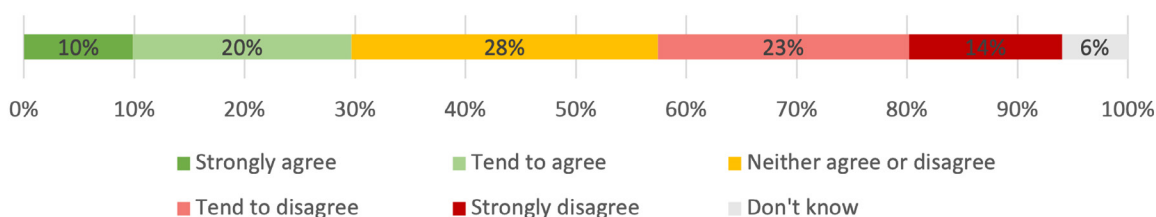
Survey A (Focaldata representative survey of adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023). Sample of n=573 fans with an interest in football who do not currently attend games live.

The cost of tickets is by far the most substantial barrier to respondents attending more games live, cited as a factor by 55% of those with an interest in football who do not currently attend matchdays. Four in ten (40%) also cite a lack of free time as preventing them attending matches, while one in five (20%) note concerns about the matchday atmosphere being unwelcoming for families.

Yet concerns about racism also remain a major concern holding many fans back from matchdays. One in six (16%) 'armchair fans' who did not attend games live cited concerns about the atmosphere at clubs being unwelcoming for people of different ethnic, faith or social class backgrounds. However, this concern rises substantially to 30% among armchair fans from ethnic minority backgrounds. It is clear that further progress will be needed if football is to address ongoing prejudice and allay anxieties from fans. In focus groups, football fans across different backgrounds noted the importance of having visible stewards and easy to use reporting methods to help allay concerns about prejudice, along with proactive content from clubs to set boundaries and denounce hate.

Figure 2.12: Football stadiums as welcoming places – ethnic minority armchair fans

Q. “I’d be interested to go to more matches at my local club, live in the stadium, but the atmosphere is not welcoming for people of different ethnic, faith and social backgrounds.” (Ethnic minority armchair fans)



Survey B (Focaldata representative survey of ethnic minority adults in England and Wales, 20 Feb -3rd March 2023). Sample of n=665 fans with an interest in football who do not currently attend games live.

One in six armchair fans (18%) felt concerned that the atmosphere of live matches was not welcoming for people of all genders and sexualities, a feeling shared by 19% among female respondents. Sexist incidents were rarely reported in our focus groups with football fans, who more often noted that recent years had seen a decline in sexist chants and matchday behaviour. However, the focus groups also acknowledged that women across club fanbases were often under-represented on the terraces. Huddersfield Town’s Women’s Plus Network, and its consultation with female fans, was noted by some female season ticket holders in the Huddersfield focus groups as an example of proactive work that were helping improve inclusive matchday experiences.²⁸

Similarly, 17% of armchair fans (and 16% with a long-term health problem or disability) felt concerned that the matchday atmosphere is not welcoming for disabled people. In focus groups, disabled participants noted that bespoke fan groups, supportive matchday staff and accessible, sensory viewing rooms were strengthening a sense of welcome in clubs’ stadiums.

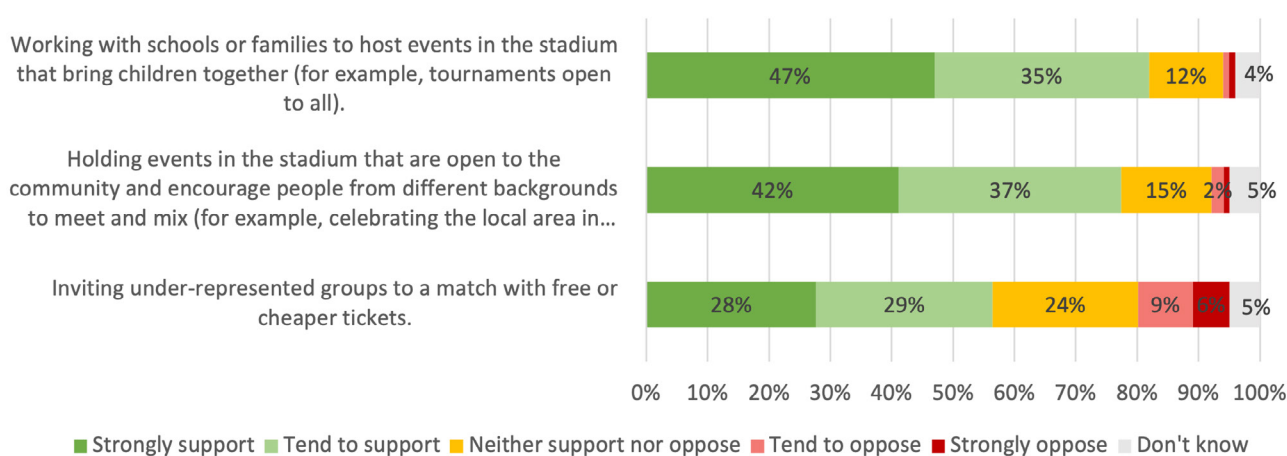
There also appear to be stronger intersectional concerns about the matchday atmosphere in the survey of ethnic minority armchair fans, compared with the nationally representative survey. Among ethnic minority armchair fans, there was a higher level of concern about matchdays being welcoming for families (among 24% of respondents, versus 20% in the national survey). More female armchair fans from ethnic minority backgrounds were also worried about whether the atmosphere is welcoming for people of all genders and sexualities (33% versus 19% in the national survey). Similarly, ethnic minority armchair fans with long-term health problems or disabilities were more likely to express concerns about the atmosphere for disabled people (28%), compared with 16% in the nationally representative survey. Further research is needed to understand and address these concerns among fans who may experience or be worried about multiple overlapping forms of discrimination.

The public supports more activity from clubs to promote social connection

The survey lastly asked respondents about a number of ideas for clubs to support people from different backgrounds to feel welcome attending matches and to promote social connections between fans. All were supported by a large majority.

Figure 2.13: What could help football stadiums feel more welcoming?

Q. Below are some ideas to help people of different backgrounds to feel welcome attending matches at their local professional football club. (By 'different', we mean in terms of ethnic, faith and social class background). To what extent do you support or oppose each of these?



Survey A (Focaldata nationally representative survey of 1,260 adults in England and Wales, 20-31 January 2023).

The most popular idea was for collaboration between clubs and local schools to host events that bring together children from different backgrounds, for example welcoming children into the stadium for football sessions and tournaments. This was supported by 82% in the national survey and 77% of respondents in the survey of ethnic minority adults. There is similarly strong support for clubs to hold events that are open to the community and encourage people from different backgrounds to meet and mix, among 79% of respondents in the national survey and 73% in the ethnic minority survey.

Targeted efforts to invite under-represented groups to a match with free or cheaper tickets were supported by a majority (57%) and opposed by only 15% of respondents. Ethnic minority respondents were more supportive, with two-thirds (66%) backing this idea. The slightly weaker support among the wider public likely reflects mixed views about some fans paying less than others.

3. Building inclusive belonging: what's working well

Football in Britain has seen impressive progress toward becoming an inclusive sport over the past three decades.²⁹ Efforts to stamp out hate have now seen prejudice that was once endemic to matchdays pushed to the margins. Continued effort is needed to reduce instances further, in particular to tackle the online abuse perpetrated by a toxic fringe. Yet standards and expectations within professional clubs have risen such that it has now become the norm to have a diversity, equity and inclusion strategy, to shift attitudes inside their organisation and ensure that, externally, clubs strengthen relations with diverse audiences.

A newer development is that a number of clubs are now also developing initiatives that promote social connection and shared identities to complement this work. Emerging examples of good practice highlight that, via their communications, outreach efforts and fan experience strategies, clubs can help to connect fans of different backgrounds through shared belonging and pride, in ways that open up important conversations across our differences.

This chapter explores example case studies and key themes from where clubs are improving their strategies to engage diverse audiences, while also harnessing new ways to bring fans of all walks of life together to encourage connection and common ground.

Communications: using the power of the badge to forge inclusive identities

Just as the England team of Jude Bellingham and Bukayo Saka has become one of our strongest symbols of a multi-ethnic English identity³⁰, a growing number of clubs are now using their brand power to launch campaigns that shift local perceptions of identity, helping to promote shared feelings of inclusive belonging in diverse communities.

From Wolves' *One Pack* campaign to Brentford's *Bee Together*, clubs are tapping into the power of their badge to celebrate their players and fans from all walks of life, while at the same time reinforcing a sense of shared pride in their team and local area. Though often simple in their theme, campaigns such as *My City My Shirt* for example (see below), which give visibility to people from different backgrounds coming together, can help to forge a sense of a 'new us' – building respect for difference and normalising diversity in areas that have seen demographic change. Few other local institutions, whether a city council or a local museum, would be able to match this ability to poignantly communicate inclusive pride in place.

Our research also suggests that campaigns themed around shared, inclusive club identity can successfully engage audiences of different backgrounds and with different social attitudes. As part of British Future's research with its partner clubs in West London and Huddersfield, we held focus groups in each area. These comprised a mix of local residents with a range of views on immigration and diversity.³¹ We then tested different campaign messages for promoting inclusion and social connection to find out which resonated most strongly.

While messages that spoke explicitly about diversity (e.g. *'We're making football an inclusive sport for all'*) often received a mixed reception, and were seen by those in the balancer middle as too 'preachy', messages that approached the same themes through a sense of shared pride (e.g. *'We're one club, one community, where we can all belong'*), resonated strongly both with ethnic minority and majority audiences, and across groups who felt less positive about migration in our society.

Example: 'My City My Shirt'

Pioneered by the Fans for Diversity campaign, My City My Shirt is a simple but successful example of how clubs can harness their ability to inspire local pride and to shape inclusive identities that strengthen common ground.

First developed in partnership with Cardiff City FC and photographer Yusuf Ismail, the project evocatively captures a series of portraits with fans from diverse walks of life – spanning different ethnic backgrounds, ages, faiths, sexualities and genders, and disabled fans – all sporting the same team kit.³²



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The initiative involves clubs hosting an exhibition in their stadium to engage fans and a social media campaign. Yet many clubs have gone further to put up posters and even support murals around their local area that help instil pride and belonging to a much wider audience. Easily replicable, the campaign has now been adapted around the country with campaigns held in a range of clubs from Lincoln to Leicester City.

As part of its research, British Future tested a video for the campaign produced by Blackburn Rovers, finding that its content was highly effective at engaging diverse fans. In our survey of 1,050 adults from ethnic minority backgrounds, 73% agreed (including 44% who 'strongly agreed') with the statement that 'Campaigns like this would help me feel a stronger sense of belonging at my local professional football club', while only 5% disagreed.³³ Importantly, the statement was also supported by 84% of ethnic minority 'armchair' football fans who rarely attended games live, and even a majority (56%) of those who were not interested in football – highlighting that football clubs have the power to shape identity and belonging beyond their most engaged fanbase.

Outreach: Clubs and foundations are welcoming new fans, while creating opportunities for connection

A growing number of clubs and their foundations have now developed outreach strategies to welcome and build relationships with fans from underrepresented communities: from hosting open iftars for Muslim residents³⁴ to developing targeted ticket offers for schoolchildren in areas with higher rates of deprivation. Some are also driving innovative new projects that bring majority and minority groups together, in ways that can enable fans from different backgrounds to discover common ground over a shared love of their team.

Around the country, in clubs located in communities with a range of demographics, the football sector has supported initiatives promoting positive 'bridging' social contact between fans of different ethnic backgrounds, ages, faiths and between refugees and people born in Britain.

A. Charlton Athletic: Red, White and Black Day

Each year, Charlton Athletic and its Community Trust lead a major ‘Red, White and Black Day’ parade from Charlton station through the town to the stadium in celebration of the diversity of cultures in their community. The most recent of these – themed around the tagline ‘All Different, All Altogether, All Charlton’, saw over 300 attendees from a wide mix of backgrounds come together, accompanied by a steel band and led by local equality campaigner Baroness Doreen Lawrence.³⁵

The occasion marks an opportunity for the club to reach out into the community to instil local pride and belonging. It also seeks to open conversations through the medium of football about our changing multi-ethnic society. Ahead of the event, the community trust has engaged local schoolchildren from diverse backgrounds to take part in tailored diversity and inclusion workshops where they learn about the importance of respecting differences, before working together in creating parade banners and flags.

In acknowledgement of the area’s proximity to Eltham, where Stephen Lawrence was tragically murdered in an act of racist hate, the club has also marked the 25th anniversary of his death by holding open public talks to explore Lawrence’s legacy and how the club and community have sought to promote “empathy, respect and connection.”³⁶

B. Amnesty International: ‘Football Welcomes’

Football Welcomes is a national campaign co-ordinated by Amnesty International to mark the positive contribution of refugees to football and society, and to platform the role that football can play in bringing communities together.³⁷ Now involving over 160 clubs and community trusts, the campaign encourages activities over the month of April each year to support refugees through local initiatives, from supporting English language lessons within clubs to providing free football sessions and guided tours of stadiums.

Five of the participating clubs and foundations are now also deepening this work to form ‘community alliance’ partnerships with local organisations including civil society groups, fans’ groups, schools and others that help people seeking asylum and refugees to make new friends through football and feel part of the community.³⁸ Doncaster Rovers’ Foundation, for example, has run training and kick-about sessions that bring refugees together with other supporters and participants from their different fitness groups.³⁹

C. EFL and British Red Cross: Club Connect

The British Red Cross has been the English Football League's (EFLs) Official Charity Partner for 2022/23 and 2023/24 seasons, sharing a joint commitment to combat loneliness and bring communities together through football.

Over the course of the past two seasons, many EFL Clubs and Club Community Organisations have opened their doors to British Red Cross beneficiaries, inviting them to watch a home game through an initiative named 'Club Connect'. The EFL has covered ticket, travel and refreshment costs to get British Red Cross beneficiaries, carers and volunteers better integrated into their local community and back into football stadiums. Clubs have also organised pre-game coffee mornings and 'kickabouts' where participants met and connected with new people through a shared love of football and learned about the community provisions on offer at their local Club and how to access them.

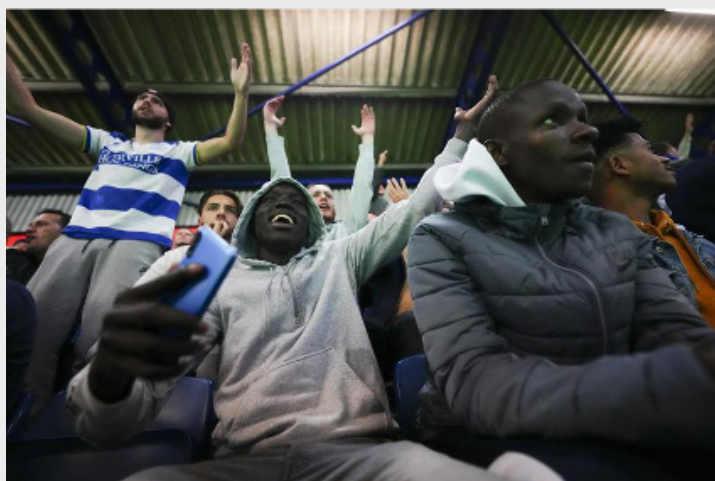
In total, the British Red Cross partnered with 21 EFL Clubs and Club Community Organisations on 25 Club Connect days. This enabled around 330 local British Red Cross beneficiaries to be better integrated into their communities through EFL Community programmes.

More recently, the British Red Cross has also partnered with 13 Clubs to carry out additional community-based activity. This has included refugee football tournaments, a youth engagement initiative focusing on the importance of kindness and teamwork, and fundraising collections to help reach more people experiencing loneliness.

Queens Park Rangers, Club Connect

'With football it doesn't matter who you are, where you live, what country you're from, football brings people together. It helps you make friends. I've met new people from the QPR match and will play with them again.'

– Naby, member of the British Red Cross Young Refugees Group.



Credit: British Red Cross.

Fan experience: Clubs are extending different opportunities for under-represented audiences to enjoy the game

There is now a broad, mainstream recognition in clubs that proactive strategies are needed to support under-represented audiences to feel safe and comfortable attending games. Anti-prejudice efforts to prevent and report hate comprise a major part of this, supported by dedicated work from Kick it Out, and high-profile campaigns such as the No Room for Racism initiative and Rainbow Laces. However, clubs are also increasingly recognising that engagement with under-represented groups requires more concerted planning in order to create a welcoming environment that can ease new attendees into the live experience and offer multiple routes for people to enjoy the sport and connect to the club community.

This is an important process to help create a space in which everyone feels that they belong, with matchday audiences more closely resembling the diversity and demography of their surrounding area. In many clubs based in areas with growing diversity, stakeholders in our roundtable discussions noted that fan engagement strategies were also important for clubs' business models. Such initiatives can help to grow their supporter base, connecting with people who previously had no family connection to a club, or who may have been uncertain whether live football was for them.

Focus groups for Shared Goals with football fans from ethnic and faith minority backgrounds found that, more so than discrimination, concerns about rowdy behaviour and alcohol consumption could be a significant barrier to newer 'armchair fans' attending a game live. For some, the police presence at games, and in the local area to shepherd fans, also raised anxieties and wariness – particularly for women and people with children. The examples below outline a number of steps being taken by clubs to create an inviting experience for newer audiences, to help address these worries and create supportive pathways for people of all backgrounds to enjoy the game, come together and connect.

A. Fan groups build trust and community

From the Bangla Bantams to Proud Shrimpers, many professional football clubs in the Premier League and EFL are now working with fans to help establish new supporters' groups that offer targeted support to people from particular underrepresented communities, such as ethnic minority groups, women and LGBT+ fans.^{40,41} Reflections from staff in the roundtable discussions, and from some football fans in our public focus groups, highlighted how these are playing an important role in helping new fans to

meet and connect with others from the same background or gender, to form friendships and to build initial confidence for people to engage with the wider fanbase.

Such groups offer a safe environment to address anxieties about matchday experiences with others from a similar walk of life, to socialise and make friends, and to find a group that nurtures a sense of belonging and inclusion at their local club. Some clubs are then also actively supporting members of fan groups to meet and connect with others – helping spread awareness and understanding of people’s different life experiences and promote allyship on themes of inclusion. Leicester City, for example, holds social opportunities both on and outside of matchdays that combine its LGBT+ fan group Foxes Pride with its Disabled Supporters Association. These support new connections across fans of different backgrounds, creating friendships where members can attend games together and feel part of the community.

Fans for Diversity: ‘When Football Unites’

‘When Football Unites’ was a piloted project from Fans for Diversity to create an ‘exchange’ between two fan groups: the Lady Imps Supporters Association (a group of female Lincoln City fans) and the Bangla Bantams, a Bradford City Bangladeshi Women’s Group.⁴² It sought to promote cross-cultural understanding and new friendships between the women involved through a shared love of football.

Many of the Bangla Bantams supporters were first-generation migrants and some were practicing Muslims. Many of the Lady Imps were born in Britain and based in a small city with an Asian or Asian British population of under 5%, with little day-to-day contact with people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The project facilitated a trip for the Lady Imps to Bradford to enjoy a cooking session and hot meal, a stadium tour and a game at the Valley Parade with the Bangla Bantams. In return, a trip then took the Bantams to Lincoln for a tour of Sincil Bank and to see the Red Arrows.⁴³ The programme was successful in sparking new, long-lasting friendships across cultural divides, and a short film of the project helped platform these experiences of positive ‘bridging’ contact to the wider fanbases of both clubs.⁴⁴

B. Family stands and pre-match zones offer comfortable environments

In focus groups we asked fans from ethnic and faith minority communities, as well as from other under-represented communities, how they enjoyed matchday experiences. Some spoke proudly of their love of the atmosphere and energy in lively areas of the terraces, venturing to pubs before the game and joining in with chants and jokes throughout the ninety minutes.

At the same time, many others – particularly those who were newer supporters of clubs – were anxious about this dimension of fan culture. Notably, among those who were more used to viewing games on TV and those with children, some spoke about underlying concerns and perceptions about rowdy behaviour (particularly on derby matches) and alcohol consumption that had left them worried about what to expect on a matchday.

“It’s not unique to any one club – it’s an issue across the leagues – but when you look at some of the football rivalries, or when certain clubs come to town, you sense a real tension. You feel that heat and a fervour on matchdays. You don’t know what’s going to happen.”

– Huddersfield Town fan, ethnic minority background.

Within this section of fans, we learned about the important role that family stands and other quieter spaces within the ground, such as sensory rooms, had played in overcoming these barriers and offering alternative ways to enjoy the game. Fans from under-represented backgrounds who still held a sense of wariness about livelier sections of the grounds noted that having a safe and inviting space had kept them coming back to more matches.

Person A: *“Last season one of the staff let me and my children watch a game from the sensory room, which I didn’t know they had. And we were then really able to enjoy the game: it was a much warmer environment and it was really quiet, so that everyone got the chance to have a good experience. I was really impressed and felt really catered for.”* [...]

Person B: *“It’s about what group you’re with and where you’re located. In some stands the chanting gets really loud and it might feel bothersome at certain times. [In others] You feel happier – it’s more friendly and you’re happier in an environment where you’re more welcome. Like [Person A] said, she wanted a quiet area that was warm for her child, and that was brilliant.”*

Many clubs are now promoting their family-friendly stands as environments to ease those from under-represented groups into the matchday atmosphere. Blackburn Rovers, for example, has a ‘NextGen’ area of the stadium specifically portioned off for selected games for new, first-time fans to attend, through bespoke ticket deals targeting local schools, mosques and community groups.⁴⁵ Clubs in our roundtable discussion also noted that alcohol-free and family oriented activities, such as in their ‘Fan Village’ areas,

were an engaging way to attract new supporters, who might have less pre-existing connection to fan culture but want an inviting, fun family day out.

Women's football is broadening the audience

Research has shown a surge of interest in women's football in the UK, following the success of the Lionesses. In a survey following England's 2022 victory in the women's Euros, 44% of the public and 64% of self-identified football fans responded that they were more interested in watching women's football in future. This has been borne out by rising attendance figures at many clubs.^{46,47}

In focus groups we heard how women's teams were helping broaden the audience of football in new ways. In discussions at Brentford, participants noted how the atmosphere of the women's game was appealing to their friends who had never previously engaged with men's football.

"There was recently a women's game where the club was giving out free tickets. And so many people messaged me to say they were going to a Brentford game for the first time! A lot of them were girls too. It's a really good marketing piece and gets people wanting to come back [...] because the atmosphere is lighter, less intimidating. I think that gets rid of that fear which some people like my mum might have [...] and it just makes it a little bit more accessible."

– Fan, Brentford FC focus group.

In Huddersfield, female fans also spoke of feeling pride in their women's team, which increased their sense of belonging and identity at the club.

"I was really pleased to see, at one of the home games a few weeks ago, there were three of the Huddersfield Town women players who were signing kits. And a lot of people were queuing up to get the men's and women's signatures. I thought to myself – that's exactly what I want to see."

– Fan, Huddersfield Town focus group.

While national football audiences in spectator football still skews male, developments in the women's game are now helping to redress this imbalance and take the game to larger fanbases than ever. Particularly as clubs look to improve the visibility and ticket offers for women's games, and to integrate women's teams closely into their brand identities, these developments can help to further strengthen the power of clubs as unifying institutions, capable of connecting and bringing communities together.

4. Putting research into practice: pilot campaigns from Brentford FC and Huddersfield Town AFC

To apply the findings of our research, the Shared Goals project worked with two football clubs, testing the power of football – in practice – to bridge diverse communities. We partnered with Brentford FC and Huddersfield Town AFC to develop campaigns that aimed to help strengthen inclusive belonging and social connection among fans from different backgrounds through their shared sense of pride in their team.

This chapter looks at the results from the evaluation of these partner campaigns to understand their impact on clubs' fanbases and to share lessons that other clubs may use to build on the approaches used.

About the locations

Both clubs were selected in order to explore how clubs in different locations, with different demographic profiles, could build shared identities and social connections.

Huddersfield Town AFC exemplified a club in the setting of a diverse but segregated town. Ethnic demographics in the area vary substantially between districts, with some that are 83% white and others that are 64% Asian or Asian British.⁴⁸ This residential segregation often reduces the opportunities for people to meet and mix with others from different ethnic and faith backgrounds in their daily lives. However, the area is also a one-club town with a distinct sense of place-based identity.

Brentford FC, by comparison, is an example of a club in a high-diversity, metropolitan area. Urban London boroughs such as Hounslow, where Brentford FC is based, often see more social contact between people from different backgrounds and residents tend to have greater confidence in diversity and immigration. However, residents in such areas may often feel more socially disconnected and share less of a sense of place-based belonging, since inner city areas tend to have a higher population of transient renters, who move in and out, often putting down fewer roots in their local community.⁴⁹ Perceptions of local identity may also differ from other towns or smaller cities, since Hounslow is not only a borough within a larger city, but an area proximate to multiple football clubs.

The research sought to compare and understand the similarities and differences between the two areas, the clubs and their fans, to offer lessons for other clubs in similar settings.

About the process

The campaigns involved three steps:

1. Audience consultations

British Future supported the clubs to conduct audience consultations with local fans and residents, to shape the content of their messaging and their campaigns. These involved three focus groups with different audiences, to understand how best to engage and bring together fans of diverse backgrounds and fans with different levels of attachment to football.

- ‘Hardcore fans’: We went through clubs and their community foundations to identify season ticket holders and members of fan groups and supporters’ associations who regularly attended matchdays live.
- ‘Armchair fans’: A market research firm recruited local residents who supported the clubs, but who followed matches online or on TV and rarely or never attended games live.
- Residents from ethnic and faith minority backgrounds: A market research firm recruited a mix of hardcore and armchair fans from ethnic and faith minority groups, to understand their views and any potential concerns about engaging more closely with their club.

Participants were selected to incorporate a mix of genders and ages. In groups recruited through a market research firm, participants were also selected to comprise a mix of socioeconomic backgrounds and a mix of different views on diversity and integration (see methodology in the appendix).

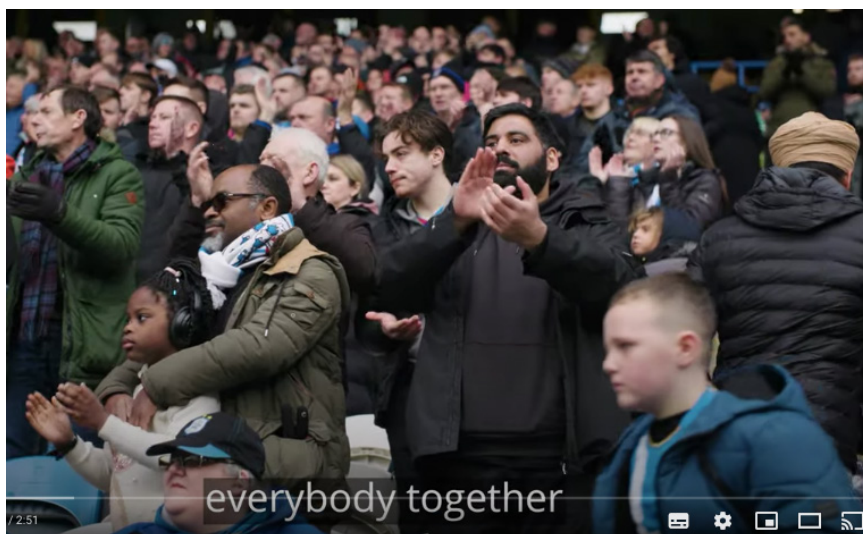
2. Co-producing the campaigns

Working with both clubs, we then shared the findings, enabling them to build campaigns to promote inclusive belonging and social connection. Both campaigns involved the production of a video that aimed to inspire shared identity and club pride across people of different ages, ethnicities, faiths and social backgrounds.

3. Evaluating impact

Lastly, we evaluated the videos to understand their impact on viewers’ attitudes toward the club and their community. Sharing these with the clubs’ fanbase, we ran a split sample survey (or A/B test), that displayed the video to one half of a survey sample and not the other half. All respondents then answered the same set of questions about their attitudes to inclusion in football, pride in their club and local area, and their views on diversity. These tested the effectiveness of the videos in reaching and persuading the clubs’ fanbases.

Campaign 1: Huddersfield Town AFC – Terriers Together



Click to watch. Credit: Sam Teale Productions

Consultation Findings:

Families a strong theme of fan experience and connection

Fans across all the audience groups were asked to contribute and suggest themes for the campaign, with an indicative list of options as a prompt. In all the focus groups, fans prioritised bringing together people of different ethnic and faith backgrounds through engaging children and, by extension, their families. Children were seen to have grown up with multi-ethnic friendships in an increasingly diverse town and could help connect and break the ice for their parents. Season ticket holders also emphasised the importance of engaging people from a young age to build lifelong fans of the club.

Inclusion in the terraces

Very few of the participants across the focus groups expressed worries about facing prejudice or discrimination. Largely it was acknowledged that the atmosphere of the club – along with wider footballing culture – had improved significantly over recent decades.

Participants from ethnic minority backgrounds, and women from a variety of backgrounds, were more likely to report perceived concerns about rowdiness and the potential for *'things to kick off'* at live football games. This was not seen as unique to the club, but rather a broad concern in football, with several noting a sense of wariness at the police presence around games. Discussions about alternative spaces to enjoy the game helped allay these concerns. While some participants were initially less aware of the club's family stand (now rebranded the 'Terriers Together' stand), this was seen as a more comfortable space for some newer fans, and fans from cultures that do not drink alcohol, to enjoy the game.

Club identity in Huddersfield

The vast majority of participants felt proud of the club – even among those who had not or rarely attended games live. This was naturally felt to have been strongest when the club entered the Premier League from 2018-2019; however, the club was still unanimously seen as the largest source of pride in the town, compared to the Giants rugby club or heritage institutions. As a one-club town, most participants, even among the armchair and ethnic minority groups, were only one degree of separation away from a season ticket holder and noted having a relative, a friend or a colleague who was an engaged fan.

Among season ticket holders, many spoke warmly of the club as a space for community and friendship, noting instances where they had built lasting friendships with those seated around them, celebrating the wins and lamenting the losses on the pitch.

“Once you go it’s a community, in a world where you don’t find much community. You sit around the same people each week; go through the same tragedies. There is that sense of belonging; that family feeling. Even one of the stewards noticed that I’d had my hair done, before my husband!”

– Focus group participant (female, white)

The Campaign:

Huddersfield Town AFC integrated the project within their existing ‘Terriers Together’ campaign.

The club engaged schools across the town via their community foundation: one in a diverse area with a high South Asian population, and one in an area of lower diversity. Pupils were encouraged in a bespoke lesson to develop a matchday banner themed around ‘Our Huddersfield Family’, depicting fans from different backgrounds enjoying a matchday. The children, along with their families, were then invited to come together to watch the clubs’ annual Terriers Together matchday fixture, in the newly



Credit: William Early / Huddersfield Town AFC

rebranded Terriers Together family stand. At half-time, the children presented their banners to the fans and had the chance to be interviewed about their experience taking part in the activity.

A video by local fan and film producer Sam Teale captured the day and the pride of fans from across ages, disabilities, genders and ethnic backgrounds at the club. This was launched on the club's social media, receiving 53,000 views. An early version of the video was shown on the Terriers Together matchday.

The Messaging:

Throughout the audience consultation, the most popular messages tested were “We’re one community, one club” and “a place where we can all belong”. These themes, of unity across difference and shared belonging, connected with fans of different ethnicities and armchair and hardcore fans alike. The messages also received positive feedback from focus group participants with more positive views about immigration and demographic change, as well as from ‘balancer’ participants with more middling or anxious views. The themes were then integrated into the design of the video.

Participants were less positive about messaging that referred specifically to the club as being against racism. It was felt this should be used only as a response to a specific incident.

The Results:

The final video was tested in an online split sample survey of 740 Huddersfield Town AFC fans, with half seeing the video and half not. The research found that watching the video increased fans’ sense of having a shared local identity that spans people of different ethnic and faith backgrounds, compared to a control sample. Those who watched the video also reported slightly more positive views on diversity and immigration compared to the sample not shown the clip.

Shared Identity

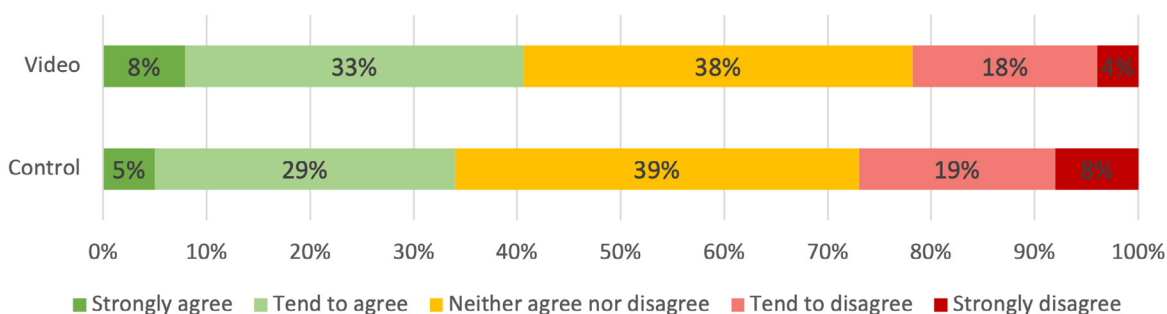
Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement “People of different ethnic and faith backgrounds in Huddersfield share an inclusive sense of local identity.” The results found mixed views among fans, yet watching the video strengthened perceptions of shared identity.

Among those who viewed the video, 41% agreed that people of different backgrounds in Huddersfield shared an inclusive sense of local identity, seven percentage points higher than respondents not show the video (34%). A large proportion of respondents, both those who saw the video and those who didn’t, were on the fence, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement (38% and 39% respectively). However, those who viewed the video were five percentage points less likely to disagree with the statement (22%) compared to the control statement, and were half as likely

to ‘strongly disagree’ (8% vs 4%). In a diverse yet segregated town, the video – by showcasing shared pride across fans from different backgrounds – helped contribute to a sense of inclusive belonging among supporters of the club.

Figure 4.1: Impact of Huddersfield video on perceptions of shared local identity

Q. “People of different ethnic and faith backgrounds in Huddersfield share an inclusive sense of local identity.”



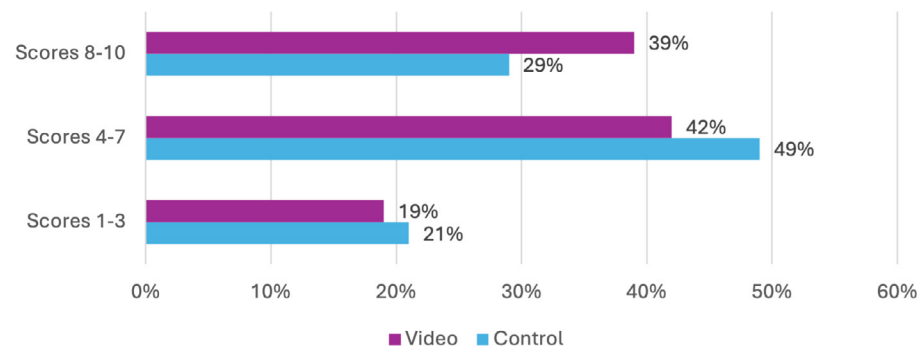
n=740 Huddersfield fans

Attitudes to migration, diversity and integration

Fans who watched the video reported greater confidence in the impact of immigration on the UK and their local area. Respondents were asked to score the impact of immigration from 1 (negative) to 10 (positive). Those who watched the video were 10 percentage points more likely to report the highest scores of 8-10 (39%) than those not shown the clip (29%). As shown in figure 4.2 (below), this effect appears strongest amongst those in the ‘balancer middle’ who would otherwise report middling scores of 4-7.

Figure 4.2: Impact of Huddersfield video on attitudes to impact of immigration

Q. On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being very negative and 10 very positive) do you think that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, nationally and in your local community?



n=740 Huddersfield fans

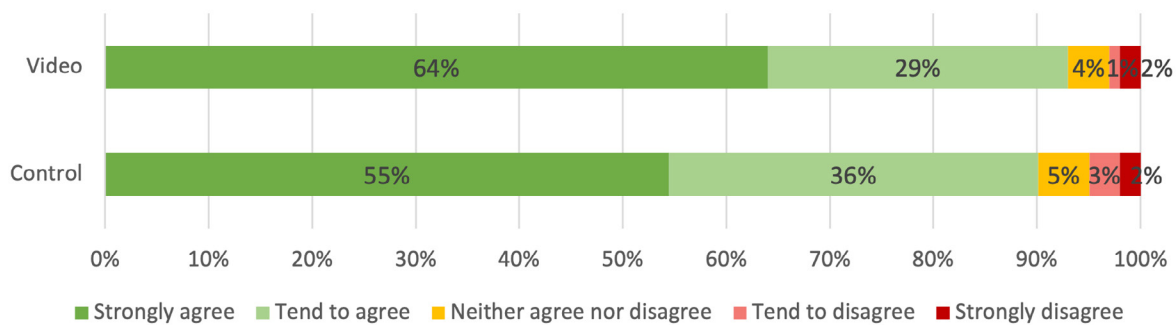
Fans who watched the video also reported a modest shift with slightly warmer attitudes toward diversity at a national level. Asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “Having people of different ethnic and faith backgrounds in our society makes Britain a better place to live,” 61% of those who viewed the video agreed, four percentage points higher than the control sample (57%).⁵⁰ Those who saw the video were five percentage points more likely to ‘strongly agree’ (28% vs 23%) and half as likely to strongly disagree (3% vs 7%).

Attitudes to inclusion

Fans were lastly asked whether they felt their club “is open to fans of all backgrounds.” While a broad majority in both the video and control groups felt that Huddersfield Town AFC was open for all, this view was stronger among those who watched the video. Those shown the clip were nine percentage points more likely to ‘strongly agree’ with the statement than the control sample.

Figure 4.3: Impact of Huddersfield video on perceptions of the club’s inclusivity

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Huddersfield Town AFC is open to fans from all backgrounds.”



n=740 Huddersfield fans

Feedback from the club:

Reflecting on the club’s participation in the Shared Goals project, Zoe Shackleton, HR Manager and Equality Lead at Huddersfield Town AFC, said:

“Celebrating diversity and enhancing community cohesion are fundamental principles of our ‘Terriers Together’ Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy, but we recognise that there are longstanding and deep-rooted perceptions of football clubs and the men’s game that will take time to change.

“By participating in the project we hoped to gain deeper insights into the potential barriers to members of our local communities engaging with us and attending matches. We also wanted to sense-check our own thoughts about the Club’s role in bringing people from different backgrounds together in an environment where everyone can feel a shared sense of belonging.

“We are now much better placed to tailor future actions and initiatives in ways that are appropriate to culturally and ethnically diverse groups of people. We have already seen the potential of our Terriers Together video, created in partnership with Sam Teale Productions, to portray and celebrate the inclusive nature of Huddersfield AFC, and this is definitely something on which we will build in the coming months and seasons.”

Campaign 2: Brentford FC – Bee Together



Click to watch. Credit: Studio Something

Consultation Findings:

A vital community space

A theme shared by fans and residents throughout the consultation was that the club provided a hub for community in a fast-changing, socially disconnected area with few other spaces for local people to come together.

Older and white fans largely tended to support the club through family ties. For new and ethnic minority fans, their support drew from living locally to the club and attending games with friends and colleagues. However, across the groups, there was a shared appreciation, among those who had attended games, that the stadium offered one of the only spaces where people might naturally bump into and recognise a neighbour in the area. Many participants shared experiences of building new friendships with other fans through a shared connection to the club.

“People will chat to you like they’ve known you for ages, which I always think is a nice thing”

– Focus group participant (Female, white British)

Club identity within West London

The proximity of Brentford to other clubs in West London was not seen to weaken the connection between the club and local identity. On the contrary, many participants felt this strengthened the sense of community through creating a friendly rivalry with local teams Chelsea, Fulham and Queens Park Rangers. Meanwhile a love for local ‘in-jokes’ among fans, such as ‘*We’re just a bus stop in Hounslow*’, connected the club to a local sense of place.

A welcoming space for a diverse fanbase

The consultation found relatively strong awareness across the audience groups of the club’s work on inclusion. There was a perception in the focus groups that the club was proactive in challenging prejudice – particularly following abuse towards striker Ivan Toney – and encouraging an inclusive atmosphere where all could feel welcomed. Newer fans from a mix of backgrounds also spoke warmly of the club offering ticket deals for men’s games and for women’s matches that had sparked their interest, with cheaper opportunities than some other local clubs. Multiple participants from ethnic minority backgrounds shared stories of how these efforts had helped Brentford stand out as the club that they eventually began to support.

“Growing up, my family didn’t really take me to games, particularly my dad, he had an apprehension of going to games because of racism in football cultures. And so it’s only through my teenage years and growing up, I developed that feeling of being comfortable going to games. I’d say Brentford does have a welcoming atmosphere. That, I think, is a big part of why I feel comfortable being a fan there and following them and being as invested as I am.”

– Focus group participant (Male, Asian British)

“You sort of get engrossed in it. If there’s a Mexican wave, you start doing what everyone else is doing. It’s like a tribal feeling – you’re part of the family there. And it’s a good family that’s welcoming.”

– Focus group participant (Male, Asian British)

The Campaign:

A video production agency was commissioned to capture and project the sense of community and connection felt at the club, to strengthen this identity throughout Brentford’s diverse fanbase and beyond in the local area of Hounslow. Working with the club and British Future, the agency produced a film that showed portraits of different Brentford fans, while former player and EDI club ambassador Marcus Gayle provided a poignant voiceover to the video, sharing a spoken word piece depicting the togetherness and unity felt by fans from different backgrounds, and a sense of shared community spirit in West London.

The Messaging:

Throughout the community consultation, fans from all backgrounds preferred messaging that emphasised the club as *'representing the heart of the community'*. Several also stressed the importance of using images that showed the full diversity of both the team and the fanbase.

Similarly to the Huddersfield Town AFC campaign, messages that emphasised shared club identity across people of different backgrounds, such as *'united in passion'* and *'our community; our club'* were preferred to others that spoke explicitly to themes of diversity and respect. Alternative messages that were tested, for example, *'where every culture finds a home, where every faith finds respect'*, conversely sparked questions and concerns among some of the 'armchair' fans from ethnic minority backgrounds (who had been to fewer live games). These participants felt statements of this tone might inadvertently suggest a club had faced a recent issue with discrimination.

The Results:

The final video was tested in an online split-sample survey of 788 Brentford fans. Overall, the results found that there was already strong pre-existing confidence among fans in diversity, community relations and the openness of the club, reflective of wider attitudes in inner London boroughs. However, the video was effective in strengthening a sense of shared local identity, for fans in Hounslow and West London more widely – a socially disconnected area with few other comparable community institutions.

Shared identity

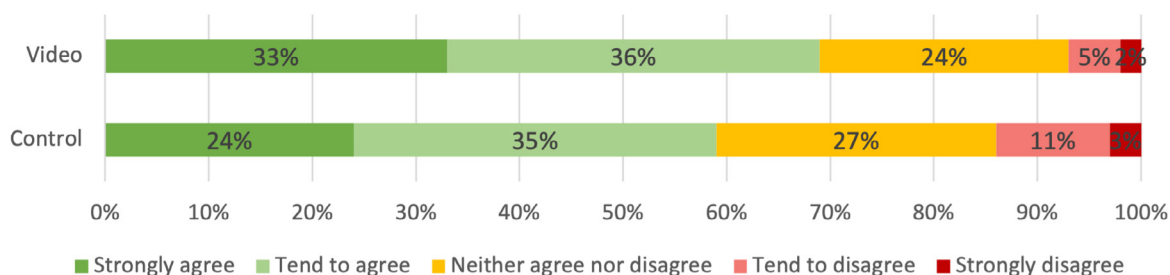
Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement "People of different ethnic and faith backgrounds in the local area share an inclusive sense of local identity."

The survey found a positive feeling of local identity in both samples, but watching the video strengthened these sentiments.

Among those living in Hounslow, the immediate catchment area for the club, the results were strongest. Overall, seven in ten (69%) of those who watched the video agreed that people of different backgrounds in Hounslow shared an inclusive sense of local identity, 10 percentage points higher than the control sample. Some 33% of those who watched the video 'strongly agreed' with the statement, nine percentage points higher than the control sample. In addition, people who watched the video were half as likely to disagree with the statement (7% vs 14%).

Figure 4.4: Impact of Brentford video on perceptions of shared local identity (Hounslow residents)

Q. “People of different ethnic and faith backgrounds in Hounslow share an inclusive sense of local identity.”

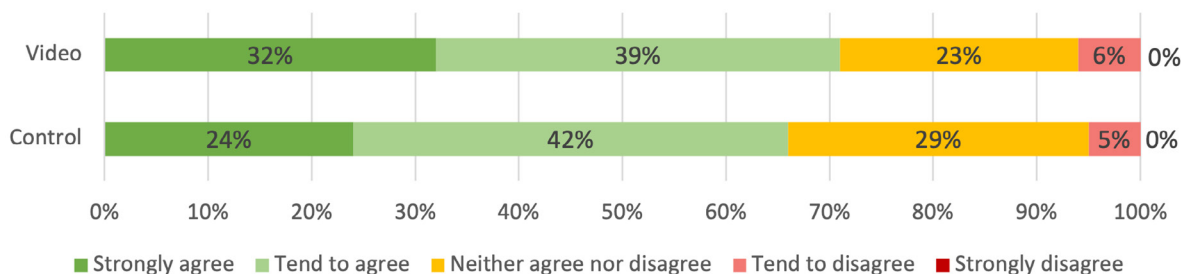


n=184 Brentford fans who live in Hounslow

Across the wider West London audience, a third (32%) of those who saw the video strongly agreed that residents of different backgrounds shared a local identity, eight percentage points higher than those who were not show the video (24%). The overall percentage of those agreeing with the statement was also five percentage points higher (71%) compared to the control sample (66%).

Figure 4.5: Impact of Brentford video on perceptions of shared local identity (West London residents)

Q. “People of different ethnic and faith backgrounds in the local area share an inclusive sense of local identity.”



n=604 Brentford fans who live in locally to the club (minus Hounslow residents)

Confidence in integration

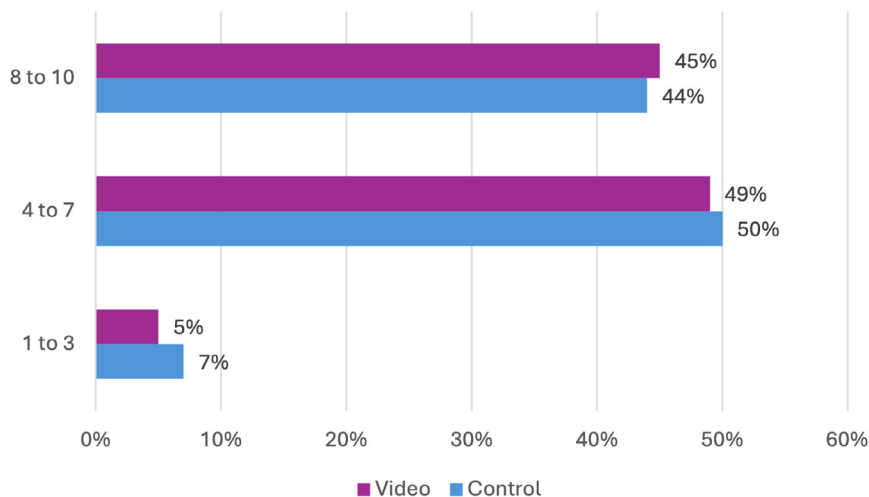
The survey found strong confidence in local community relations across both the control and the video samples. Respondents were asked “On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being not very well at all and 10 being very well) do you think that people of different races and ethnic backgrounds get along well in the UK, nationally and in your local community?”

In both samples, approximately half chose middling ‘balancer’ scores of between 4-7 and a similar proportion (44% control sample; 45% video sample) chose the most positive scores of 8-10. Only one in fifteen respondents selected a score of 1-3. These reflect similar results to Greater London findings in our national opinion poll surveys and likely reflect high levels of pre-existing

confidence in community relations in and around Hounslow – a diverse, liberal and comparatively well-integrated area.

Figure 4.6: Impact of Brentford video on perceptions of local community relations

Q. “On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being not very well at all and 10 being very well) do you think that people of different races and ethnic backgrounds get along well in the UK, nationally and in your local community?”



Similarly, the survey returned similar scores when participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: “Having people of many different ethnic and faith backgrounds in our society makes Britain a better place to live.” Strong confidence was shared across both the video sample (73% of whom agreed with the statement) and the control sample (75% of whom agreed).

Feedback from the club

Rhiannon Maher, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Manager at Brentford FC, said:

“At Brentford FC we believe football is for everyone. It belongs to and should be enjoyed by anyone who wants to participate in it, whether a fan, a player, official or staff member. Shared Goals has been a unique and important opportunity for us to work closely with the fans and community to better understand and shape the way we talk about diversity, belonging and inclusion. Our vibrant community and locality are central to our club, so to be able to take a magnifying glass to the experiences and attitudes of fans has been insightful.

“We embarked on this research to gain an understanding of how we can use our campaigns and communication to build a sense of belonging. We also want to open the doors of this club to others in the community who may be new to the area or to football. The findings have underlined the importance of inclusion to our fans and the sense of pride they have in the club. They also show the impact that the club can have to act as a bridge to connect fans from different communities and to create a sense of place here in west London.

“We look forward to embedding the research findings and continuing to ensure Brentford remains as a club for all.”

5. Realising football's full potential: gaps and challenges

The football sector has taken important strides toward realising its potential for bringing communities together. A growing number of clubs are now embodying good practice of how best to create inclusive belonging and social connection in divided communities.

There is room, however, for further improvement to strengthen the impact of this work. Now that clubs are playing a role as messengers in debates on inclusion and integration, there is a need to explore and understand how best to do so in ways that can engage and persuade the sections of football's audiences who are more anxious about demographic change in communities and may be more resistant to work on inclusion. Doing so will require clubs and league bodies to explore new capacity to run fan consultations to help understand which activities and messages can successfully change hearts and minds, helping reduce hate and increase fans' feelings of inclusive belonging.

Inroads have been made by leading clubs that demonstrate the important role clubs and trusts can play as hubs for social contact across our differences. Yet further questions remain over how this can be scaled and applied more concertedly across clubs' outreach and fan engagement to maximise opportunities for bringing communities together, from fan groups to fitness initiatives.

A core challenge will also be to ensure that this work on social connection and shared identity is recognised and rolled out more widely across professional clubs, moving beyond the work of an innovative few to become the norm. Here, league bodies and civil society groups working with clubs can play a vital supporting role in sharing key lessons and strengthening clubs' confidence to pilot and evaluate new initiatives.

This following chapter explores key gaps and challenges for clubs to fully harness their ability to shift attitudes towards football in diverse communities and to broaden support for an inclusive, shared local identity.

Connecting segmented outreach projects and fan groups

Professional clubs are increasingly committed to intersectional frameworks for inclusion, with most in England and Wales now building strategies to engage and welcome under-represented groups from a range of protected characteristics. Community foundations also typically lead on a wide portfolio of projects that engage sections of society in activities from breakfast clubs to fitness sessions and volunteer programmes.

However, a challenge for those working in football, in harnessing its potential to drive social connection, is to reflect and include society's growing diversity, without segmenting groups into parallel spheres of separate engagement. Efforts to incorporate faith inclusion or welcome refugees, for example, have in many cases taken place through targeted activities such as football sessions or matchday experiences that are *exclusive* for one particular group. This is an important first step to engaging and building trust with individuals who may have less previous experience or connection to a club. However, it can sometimes neglect opportunities to facilitate bridging contact *between* people from different backgrounds in communities and reinforce 'them' and 'us' identity divides.

There is an ongoing need for clubs to review and apply a 'social connection' lens across their work. In many cases, there will often be easily realised opportunities to facilitate and scale social mixing, such as through outreach initiatives and fan engagement events and forums.

A. Outreach activities

Practitioners working in clubs and their community trusts should consider opportunities for connecting participants across their initiatives to enable mixing that builds sustained, positive relationships across different social, faith and ethnic groups. Studies have repeatedly shown that these opportunities for contact can play an impactful role in building confidence in our diverse society and strengthening resilience against attempts to foster tensions or divide communities.⁵¹

Clubs will often already have deep relationships across communities: from supporting schools in wards with higher deprivation, to working with faith leaders or local asylum and refugee charities. Examples of bridging work could include schemes to connect conversation classes between migrant and refugee communities with programmes to reduce isolation among elderly residents vulnerable to loneliness. Sport also offers a common language that can help to overcome awkwardness or anxieties about meeting others from different backgrounds for the first time. Clubs could utilise the power of the game to offer fitness activities and football tournaments which proactively mix and bring together participants from across multiple targeted projects, to encourage new friendships that cross divides, strengthening trust, empathy and shared belonging.

B. Fan groups

Similarly, opportunities can be offered for members of fan groups within and between clubs to come together on matchdays. As seen in Chapter 3, a small number of clubs are leading the way with work to drive this: to promote cultural exchange between high and low diversity areas, or to strengthen allyship between fans of the same club.

Particularly in areas with social segregation or intergroup tensions, and where ‘them and us’ identity divides may be stronger, more clubs can look to develop bridging initiatives for fan groups, helping play an active role in demonstrating the ways for communities to live together well. Examples might include events open to fan groups from minority and majority backgrounds that encourage shared celebrations of cultural occasions such as Diwali, St George’s Day or Pride, in ways that use a common love of the club to foster dialogue and understanding. These can then also be filmed and broadcast more widely, online and in the media, to help raise awareness and shift attitudes among much larger audiences.

Harness opportunities to project shared history

Commendable work has been done by many clubs to mark different faith and cultural occasions throughout the year, on matchdays and through their social media. This has been supported by the FA, which has designed and disseminated an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion calendar.⁵²

However, in parallel to celebrations of our differences, clubs have somewhat under-recognised their distinct power to commemorate and elevate ‘all of us’ moments that acknowledge our shared histories and inclusive identities in multi-ethnic Britain. Doing so can be a win-win: recognising the contributions and heritage of minority groups to engage under-represented audiences, whilst also telling stories of integration and shared pride that shift broader social attitudes, strengthening confidence in our diverse society.

Examples below point to two national moments where clubs can inspire shared pride in our diversity from fans and residents across different backgrounds, helping break down ‘them and us’ barriers and building a sense of a ‘new us’.

A. Remembrance Day and the Commonwealth Contribution

Professional clubs will often already hold special matchday programmes and run social media campaigns to mark Remembrance Day each year on the 11th November. However, currently less recognition has been given within current activities to the diversity of the Commonwealth forces that secured victory in the World Wars, including for example the 2.5 million soldiers from pre-partition India, many of them Muslims, who served from 1939-45.⁵³

Football clubs, particularly those in diverse communities, could seek to recognise and commemorate this contribution as part of their planned activities. Indeed, many players, fans and local residents might have direct connections to Commonwealth servicepeople whose stories can be platformed. Doing so can help to strengthen a sense of shared history and identity across cultures and ethnicities, and to strengthen engagement with Remembrance activities – ensuring these feel relevant and inclusive to everybody.

Upcoming major anniversaries also offer major opportunities to acknowledge and draw attention to this shared sacrifice, including the 80th anniversary of D-Day (June 2024) and the 80th anniversary of VE Day in 2025.



Credit: British Library. Creative Commons Licence.

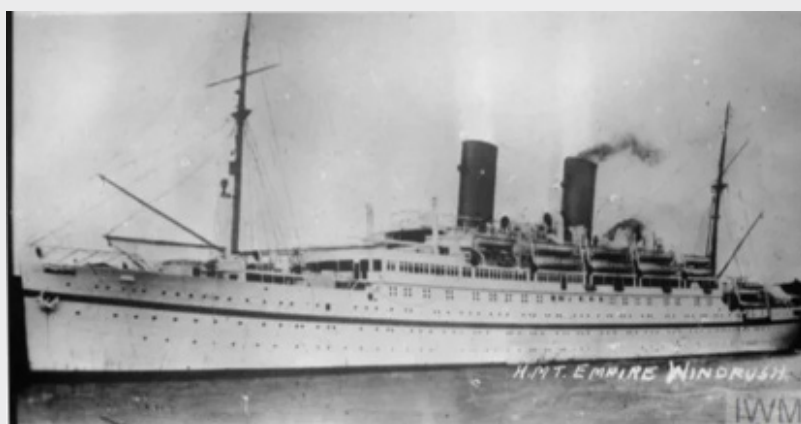
B. Windrush Day

Windrush Day, on 22nd June each year, marks the date when HMT Windrush first docked in Britain – a symbolic origins moment for the multi-ethnic society we share today. Last year saw the 75th anniversary of Windrush, marked by major celebrations around the UK – including from institutions such as the FA.⁵⁴ Organisations across the UK got involved to mark Black history as British history, and to share Windrush stories of how we became the society we share today.

While the major anniversary year has now passed, annual Windrush Days nonetheless continue to offer opportunities where we can celebrate this shared history and the rich contribution of the Windrush Generation to sport and to Britain. Indeed, some of the clubs in roundtable discussions for Shared Goals noted that the anniversary had inspired plans to begin platforming the occasion each year.

Upcoming opportunities are also on the horizon to elevate the public profile of Windrush Day in sport. In 2028, the UK and Ireland will host the Euros in what will likely mark one of the largest national sporting events of the decade. This major moment also falls neatly alongside three significant anniversaries: the 80th anniversary of the Windrush, the 50th anniversary of Viv Anderson becoming England's first black international in 1978, and 30 years since Hope Powell became England's first black manager for the women's team.

The FA, league bodies and clubs should look to create plans in the run-up to this major event to shape a major campaign: countering the racism directed at England players over previous Euros, and celebrating the enormous contribution of England's black communities in football as part of the Windrush legacy in sport and society.^{55, 56} British Future and the Windrush 100 Network will be among a large coalition seeking to build this momentum over the coming years.



Credit: Imperial War Museum. Creative Commons Licence.

Reaching and persuading the sceptics

Football clubs have demonstrated growing confidence over recent years to communicate on inclusivity and race. In particular, campaigns with footballers taking the knee, after the Black Lives Matter anti-racism protests, highlighted the significant power of the sport to influence the national conversation, increasing the urgency for proactive efforts to tackle injustice and prejudice.

This progress is undoubtedly positive and has seen clubs emerge as powerful voices. However, comparatively less attention has been given to-date to how clubs can strategically communicate on themes of race and anti-prejudice in ways that do not just mobilise those already ‘on-side’, but also reach and persuade those who may feel less positive about diversity. Research for British Future’s report *Calling out Hatred and Prejudice*⁵⁷, demonstrates how it is possible to craft and test messages on themes of inclusion and race that can mobilise large majorities, including shifting attitudes among those who are on the fence and some oppositional groups.⁵⁸

Over the course of this project, conversations with staff in a number of clubs highlighted a tendency for some to ‘lean out’ of conversations about inclusion when facing backlash or criticism of their campaigns, sometimes out of concern for alienating groups of fans. Others noted relying on the more supportive audiences to ‘drown out’ the fans booing players who took the knee on matchdays, or leaving allies to respond to negative comments online.

More efforts are needed to test and develop campaigns within clubs that not only contain and call out hate, but actively grow confidence in work to support diverse, inclusive spaces. The partner campaigns (see Chapter 4) developed through Shared Goals offer two examples of how clubs can inform their communications through simple message testing and consultation exercises. These consultations helped shape campaigns that resonated with both under-represented audiences and longer-established fans with a range of attitudes towards immigration and diversity. Simple A/B survey tests, such as those used in the evaluations of the campaigns, can also help club staff to understand whether or not their campaigns are able to increase perceptions of tolerance, inclusivity and shared pride across different sections of their fanbase.

League bodies, such as the Premier League Fan Fund, could also consider how best to strengthen clubs’ expertise and capacity to engage in strategic communications, growing the evidence base for inclusive messaging that can reduce prejudice, build belonging and engage across majority and minority audiences.

Strengthening the evidence base for inclusion and social connectedness

While there is a growing appetite among professional clubs to engage in work that helps connect diverse communities through a shared love of football, they currently lack a strong evidence base of what is working well in their inclusion and engagement work to shape their practice.

League bodies have played a crucial role in helping strengthen peer networks across communications, EDI and community foundation practitioners to share good practice. Both the EFL and Premier League are also driving through a set of EDI standards – through the PLEDIS⁵⁹ and the Together strategy⁶⁰. However, assessment criteria could go further to incentivise work that encourages inclusive, shared pride and social mixing across minority and majority audiences: the ‘bridging contact’ that reduces prejudice and builds empathy (see Chapter 1).

An emerging trend is also that a small number of proactive clubs are leading the pack with their inclusion work, boasting strong community relationships and a comprehensive portfolio of initiatives and campaigns. Many, however, ‘specialise’ in or prioritise work with select groups with protected characteristics, but are further behind in building relations and inclusion practices with others.

There often remains a lack of understanding – except through anecdotal comparisons – of how well clubs are succeeding (or not) in this work relative to others in similar community profiles and with similar resources. There is also no authoritative case study hub where examples of good practice can be shared, with lessons for others to adapt and implement new and tested initiatives. Together, these can limit the uptake of new ideas and dampen the aspirations of clubs to push harder in ‘catching up’ or overtaking one another’s progress.

League bodies, universities and civil society organisations with specialist expertise in inclusion could support efforts to collect and aggregate stronger data on inclusion and social connection activities to platform good practice and share generalisable learnings. Over time, efforts to index clubs based on their efforts, through comparative data, could then help incentivise and celebrate those working hardest, while over time raising the bar of expectation for all.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings in this report highlight that there is enormous potential for football clubs to play an active role in bringing diverse communities together: connecting large audiences across ages, ethnicities, faiths and social classes around a shared sense of local pride and a common love of the game. Doing so can also have major benefits. Clubs can strengthen the local ‘all of us’ identities that build common ground and bridge social divides, creating an inclusive sense of belonging through rooting for the same team. Their terraces and community trusts moreover provide valuable community spaces to encourage ‘bridging’ contact where we connect with others from different walks of life, which research has shown helps break down prejudices and stereotypes.⁶¹

There is also a broad public appetite to see clubs drive this work forward. Our national poll found that 75% of the public agree with the statement: ‘I want my local football club to be part of efforts to bring people from different backgrounds together in my local area,’ while just 3% disagree. Support for this work includes a majority across people of different generations, political support and among football fans and those less engaged with the game.

At the same time, the research has also highlighted where further progress is needed from clubs and league bodies to fully realise the sport’s potential. More work is needed at many clubs to successfully welcome new fans to reflect the demography of their wider communities.⁶² Emerging good practice shows that a growing number of clubs are testing new ways to engage under-represented audiences, communicate campaigns that promote inclusion and connection, and nurture positive fan experiences on matchdays. Yet a key future challenge will be to broaden and scale these efforts, beyond the leadership of the most proactive clubs, to become mainstream practice across professional leagues.

This report outlines case studies and tested examples of this work that can help to advance this progress. Putting the research into practice, Brentford FC and Huddersfield Town AFC have, for example, demonstrated two campaigns that successfully increased inclusive pride in their club, and demonstrably shifted perceptions of their fanbase towards inclusion and strengthened a sense of local identity shared by people of different backgrounds. These campaigns offer initial insights on the steps that clubs can take to consult their fan bases across majority and minority audiences, to test communications that grow support for their inclusion work and help strengthen feelings of social connectedness in an increasingly divided, fragmented society.

Looking ahead, it is crucial that clubs are supported to build on and grow this work. Clubs, league bodies and policymakers can all play a role in helping harness the power of football clubs to become hubs for inclusive pride and a place where communities come together,

meet and mix across their differences. The recommendations below outline a series of steps that can strengthen clubs' capacity and confidence to take this work forward.

A. Recommendations for clubs

1. Use the power of the badge: build inclusive identities into club communications

Few other institutions can match the power of football clubs to inspire a sense of shared identity and pride in place across people from different ethnic, faith and social backgrounds.

Building on campaigns such as Brentford's 'BeeTogether' and Blackburn's 'One Rovers', clubs should look to build this into their communication through messages, campaigns and content that demonstrates their fanbase as a place where everyone can feel connected and part of one community.

Doing so can help engage under-represented audiences to feel welcome in the terraces, but moreover have an important impact for wider communities. In more segregated, diverse areas, inclusive club identities can help break down 'them and us' divides and create a space to build common ground and shared identity. In metropolitan cities, club identities can also strengthen feelings of belonging and neighbourliness. Clubs can be positioned as symbols and hubs of local community, at a time when people often feel a growing sense of disconnection from one another, moving in and out of an area without putting down roots.

2. Consult audiences to test and strengthen your work

Community consultation is integral to the successful design of communications, outreach and fan engagement strategies that reach and connect majority and minority audiences.

Clubs should seek to regularly convene groups of local residents: to explore opportunities and barriers for attending games, to co-produce new ideas for making the stadium a welcoming space, and to test messaging for communications that can shift and grow attitudes to inclusion. Fan forums may be a helpful starting point to understand the feedback of the current, actively engaged base. However, wider consultations should look to reach residents from under-represented groups and those who may follow the sport online or on TV, but who have concerns or anxieties about attending games live.

3. Platform different ways to enjoy the game and grow the audience

While football's audience is broad and ever-growing, the sport is now being enjoyed by a variety of audience groups in multiple ways. In particular, our research highlighted the importance of offering different routes to a love of the game that can appeal to groups

who may be anxious or wary of discrimination and aspects of fan culture.

Clubs should look to strengthen public awareness of family-friendly or inclusive spaces to attend a game, free from alcohol and swearing. Examples such as Huddersfield Town's 'Terriers Together' stand, and sensory zones now offered by many clubs, can often create welcoming, accessible environments for fans to enjoy the game in a different environment that may feel safer and more appealing.

Similarly, clubs should seek to raise the profile of their women's team to help expand an already eager and growing audience. For example, clubs can offer more equity in social media coverage between their different teams and incorporate men's and women's teams under one club identity – to help women's football reach and engage a broader audience. Focus groups similarly demonstrated how the women's game was seen as an inviting route for newer fans to enjoy the game and enter a club's fanbase.

4. Connect outreach programmes and fan groups to promote social connection

Clubs and their community trusts will often have strong roots in different sections of a community through their outreach work and fan engagement: spanning ethnic and faith groups, social classes, generations and migrants and refugees.

Tailored schemes and activities are undoubtedly necessary to build trust and nurture these relationships with under-represented and marginalised communities. However, clubs should be wary of an approach that only engages these groups in parallel spheres. Rather, football clubs and trusts are well positioned to facilitate important bridging social connections through providing voluntary opportunities to that bring people from different backgrounds together to share their love of the game.

Whether through joint events with fan groups, football tournaments that mix groups, or initiatives to link schoolchildren from different areas, clubs and foundations can complement their existing equality, diversity and inclusion efforts by widening the opportunities for positive social interactions that help people find common interests, strengthen understanding and dispel mistrust in communities.

5. Trial a 'buddying' scheme through tailored ticketing offers

Often called the 'universal language', football can be an important icebreaker and common interest for residents in a local community to develop new social connections. In focus groups for this research, 'armchair' fans who had rarely attended games live also spoke of the importance of needing 'someone to go with,' to feel confident attending their first game.

Schemes such as the Club Connect ‘buddying’ programme trialled by the British Red Cross in partnership with the EFL⁶³ have shown how clubs can tap into their broad reach to nurture and strengthen friendships, connecting fans across social backgrounds and tackling social isolation among vulnerable groups. More clubs should seek to build on this in their ticketing offers: offering schemes to ‘buddy’ fans with other new attendees and offering opportunities such as food and football sessions to bond before a game.

B. Recommendations for league bodies

1. Incentivise action on inclusive belonging and social connection through EDI frameworks

Roundtable discussions highlighted how the Premier League’s EDI standard (PLEDIS) and the EFL’s Together EDI accreditation scheme were catalysing clubs to make ongoing progress in creating inclusive atmospheres and tackling prejudice.

League bodies in England and Wales should also recognise the important and complementary role that clubs can play in facilitating social connection between people across different backgrounds. Whether through large fanbases on matchdays or their even larger audiences through media and social media, clubs can reach and bring together people across all walks of life to strengthen ‘more in common’ identities and promote social contact. This can strengthen a feeling of welcome at the club for groups less likely to attend matches live, and can also play a wider social role in bridging ‘them and us’ divides.

By incorporating into their EDI accreditations requirements to promote inclusive, shared identity and belonging, as well as opportunities to drive social contact among fans, the Premier League and EFL could incentivise wider uptake and focus on this work across the leagues.

2. Develop a Belonging and Inclusion Index to benchmark clubs’ progress and share good practice

EDI accreditation frameworks have created an important structure to nurture action and strategic planning. Yet clubs often struggle to benchmark their progress relative to others in comparable communities. While some of the more proactive clubs are driving work on inclusion and belonging to reach fans across all protected characteristics, many are prioritising particular groups while showing a weaker understanding of good practice with others.

A simple, accessible new platform could address knowledge gaps at clubs by aggregating comparative data on their progress in inclusion, equity and social connection, indexing these and platforming best practice as a blueprint for others.

An opt-in Belonging and Inclusion Index that ranked clubs by their work could help deepen the incentive structure, creating a ‘race

to the top' for proactive clubs to claim the title of league leaders at promoting inclusion. It could offer a simple, comparative tool for clubs to access annual data on their peers, encouraging those further behind to 'catch up' with others of similar size or based in similar areas. The Index could also provide an open hub for accessing case studies and insights on what is working well. This would encourage uptake of ideas more widely in clubs operating across the UK, including in different professional leagues and with men's and women's teams.

Kick it Out and British Future are currently exploring the potential to collaboratively consult on, pilot and test a new Belonging and Inclusion Index.⁶⁴

3. Develop a 'crossing divides' fund – targeting clubs in ten disconnected or divided areas, to support proactive efforts for using football to bridge divides.

Promoting social connection between people from different backgrounds can be beneficial to all clubs. Yet those in areas with community tensions or social segregation can, in particular, play an important role in defusing polarisation and demonstrating the potential for people to live together well.

Clubs in these areas may have access to audiences that few others can reach: both in terms of diversity but also bridging those who are more confident about community relations with those who may be susceptible to polarising and even extreme narratives from groups who seek to divide and spread hate.

As part of their proactive work in communities, funders such as the Premier League Charitable Trust could recognise and harness the power of clubs to strengthen proud, integrated and cohesive communities: using football as a route into conversations about our changing society and respecting one another's differences. A new 'crossing divides' fund could look to support clubs in areas with sharper divides or segregation, to actively link people of different backgrounds through matchdays and sporting activities, and to communicate this more widely within and beyond their fanbase across their local area. An initial fund might support ten pilots in different areas with a view to sharing lessons and blueprints that can be modelled and scaled by others over time.

4. Elevate major 'all of us' moments and anniversaries to strengthen shared identity

Just as the FA and league bodies have encouraged broader communications activity from clubs on faith and cultural celebrations, equal attention should be paid to platforming moments that inspire shared pride across minority and majority audiences.

Moments such as the annual Windrush Day on 22 June can mark an important moment of Black history and Commonwealth migration as an 'all of us' story: a fundamental milestone in the making of our

shared, multi-ethnic society. League bodies and the FA can help run campaigns and encourage clubs to celebrate events such as these that connect us all through telling a fuller, more inclusive national story.

Looking to the horizon, this could gather momentum for a major campaign to connect Euro 2028, hosted in the UK and Ireland, with Windrush 80, the 50th anniversary of Viv Anderson becoming England's first black full international player, and the 30th anniversary of Hope Powell becoming England's first black manager. A major campaign could seek to celebrate the contribution of England's Black players to the sport and support clubs to recognise the heritage and stories of their own players and fans over the years.

C. Recommendations for government

1. Levelling up shared pride through football

Levelling up funds should be offered to football clubs to encourage campaigns and community-building activities that strengthen shared civic pride.

As this research shows, clubs are one of the most potent symbols of local identity for many towns and cities, providing a source of pride that brings people together across generations, ethnic and faith backgrounds and social classes. Football clubs and their foundations also play enormous roles in developing and strengthening communities through their outreach, with the EFL estimating that its community trusts reached over 840,000 people in 2021/22, delivering 580,000 hours of community activity.⁶⁵

Current Levelling Up funding has provided important investment to support struggling clubs with their stadiums and to offer community ownership grants.⁶⁶ Yet despite 'pride in place' being one of the key missions of the levelling up white paper⁶⁷, focus to-date has largely been restricted to investment in grassroots facilities and upgrading sports venues.⁶⁸

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) could look to go further in funding and scaling the work of clubs to create inclusive place-based identities. This could involve supporting efforts such as the 'My Club My Shirt' campaign to develop exhibitions and community murals showcasing the diverse fans and football heritage of an area. It could include events that bring fans of different backgrounds together to celebrate their team, such as Charlton Athletic's annual 'Red, White and Black Day'. It should also include funding to support the vital infrastructure of community foundations in building relationships and help community trusts to expand projects that connect people across communities in disconnected or divided areas.

2. DCMS to support a sport learning exchange for inclusion and belonging practice

Football has for many years led the way, relative to other spectator sports, in driving good practice on inclusion. Recent developments such as the Yorkshire County Cricket Club racism scandal have shown that there is an ongoing need for other major sports to now catch up and invest similar strategic resources into creating inclusive and welcoming cultures for all. Many elements of good practice from community outreach and fan engagement strategies will have significant overlap.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) could fund and support the convening of clubs across the major spectator sports – starting with football, cricket and rugby – to enable sharing of transferable insights, frameworks and strategies for promoting inclusion and social connection. Clubs could be linked with others in their region across sports through workshops that encourage capacity building and platform relevant case studies.

3. Welcome hubs in major clubs

Many football club community foundations have built strong relations of trust with people seeking asylum and refugees: from providing English language (ESOL) lessons and volunteering opportunities to support for free football sessions. The Home Office and DLUHC could look to build on this by funding Welcoming Hubs at football clubs that provide a ‘one stop shop’ for new arrivals. These could offer language support, sign-posting to key local services or volunteer programmes, and provide social connection opportunities such as matchday tickets, befriending schemes and activities that bring people together with other local residents.

Building on existing infrastructure within football clubs would prevent the unnecessary duplication of resources to civic organisations without the equivalent profile, community spaces or connections to schools. Since community foundations also already offer support to a variety of groups, from low-income families to faith groups and elderly people, their programmes offer simple and easy methods to connect up activities in ways that help new arrivals to meet and mix with others and feel welcomed into their new communities.

4. Value football’s distinct potential to broaden the reach of cohesion, community resilience and anti-prejudice interventions

This research has shown how the broad reach of football clubs spans all of society: from those confident about immigration and demographic change to those with anxieties and even hardened prejudices. The findings of the recent inquiry by Sara Khan, Adviser for Social Cohesion, have also highlighted the vital need for new preventative anti-prejudice initiatives that reach and build resilience among hostile groups.

Partnerships with football clubs could help offer a route-in to holding these difficult conversations with target audiences to strengthen confidence in our diverse modern society. Clubs will be able to build stronger relationships of trust with many susceptible audiences, particularly younger men, compared to other local institutions. Many also already facilitate anti-discrimination programmes and workshops in schools, using sporting activities and fun methods to ease participants into difficult conversations about prejudice.⁶⁹

As DLUHC prepares its response to the Khan Review, policymakers should encourage closer working with football clubs, to strengthen the evidence base, partnerships and convening networks that can support work to tackle hatred in and beyond the sport.

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Appendix: Research Methods

Research for this report used mixed methods, combining an evidence review with practitioner roundtable discussions, two quantitative national surveys, a series of focus group discussions in two locations, and two evaluated pilot campaigns.

Evidence review

British Future undertook an evidence review to map existing practice among clubs to engage and bring together people from different ethnic, faith, social and migrant backgrounds. This collated case studies from clubs and their community foundations, along with previous research publications, from the past ten years.

Roundtable discussions

British Future held interviews and roundtable discussions with staff at six football clubs and community foundations. These explored in greater depth how clubs viewed the relevance of work on social connection to their strategies on diversity, inclusion, equity and outreach. It collated examples and insights of activities and strategies that were working well. The discussions also allowed for discussion on the gaps and challenges that clubs and their trusts were facing to deepen the impact of their work, and the forms of support that they would prioritise, including from league bodies and policy-makers.

The clubs and foundations participating in the roundtable discussions were:

- Brentford FC and Brentford Community Sports Trust
- Charlton Athletic FC and Charlton Athletic Community Trust
- Huddersfield Town AFC and Huddersfield Town Foundation
- Lincoln City FC and Lincoln City Foundation
- Leicester City FC
- Southend United Community and Educational Trust

Clubs were chosen to span different areas of the country and also to learn from practitioners working in communities with different demographic profiles – from low-diversity areas, to diverse metropolitan cities. We sought to understand perspectives and insights from clubs of different sizes – spanning the Premier League to the National League. Lastly, clubs were engaged based on findings from the evidence review to explore particular examples of good practice in their engagement and community outreach.

Opinion polling

Two opinion poll surveys were carried out by Focaldata. This included a nationally representative poll of 1,260 adults in England and Wales (with fieldwork conducted 20-31 January 2023) and a representative poll of 1,050 adults from ethnic minority backgrounds (with fieldwork conducted 5-21 March 2023).

The poll results include demographic differences, including nation and region, ethnic group, education, socioeconomic group, disability, gender and sexuality, as well as by 2019 election vote and 2016 EU referendum.

We also looked at differences in opinion based on attitudes to race and immigration and reported levels of day-to-day social contact people had with others from different backgrounds, ages and political perspective.

Focus groups

British Future undertook a series of six focus group discussions between October and December 2023. These explored in greater depth public attitudes towards football, including attitudes on inclusivity in the sport and perspectives on the influence of clubs in local identities and for bringing communities together. The discussions were also used to consult audiences and shape the design of the two partner campaigns (see below).

Focus groups were held in two locations to support the pilot campaigns of our partner clubs: Hounslow, London (to support Brentford FC) and Huddersfield, West Yorkshire (to support Huddersfield Town AFC).

In each area, three focus groups were held with particular audience segments, to understand similarities and differences between people with varying levels of interest in the sport and from different backgrounds:

- Highly engaged fans, who hold season tickets or who regularly attend games live.
- ‘Armchair fans’ who largely follow their club on TV or online but to-date have rarely attended games live.
- Local residents of ethnic and faith minority backgrounds with varying levels of interest in football.

In each area, a recruitment agency was used to identify participants for the ‘armchair fan’ and ethnic/faith minority discussions. Participants were also recruited to reflect a mix of attitudes based on gender, age, social class, and views on immigration (incorporating those who are confident about immigration to the UK, those who are anxious and concerned about immigration, and sections of the public who see both pressures and gains from immigration).

Participants for the ‘highly engaged fans’ discussions were identified through an open recruitment call circulated by the clubs and their community trusts. These also aimed to incorporate fans a balanced mix of perspectives across genders, ages and fans of different ethnic backgrounds.

Evaluated partnership campaigns with split-sample surveys

Lastly, British Future partnered with two football clubs to design and deliver campaigns that applied and tested the research, highlighting the role of the clubs in bringing fans of diverse backgrounds together.

The clubs were chosen, based on

- (A) their history of proactivity around inclusion;
- (B) the demographic profile of their communities, to understand the distinct lessons for undertaking work in a socially disconnected area and a socially segregated area.

The clubs selected were:

- **Brentford FC:** A club which prides itself as a thought leader on equity, diversity and inclusion.

Brentford FC is based in Hounslow, West London, a diverse urban area where 56% of residents are from ethnic minority backgrounds and 28% have a non-UK nationality.⁷⁰ Hounslow’s population is young⁷¹ with an average age of 36 (compared with 40 for England and Wales), meanwhile home ownership is lower than the national average. These are often indicators of high population churn, which can cause issues for social disconnection – as a young and transient population of renters often has less time and opportunity to lay down roots in a community.

- **Huddersfield Town AFC:** The only club outside of the Premier League to achieve the Premier League Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advanced Award.

Huddersfield is situated in Kirklees, West Yorkshire, a diverse area where 26% of residents are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The town is comparatively spatially segregated to London, spanning outer areas with populations that are over 95% white to inner areas that are 64% Asian and Asian British.

The six focus groups provided opportunities to consult fans and local residents in the both locations on the content and messaging of the pilot campaigns, and to understand their experiences and attitudes toward the clubs.

As part of their campaigns, both clubs produced short video clips that celebrated fans of different backgrounds in their area coming together behind the team. To evaluate the impact of these clips, the

videos were tested through a split-sample survey distributed among fans in the mailing list of both clubs.

The survey revealed the video to half the survey sample (randomly selected) and not to the other half, before posing one list of questions to all respondents, which measured their views toward the club and the local area, and asked their views on diversity and immigration. This tested the immediate impact of the campaign in shifting attitudes of its viewers.

In the Brentford partnership, a total of 788 respondents completed the survey. The Huddersfield Town AFC survey received 740 responses.



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British Future...

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank and registered charity engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

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