



House of Commons
Culture, Media and Sport
Committee

**Women's Football:
Replies to the
Committee's Fourth
Report of Session
2005–06**

**Second Special Report of Session
2005–06**

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The Culture, Media and Sport Committee

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its associated public bodies.

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Second Special Report

Women's Football

On 25 July 2006, the Committee published its Fourth Report of Session 2005-06, on Women's Football.¹ The Committee has now received responses from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Football Association and the Football Foundation. These replies are published below as Appendices 1 to 3.

Appendix 1 – Reply from the Government

The Government welcomes the Committee's Fourth Report of the 2005-06 session, and is pleased to be able to present its response to the Committee and outline how we intend to take action, where appropriate, on the recommendations made.

We strongly endorse witnesses' praise for the more recent efforts of the FA to develop and give higher profile to women's football. Without these efforts, it is likely that far fewer girls and women would now be participating in football. (Paragraph 4)

The Government agrees with this recommendation. The FA has made significant efforts to develop the women's game and should be proud of this achievement. However, the Government is keen for the FA to build on these achievements and will be encouraging the FA to work with its partners to offer more opportunities for women and girls to participate in football at all levels.

We are extremely concerned that the disparity in funding for boys' and for girls' Centres of Excellence existed for eight years. All funding bodies for sport – not just for football - should ensure that there is equitable access to funding streams for both genders. (Paragraph 9)

The Government agrees with this recommendation. All Sport England programmes now ensure equitable access for both genders. The management and funding of the Football Youth Development Plan (FYDP) was transferred from Sport England to the FA at the end of May 2006. It is now therefore a matter for the FA to ensure equitable access to the FYDP and we encourage them to address this issue.

The decision by the Football Foundation to reduce funding for Women's and Girls' Football Development Officers is perverse and detrimental to the development of women's football, and we have written to the Football Foundation to ask that the decision be reversed, particularly in the light of significant historical under-investment in the development of women's and girls' football. (Paragraph 10)

¹ HC 1357, Session 2005-06.

This is a matter for the Football Foundation which we understand has agreed to extend its funding for Women's and Girl's Development Officers through the Active Sports Partnerships for a further three years. This decision is welcomed by Government.

We recommend that the absolute prohibition on mixed football over the age of 11 should be removed and that an informed assessment by team managers and coaches of individuals' capacity to play in mixed teams should govern selection policy. (Paragraph 13)

The Government is committed to equality and its policies reflect this. We are especially keen to see proper consultation with young girls and boys on the issue of whether to lift this prohibition so that the position of young footballers currently facing the ruling is considered fairly and resolved with the utmost speed. We therefore urge the FA to continue its work on reaching a conclusion to these consultations as a matter of priority.

We would hope that the FA would combat prejudice against women in the same way as it has successfully tackled racism in football. (Paragraph 15)

The Government supports this recommendation and endorses the FA's belief that the sport must be open to everyone as our national game.

In particular, we are pleased to hear about the FA's outreach through its Diversity and Sports Equity workshop which encourages clubs to get more women and girls to become coaches, referees, and managers. We welcome its partnership work with the Central Council of Physical Recreation, UK Sport and the British Olympic Foundation to establish the Women and Leadership Development Programme. Such partnership working is crucial if we are truly to unite as a sector in order to embrace and tackle the challenges in the most effective and coordinated way.

Given the under-representation of women across the sport both on and off the field, we remain committed to our Public Service Agreement target to increase, by 3% by 2008, the take-up of sporting opportunities by women.

DCMS should examine the scope for using section 84 of the Equality Act 2006 to guide local authorities in taking a stronger line in achieving a more equitable allocation of their pitches between men's and women's teams. (Paragraph 17)

From April 2007, the new public sector duty on gender equality (as inserted by section 76A of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975) will require local authorities to have due regard for the need to eliminate discrimination and harassment, and promote equality of opportunity between women and men when exercising their public functions. We therefore anticipate that the obligations to meet this duty will be an effective way of achieving a much fairer allocation of pitch access to women and girls' teams. The use of facilities is crucial if we are to encourage, sustain, and develop both the participation and performance levels of females in the sport, and local authorities are a key delivery partner in contributing towards these aims.

The provision of adequate pitches and facilities is essential if team sports are to prosper. The Football Foundation is undertaking valuable work in improving that

provision, and we support wholeheartedly its approach in making financial support for facilities and pitches conditional on equal access for men and women. (Paragraph 19)

The Government agrees with this recommendation and continues to work with the Football Foundation and other funding partners to increase the opportunities for women and girls to get involved in football through the projects they approve.

We believe that local authorities have a social responsibility to provide sports facilities fit for use by all sections of the community. The Government should lose no opportunity to remind local authorities of their responsibilities in this field. (Paragraph 20)

Access to good quality sporting provision is essential if we are to encourage people to lead healthier, more active lives, and the Government is working to ensure every community has as wide a range of sports facilities as possible. Since 1997, the Government and Lottery has invested over £3 billion in physical activity and sport.

Local authorities themselves will spend some £1 billion over the next 3 years in sports services. In doing so, they need to ensure that facilities are in the right place, so that many people can access them, and that they meet modern 21st century standards in terms of capacity, efficiency and accessibility.

To help improve the provision of community sports facilities, the Government is encouraging local authorities to plan strategically and to rationalise their stock where necessary to meet current demand and the high expectations of today's users. Following the Audit Commission study into public sports facilities ("Public Leisure Services: making them fit for the future") published in June 2006 we have asked Sport England to establish an advisory service to help local authorities undertake this important process. DCMS and Sport England are also encouraging and helping local authorities to modernise their facilities through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and through the development of strategies and toolkits to aid strategic planning for sport.

While we can see significant benefits in the FA's proposal for a Super League for women's football, we do not believe that the case has yet been made for this to be resourced from public funding, and we expect the FA to make a financial commitment in line with its emphasis on women's football as one of its priorities. (Paragraph 22)

The Government agrees with this recommendation. As the governing body for football the FA must take responsibility for developing and resourcing new initiatives for improving the women's game.

We recommend that the FA should encourage professional men's clubs to make it standard practice to share training pitches and facilities and grounds with elite women's clubs. It is in the interests of professional clubs to be more imaginative in their approach to building links with women's clubs and publicising their matches in match programmes. By doing so, clubs can expect to increase their support base. (Paragraph 28)

The Government agrees with this recommendation and encourages the FA to do all it can to influence and encourage the FA Premier League and the Football League to ensure professional clubs do more to assist the elite women's clubs.

The FA should demonstrate that it recognises the value of drawing women into governance and promoting female role models as a way of increasing recognition and widening the fan base, thereby benefiting the sport as a whole. (Paragraph 29)

The Government agrees with this recommendation. The independent review by Lord Burns in 2005 highlighted the lack of female representation in the structure of the FA and recommended that the Council should evolve so as to become more representative, including ensuring women are represented in the decision making process. The Government is closely monitoring the FA's implementation of the Burns recommendations.

Women's football needs to carve a niche for itself and establish its own territory where it can shine and attract support. A women's summer league, when teams would face limited competition for pitches and spectator support, seems a promising way forward. A home nations championship would also raise the game's profile and might well be attractive to broadcasters and sponsors. (Paragraph 31)

It is for the FA to determine the appropriate format of competition that will take the women's game forward. We welcome the work of the high level working group created to look at this issue and await its conclusions.

We therefore urge that every effort should be made to ensure that our top women players have the opportunity to compete in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. We very much hope that the success achieved in developing women's football over the last ten years will continue for the next ten years and beyond. (Paragraph 31)

The Government welcomes the Committee's recommendation that all our top women players should have the opportunity to compete in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Government would like to see our very best sportsmen and women in all Olympic and Paralympic sports compete in 2012 in all sports, and is working with UK Sport and the Governing Bodies of Sport to make this happen.

It is recommended that a task force be set up involving the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education and Skills and the football authorities, to produce a blueprint for the future of women's football. (Paragraph 32)

The Government agrees with this recommendation. Developing a blueprint for the future of women's football is the responsibility of the FA, and we are pleased that the FA has already agreed to set up a working group. The Government, through Sport England and the Youth Sport Trust, will be closely involved, and will keep in close touch over progress.

Appendix 2 – Reply from the Football Association

The FA welcomes this report from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. We are very proud of what has been achieved in women's football in recent years under our leadership, and are therefore grateful to the Committee for choosing to hold an inquiry into this subject. We are particularly pleased with the increased Parliamentary and media attention on women's football which has resulted from this inquiry.

Football is now the most popular sport for females in England, with more players competing in affiliated competition than any other team sport. There has been a huge increase in the number of players, clubs, leagues and competition since 1993 when The Football Association assumed governance of the game. In 1993 there were 10,400 registered players and today there are over 131,000. Compared to netball, the traditional favourite sport of girls which has 56,000 registered players, football continues to grow at a fantastic rate, since becoming the top female sport in 2002. In 1993 there were just 80 girls' teams. In season 2004-05 there were over 8,000 teams. These figures show a huge growth in participation, a growth which brings its own challenges, many of which were identified by the Committee.

Given the number of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations which are aimed wholly or partly at The FA itself, we believe that it is worthwhile responding publicly to these recommendations, as a shadow to the Government's own formal response. We have set out below The FA's response to all of these conclusions and recommendations.

We strongly endorse witnesses' praise for the more recent efforts of the FA to develop and give higher profile to women's football. Without these efforts, it is likely that far fewer girls and women would now be participating in football. (Paragraph 4)

The FA is proud of its record in developing the women's game in recent years, and welcomes the recognition which the Committee and the inquiry's witnesses have shown to our work. We look forward to working with clubs, players, Government and other parties to build on our efforts to develop and promote women's football in the years to come.

We are extremely concerned that the disparity in funding for boys' and for girls' Centres of Excellence existed for eight years. All funding bodies for sport – not just for football – should ensure that there is equitable access to funding streams for both genders. (Paragraph 9)

The girls' Centres of Excellence programme is funded entirely by The FA, and we invest over £1 million per annum in this programme. The boys' Centres of Excellence programme has been funded by Sport England at £2.5 million per annum for the last eight years, although Sport England has not provided any funding for the girls' Centres. The FA supports all efforts to increase funding for the girls' Centres of Excellence, and agrees with the Committee that the public funding of these bodies should be more equitable.

The decision by the Football Foundation to reduce funding for Women's and Girls' Football Development Officers is perverse and detrimental to the development of

women's football, and we have written to the Football Foundation to ask that the decision be reversed, particularly in the light of significant historical under-investment in the development of women's and girls' football. (Paragraph 10)

As The FA made clear in its oral evidence, we believe that the Active Sports programme which funds Football Development Officers should be fully-funded by all partners. The FA is pleased to note that since the completion of the Committee's inquiry, the relevant decision has indeed been reversed and we would like to thank the Committee for their support of our position.

We recommend that the absolute prohibition on mixed football over the age of 11 should be removed and that an informed assessment by team managers and coaches of individuals' capacity to play in mixed teams should govern selection policy. (Paragraph 13)

The current ruling is based on the age where puberty (which will have begun in all youth players at that age, to varying degrees), will alter the strength and other physical characteristics that differentiate males from females. The FA places the safety of players as its overriding concern. The advice we have received is that the muscle strength and power differentials between boys and girls, which may be compounded by early-v-late development, could lead a girl to an unacceptable risk of injury. In addition, The FA supports the setting up of girls/women's football teams in order to promote and encourage female participation.

The FA is aware that the pace of change in the girls' game means that technical differences between boys and girls are constantly decreasing. We recognise that this issue inspires a number of differing viewpoints, and while we understand the Committee's particular interest in the area, we have some concern that the Committee's position has been decided based on a small number of strong opinions, which may not be representative of views around the country. The practical impact of such a rule change would have to be carefully considered.

As a result, The FA is currently consulting with a large number of children, coaches and parents across the country – as well as the Office of the Children's Commissioner – on the possibility of amending or removing the law which states that mixed football should not be allowed over the age of 11. As part of this process we will consider the impact of any regulatory changes, such as legal liability and potential funding. We will be in a position to update on the consultation in October 2006.

We would hope that the FA would combat prejudice against women in the same way as it has successfully tackled racism in football. (Paragraph 15)

The FA is proud of its tireless efforts in working to eliminate racism from football in England. We believe the lack of racist incident at football grounds in recent years – and the good behaviour of England fans in Germany this summer – to be testament to our success in this area, although we recognise that there is still more work needed to kick racism entirely out of the game.

We are committed to eradicating any form of prejudice or discrimination from the game in England. We believe football must be open to everyone in our society – football truly is

the national game and abuse of any kind is unacceptable. We have made clear our opposition to discrimination on the grounds of ability, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation in football and have undertaken a number of initiatives to prevent such discrimination.

The FA's Diversity and Sports Equity workshop, currently being implemented throughout grassroots football, celebrates the successes so far in developing the women's' and girls' game. It also encourages clubs to involve and develop female participants in the roles such as coaching, refereeing and team management.

The FA's free phone 'Abuse and Discrimination Line' (0800 085 0508) is widely promoted through this workshop and several other means, to ensure that women feel confident to report any concerns they have about being treated unfairly in football.

The FA is also working on a 'Women and Leadership Development Programme', in partnership with the CCPR, UK Sport and the British Olympic Foundation. The programme aims to improve the skills and increase the number of women in leadership positions in sport, and will be launched at the England vs Holland international match at Charlton Athletic FC on 31 August.

We therefore believe that we are already well on the way to realising the Committee's "hope" that The FA is working to eradicate prejudice against women in football.

DCMS should examine the scope for using section 84 of the Equality Act 2006 to guide local authorities in taking a stronger line in achieving a more equitable allocation of their pitches between men's and women's teams. (Paragraph 17)

The FA fully supports this recommendation. Pitch allocation is a very real problem for grassroots women's and girls' teams, and we believe that reminding local authorities of the public gender equality duty would be a very clear way for the Government to ensure fairer access to facilities around the country. We believe this to be both a creative and practical solution to this issue, and have already written to the Secretary of State urging her to accept this recommendation and work towards achieving a more equitable pitch allocation.

The provision of adequate pitches and facilities is essential if team sports are to prosper. The Football Foundation is undertaking valuable work in improving that provision, and we support wholeheartedly its approach in making financial support for facilities and pitches conditional on equal access for men and women. (Paragraph 19)

The FA entirely endorses the Committee's support for the Football Foundation's approach to funding facilities. As a funding partner of the Foundation, we work closely with them in a number of areas and believe that their work is invaluable in improving the provision of facilities.

We believe that local authorities have a social responsibility to provide sports facilities fit for use by all sections of the community. The Government should lose no opportunity to remind local authorities of their responsibilities in this field. (Paragraph 20)

The FA wholeheartedly supports this recommendation. Around 80% of all sports facilities are provided by local authorities, and we believe that local authorities have a social and

moral duty to ensure that they provide high-quality facilities to everyone, regardless of gender or any other factor. Furthermore, it is our view that good provision of sports facilities is in the interest of local authorities and communities, as poor facilities frequently result in negative societal outcomes such as anti-social behaviour, falling educational standards and public health problems.

While we can see significant benefits in the FA's proposal for a Super League for women's football, we do not believe that the case has yet been made for this to be resourced from public funding, and we expect the FA to make a financial commitment in line with its emphasis on women's football as one of its priorities. (Paragraph 22)

The FA welcomes the Committee's 'in principle' support for a Women's Football Super League. However, we disagree with the contention that this League should not be publicly funded.

The FA has created a working group to look at establishing a new Super League. The working group includes key FA Directors, and is driven from the top by The FA Chief Executive, Brian Barwick. The group is looking at how to address fundamental issues at the top of the women's game.

We believe, given the historic lack of gender-equitable public funding in football (which is itself criticised, rightly, in the Committee's recommendation 2 above), that it is the duty of Government to address this funding gap at the elite end of the women's game. We believe that it is necessary for the Government to create a new funding programme for women's football. With public investment of only £3m per year, over five years, the Government would be able to harness the profile, popularity and social role that a Super League would offer, while allowing the women's game to develop beyond all current recognition.

We recommend that the FA should encourage professional men's clubs to make it standard practice to share training pitches and facilities and grounds with elite women's clubs. It is in the interests of professional clubs to be more imaginative in their approach to building links with women's clubs and publicising their matches in match programmes. By doing so, clubs can expect to increase their support base. (Paragraph 28)

The FA shares the Committee's belief that professional clubs should do all they can to develop the women's game through their own structures, facilities and support base. However, The FA has little control over the commercial and strategic decisions of individual clubs. We have contacted both the FA Premier League and the Football League to draw their attention to this issue, and would hope for their support in encouraging the clubs to take a positive view.

The FA should demonstrate that it recognises the value of drawing women into governance and promoting female role models as a way of increasing recognition and widening the fan base, thereby benefiting the sport as a whole. (Paragraph 29)

There are a number of women in senior executive positions at The FA, across all divisions ranging from those involved in the women's game, to equality, child protection and human resources. Kelly Simmons, who gave evidence to the Committee, is Head of National Football Development with overall responsibility for grassroots football in England.

The FA recognises that its current democratic structure does not include enough female representation. A structural review, carried out by Lord Burns in 2005, is nearing implementation at the time of writing, and representation of all areas of the game is an issue that is being addressed within that process.

We take the promotion of women footballers as positive role models very seriously, through organised campaigns such as our Get Into Football initiative and the Euro 2005 Education Pack described in our written evidence to the inquiry.

England Captain Faye White and Kelly Simmons were specifically chosen to act as our witnesses to this inquiry in order to showcase the importance we place on expert women at the highest levels of our organisation.

Women's football needs to carve a niche for itself and establish its own territory where it can shine and attract support. A women's summer league, when teams would face limited competition for pitches and spectator support, seems a promising way forward. A home nations championship would also raise the game's profile and might well be attractive to broadcasters and sponsors. (Paragraph 31)

The FA has created a senior working group to look at establishing a new Women's Super League. As set out in our written evidence to this inquiry, this group is looking closely at the possibility of holding this Super League over the summer. We will consider the Committee's backing for a summer league as we develop our thinking in this area.

Given the current issues around fixture planning, and England's preparation for major tournaments such as FIFA Women's World Cup 2007 in China, The FA has no plans to establish a home nations championship. Current world and European rankings would also suggest that such matches would be very uncompetitive and therefore potentially counter-productive to the development of the sport.

We therefore urge that every effort should be made to ensure that our top women players have the opportunity to compete in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. We very much hope that the success achieved in developing women's football over the last ten years will continue for the next ten years and beyond. (Paragraph 31)

The FA agrees with this recommendation, and we have been leading the drive towards football teams representing Great Britain, for both men and women, at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Discussions with the other British football Associations are ongoing, but The FA's commitment remains as strong as ever.

The FA has also held preliminary discussions with the Commonwealth Games Federation, regarding the possibility of including women's football in the future.

It is recommended that a task force be set up involving the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education and Skills and the football authorities, to produce a blueprint for the future of women's football. (Paragraph 32)

The FA has already written to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills setting out our enthusiasm for such a task force, and our willingness to be involved should the Government decide to accept this recommendation.

While we believe that The FA has a good record of developing women's football in England, we accept the Committee's recommendation that we now require support and backing from Government if we are able to realise the full potential of the game in future years. Close work with both DCMS and DfES will be vital to ensure continuing success in this area, and The FA has offered to chair and manage the running of this task force if the Government believes that to be useful. We have also recommended that both Sport England and the Youth Sports Trust would be able to play a valuable role in this group.

The FA is grateful for the Committee's efforts to support its work in women's football by engaging Government departments on this issue.

Appendix 3 – Reply from the Football Foundation

The Football Foundation is the UK's largest sports charity with an annual income of £45m by the FA Premier League (£15m), the FA (£15m), Sport England and the Government (£15m). The Football Foundation welcomes the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report into women's football. The Foundation made a full and active contribution to the inquiry, submitting both written and oral evidence.

In particular, the Football Foundation is grateful to the committee for acknowledging the valuable work that we carry out in funding pitches and facilities to give both genders wide and equal access to the sport (paragraph 19). We are proud to have supported over 88 projects worth £9.8 million aimed exclusively at the development of girls' football.

The Foundation agrees that prejudice against women in football must be tackled by all partners and we support the committee's call for an increase in support of women's and girls' football in all ways possible. The Foundation is also encouraged by the emphasis on the responsibility of local authorities in improving and maintaining community sports pitches (paragraph 19).

Whilst welcoming the majority of the report, the Football Foundation is concerned by the criticism surrounding the Foundation's support of the Active Sports Programme (paragraph 10). The Football Foundation is a charity focussed on kick-starting projects so that they will become self sufficient. With this in mind, the Foundation originally gave a five-year grant to the Active Sports Programme. As the Active Sports Programme was still unable to self-sustain after this time, this funding has since been extended to eight years. This decision had been pending for some time and the timing of our decision was entirely coincidental to the Culture, Media and Sport committee report.

The Football Foundation welcomes the Culture, Media and Sport committee's interest in this area and would be delighted to keep the committee updated in all issues regarding the Foundation's commitment to women's football.