



Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee Inquiry: Women's Football

**June 2006
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Introduction & Summary

Football has an enormous amount to offer. It stands in a uniquely privileged position with regard to financial power, media coverage, infrastructure, participation and national affection. This powerful position makes football ideally placed as a delivery mechanism for a whole myriad of public policy priorities ranging from social exclusion to literacy to health. To that end it has already contributed a great deal however it is within women and girl's football that the full potential has yet to be realised.

As the figures in this paper illustrate women and girl's football is growing and is now the number one sport for females in England. It is easy therefore to assume that all is well and that no changes are needed. It is important to note however that this growth comes against a backdrop of poor and falling participation of women and girls across sport as a whole. Furthermore it is also a level of growth far short of its potential.

We therefore believe that football has a critical role to play in maximising the opportunities for women and girls to get active. A survey of 2000 young people in 2002 found that as many as 1 in 3 girls want to play football. As things stand they will not all have the chance, and that needs to be addressed.

Football has already delivered many layers of benefits for boys and for men. If it is to do the same for women and girls more work is needed. This paper will outline what we believe to be the priorities for moving forward:

- Fair and equitable investment in women and girl's football, at the very least comparable to that given to other minority sectors in the sport (e.g. disability and BME) and ultimately on a par with boys;
- An increase in quantity and an improvement in the quality of facilities;
- Commitment from England's biggest and richest football clubs to invest in community and in particular women and girls football.

We strongly welcome the Committee Inquiry and believe a thorough review of the investment into women's football is timely. Our perspective has been compiled from consultation with colleagues and other sports organisations, individual grassroots participants and from desk research. We would welcome the opportunity to give oral evidence on June 27th. The following is our written evidence in accordance with your stated terms of reference.

Women's football – the context

It is important to understand the context of women and girl's football in England. Contrary to popular belief women's football in England is not a new sport. As early as 1895 there are records of a representative match between northern and southern women's teams. The most infamous women's club team in history was Dick, Kerrs Ladies. They attracted huge crowds and for example on Boxing Day in 1920 they attracted a crowd of over 52,000 to watch their game against St Helen's at Goodison Park. This success was thwarted however when the FA of the time banned women from playing on football league pitches.

Almost 100 years later it is the persistence of grassroots players and volunteers along with the efforts of the FA and visionary leadership from a number of professional clubs that has helped the re-emergence of the women's game. In 2006 the number of women and girls playing football in the UK is on the increase and more women are becoming coaches and officials. Yet, gendered attitudes still prevail. The idea that women cannot and should not be actively involved in football is still widespread. Women and girls still face derision on a regular basis; ranging from Sunday afternoon park spectators to experienced sports journalists, and if further investment in women and girl's football is not ensured then there is a genuine risk of it sliding backwards into obscurity again.

About the Women's Sports Foundation

The Women's Sports Foundation is the national non-governmental organisation committed to improving and promoting opportunities for women and girls in sport and physical activity in all roles and at all levels.

Founded in 1984, we are a non-profit organisation. Our vision is of a society that celebrates the diversity of women and girls and enables them to benefit from, excel at and fulfil their potential through the sport and physical activity of their choice. We work across the UK through a combination of advocacy, information, education, research and training.

As the figures below illustrate women and girls still have shockingly low levels of participation in sport and physical activity.

- Even by the age of 7 girls are expressing negative attitudes toward physical activity and sport [Sport England 2002]
- 40% of girls have dropped out of sports activity by the time they reach 18 [Youth Sports Trust 2001]
- Over half of men compared to only 36% of women had participated in some form of physical activity other than walking in one month prior to being interviewed for the General Household Survey [GHS 2002]

Despite a widely held perception that gender inequality is no longer an issue of concern, women and girls still continue to fall behind in all aspects of sport and physical activity; not only in participation but in funding, media coverage and in all aspects of management and professional development.

As listed below, sport holds a multitude of benefits for women and girls:

- Young girls who play sport have a more positive body image and higher self-esteem;
- Playing sport enhances an active lifestyle and encourages a healthy approach to diet;
- Girls who participate in sport are less likely to have unplanned pregnancy, or to smoke or use drugs;
- Sport is an effective tool for girls to reduce the symptoms of stress and depression;
- Playing sport teaches girls to be assertive, confident and strategic;
- Sport teaches girls leadership skills as well as teamwork;
- Playing sport generates energy and improves work and educational achievement.

Football has a head start in helping to deliver these benefits.

Section A

The development of women's football at all levels and the resource requirements to support wide participation in amateur and elite women's football

In summary

While 1 in 3 girls want to play football, there is a postcode lottery of actual opportunities to play.

Funding and investment in football leaves women and girls by far the poorest relation, receiving less than one tenth of the ring fenced money allocated to BME and disability football through the Football Foundation.

Facilities across the country are of irregular and often extremely poor quality. Women and girls are more likely to be put off sports participation by poor playing, changing and showering facilities.

Model for success

The current situation with women's football is positive. More women and girls are playing, there are record crowds watching the elite game (England versus Finland attracted over 29,000) and Women's Euro 2005 was an unprecedented success. This success has come through specific investment in the infrastructure of women's football and programmes such as Active Sports through which the FA have put in place. It is a model for development that is without a doubt working as far as it can. There is however enormous scope for improvement.

According to FA figures there were 132,000 affiliated female footballers in England in 2004-05. However this is still only 9% of all affiliated footballers (male membership is around 1.27 million). By contrast, in Germany there are as many as 860,000 female German Football Association (DFB) members. Furthermore a comparison with Sweden reveals the extent of the imbalance of female to male player registration in England (as of December 2005 there were 56,328 registered female players in Sweden compared to 187,042 registered male players. This equates to 30% of all registered players).

Furthermore, there is little doubt that girls want to play football. A survey of 2,000 young people and adults in 2005 found that more than one in three girls now say that football is their favourite sport to play. The study found that 83% of children say that girls should be 'allowed' to play 'boys' sports such as football or rugby.¹ Furthermore research by Sport England has found that the proportion of girls taking up the chance to play football in school at least once within a given year has increased from 24% in 1994 to 37% in 2002².

However it still remains true that for far too many girls the opportunities do not exist to play football at school or for a local club. Unlike boys and men's football where a breadth and depth of football opportunities exists for all levels of ability (from pub team to semi-professional), in women and girl's football there remains a postcode lottery. Access to football depends heavily on luck, individual teacher attitudes and on parental ability to travel long distances. Furthermore where clubs do exist there

¹ Tesco's Sport for Schools and Clubs, 2005.

² Young people and sport in England 1994-2002, Sport England.

are limited opportunities across a diversity of experience and aptitude resulting in the exclusion girls of lower confidence and ability who are far less likely to try football, stay playing football or to return to it later in life.

Funding and investment

Over the last 10 years the financial injection into football as a whole has been astounding and top-flight professional football in England in particular has never been wealthier. It is well documented however that, even when the investment comes from the public purse, not everyone in football is getting a fair share of the riches.

In the period following the Taylor Report millions of pounds of public money has been invested in football. Women and girl's football has not seen their fair share of that. For example, each year £2.5million of National Lottery money is dedicated to a Youth Development Programme that is dedicated to centre's of excellence that only cater for boys. The Football Foundation has a budget of £45 million to dedicate to the grassroots of football each year of which £15million is derived from the public purse. However while they have specific investment targets for funding into disability football (£2.794m invested to date /target £3.4m) and ethnic minorities (£4.055m invested to date/target 3.9m target) they do not currently have a target for women and girls football. Their current investment into women and girl's football via the Active Sports Programme is a paltry £450k.

Football itself (organisations such as the FA Premier League and FA) have made a significant contribution to grassroots football – amounting to community projects worth £200 million over three years. We would like to see more of that invested in women and girl's football. We also believe that more can be done directly by central government to facilitate further football participation amongst women and girls. It is pertinent to note that while the football sector in England makes the largest contribution to grass roots of any national industry in Europe, the contribution from central government is among the lowest. Figures from the CCPR indicate that central government investment in sporting infrastructure is the lowest per capita of the major countries in Europe. In 2003/04 it equated to a mere £2 per head of the population; less than half that invested by France. Further public investment needs to be made before it is too late.

Women and girl's football remains the poorest relation with regard to investment in football. We believe that even a small increase in funds could make a significant difference in stabilising the infrastructure of women's football. This should not be based on good will or altruism but straightforward parity, in particular through organisations such as the Football Foundation who are charged with distributing public money.

Facilities – getting a pitch

In 2002 the FA and Football Foundation conducted an audit of the playing fields and changing rooms accessible to football in England. This survey found a need for investment of over £2billion in existing facilities alone to bring them up to an acceptable standard for existing levels of participation, let alone any desired increases.

WSF research highlights that women and girls are particularly likely to be put off by poor playing, changing and showering facilities.

The lack of football pitches is of particular significance to women and girls football. Too often pitches and training facilities are simply not available and women's leagues, even the National FA Premier League, are confined to the least desirable time allocation available – Sunday afternoon's at 2pm. This means that women's football is almost universally exiled from the mainstream of football participation. At 2pm on a Sunday pitches are of a poor quality having been played on all weekend, many families and potential spectators use that time for other activities and as games finish at around 4pm the opportunities for publicity and reporting of games is limited. What's more, as all women's football is played at this time, grass roots players are denied the opportunity to watch the elite players perform. Women's football is therefore caught in a viscous cycle in which it is marginalised and unable to fulfil it's complete potential.

We will be examining the potential impact of the Public Sector Gender Duty on the allocation of local authority sports facilities however we would also like to see greater investment in modern and flexible football facilities with, for example, the installation of more third generation pitches³.

³ Third generation pitches are synthetic turf pitches that are low maintenance and allow for multi-sports use all year round.

Section B

Availability of opportunities for young players to develop skills, stamina and performance

In summary

Elite women's football has improved however it's existence remains fragile

While the FA has invested in 51 centres of excellence funding for girls academies is still only one tenth of that for boys

Too many of the biggest football clubs in England are letting women's football down

The level of elite women's football in England has never been higher. The England team are improving steadily and have a real chance of qualifying for the Fifa World Cup Finals in China in 2007. They are currently ranked 12th in the world.

The establishment of 51 licensed FA Centres of Excellence has supported this improvement, however, as is highlighted above there remains a postcode lottery for starting, staying and excelling in women and girl's football. While player affiliation as a proportion of the population is increasing in England, it still falls a long way short of other successful football nations such as Germany and Sweden. Greater choice and a diversity of opportunities through an increased number of clubs, increased number of female coaches and improved facilities is critical for building upon progress made to date.

The established professional clubs

As with mens football professional football clubs provide a focus for the elite of women's football. However with little inducement or specific incentive for professional clubs to invest in their women's and girl's football there is a very thin layer of elite level competition and development. Arsenal FC and Charlton Athletic FC lead the way as the leading investors in the women's game and their dominance in all competitions is evidence of that. Other clubs like Everton have started to invest however over the last two seasons there has been increased media focus on professional clubs actually withdrawing all funding from their women's teams. Premiership clubs such as Manchester United, Birmingham City and Fulham have all recently taken this decision. This leaves a fragile league structure for the game, which inhibits competition, professional development, supporter loyalty and therefore seriously limits media exposure and marketing potential. Again women's football is caught in a viscous cycle.

Too many of the biggest football clubs in England are letting women's football down. We would like to see a greater proportion of the wealth within top level professional football (for example the recent £1.7billion Premiership television rights deal) dedicated to community development and in particular women and girl's football development.

With a relatively small but consistent injection of public investment each year a stable and competitive women's elite league could be established. If football can achieve this and establish women footballers as role models for future generations of young women and girls it could be the start of a revolution in how women's sport is

Artificial cut off point

There has recently been a considerable amount of media attention with regard to the lack of opportunities for girls to play mixed football beyond the age of 11. At present the FA rule stipulates that from the age of 11 boys and girls must play football separately.

We believe this is an artificial barrier to the potential development of 11 years plus girls and that the separation of young players in coaching and matches should be based on more sophisticated criteria such as weight, height and ability. The separation from age 11 accentuates the perception that women and girls play an inferior version of the sport and prevents young women and girls developing to their physical and technical peak.

Section C**Women's participation in all aspects of the game including coaching and management.**

In summary

- While progress is being made there are still far too few female coaches across all sports, including football
- Women's football is either entirely unrepresented or extremely poorly represented in the decision making structures across football

Coaching

Schemes such as the Women's Sports Foundation's Women into Coaching scheme have gone some way to facilitating professional development for women coaches in football. The FA National Mentoring Programme has over 60 female coaches registered of which four have already achieved their UEFA 'A' Licence, the highest coaching qualification available.

However, women fall desperately short of their coaching potential. As the table below illustrates, while the situation is improving, there is still a very long way to go.

Figures for numbers of qualified coaches at each level in 2004	Total	Female	Proportion of female to total
Level 1	27716	3072	11.08%
Level 2	5768	404	7.0%
Level 3	814	31	3.8%

This reflects the poor situation across sport where, for example, only 10% of the British Olympic coaching team for the Athens Games was female.

Management

Women's football needs more champions in places where decisions are made and funds are allocated. The women's game is poorly represented across the decision-making structures of football with, for example, the Football Association having no direct representatives of women's football on its Board of Directors and no women in its senior management team. Likewise the Football Foundation has no formal representative of women's football at Board level or on its respective Panels.

There have always been exceptional women that have found their way to the top levels of football hierarchy. In 1994 for example, Pat Smith was appointed as Deputy to the Chief Executive of the FA and Vicky Oyston, the then Chair of Blackpool FC, was once famously banned from the Tranmere Rovers boardroom on the basis that it was a men only area. A small trickle of women are facing slightly less draconian restrictions within football in 2006 but they are still vastly outnumbered by men. What's more female representation does not always equate to the championing of the women's game. Birmingham City Football Club have the first female Managing Director in Karren Brady and yet in 2005 still took the decision to withdraw funding

from their women's football team. In contrast, at Arsenal FC where they have one of football's most successful women's infrastructures the driving force are two men: David Dein and Vic Akers.

If women's football is considered a valued sector within the national game it should be given formal representation at the highest level of the game's governance.

Section D**Media coverage and sponsorship of women's football**

In summary

- WSF research indicates that as little as 5% of sports media coverage is dedicated to women's sport
- Women's Euro 2005 proved that there is a national appetite for media coverage of women's football

Football dominates media coverage of sport above and beyond all other sports put together. In 2006 WSF conducted an analysis of three random days of newspapers and found that even excluding Mondays when many papers produce special football supplements almost 60 per cent of all of the sports articles were devoted to men's professional football.

This dominance is unlikely to subside, however small indications of progress have arisen in the coverage of women's football. Following lobbying the WSF for example the BBC have significantly improved their online web pages dedicated to women's football. Furthermore the Women's Euro 2005 tournament held in the North West of England provided a real watershed for actual media time and space committed to women's football and also for the levels of subsequent support from the public.

The BBC and Sky Television already have a track record of covering women's football. In recent years the BBC have showcased the FA Women's Cup Final and Sky Sports have shown England women's internationals. However, Women's Euro 2005 pushed the coverage of women's football to a new level. The BBC committed to show all of England's games live and with investment in the build up to the tournament, the showcasing of the England team's leading players and the sort of hype that surrounds men's football the television and radio coverage was an unprecedented success.

England versus Finland attracted a peak audience of 2.9 million (as many as those that watched The Derby on BBC television the day before) and 8.9 million people watched England across the duration of the tournament. The BBC coverage brought women's football into homes and work place discussions like never before and along with the work of The FA, the marketing of the team and players meant that names like Karen Carney, Rachel Yankey and so on became topics of everyday football chat.

Furthermore the FA investment in media liaison meant that the tournament was covered by every English national daily on at least one occasion - unprecedented for women's football.

The appeal of Women's Euro 2005 has helped cement further coverage of women's football throughout the season on the BBC. Premiership results are now announced on Radio Five Live. Live pitch side reports from major games are now common place and the England World Cup Qualifying matches in March 2006 were broadcast live on BBC 3.

This support for the women's game has made a real impact on player numbers and helped the FA secure sponsorship partners for the women's game. There is still a very long way to go before the deep rooted culture of sports journalism accepts

women's football, however it is absolutely imperative that continued and steady progress is made in order to help the women's game survive.

The Women's Sports Foundation works tirelessly to secure improved media coverage for women's sport and to challenge entrenched cultural and practical barriers. We would welcome a public debate about a more balanced approach to all sports coverage.

Sponsorship

As other governing bodies such as the ECB do, the FA have kept sponsor investment in the England men's team and FA competitions closely linked with their female equivalents in combined packages. This innovative use of contractual obligations has enabled women's football to step outside the viscous cycle of poor exposure resulting in poor commercial investment and has made a significant difference. The challenge will be to ensure growth in this area and attract further independent sponsorship for grassroots football clubs through to the national game.

Section E **Discussion and conclusions**

As with any other progressive industry there is an opportunity within football to capture a huge growth market. Women and girls could and should represent a future market of supporters (according to the FA Premier League fan survey in 2001 one in seven season ticket holders is now female), players and coaches.

The transition is not happening organically however. Strongly gendered cultural attitudes still prevail from parkland pitches to powerful Boardrooms and distinct and direct interventions and specific investments are still very much needed to ensure that the momentum of the last 10 years is not lost, wasted and forgotten.

As this paper outlines women and girl's football is on the threshold of a potential revolution, while it also lies precariously on the edge of liquidation.

We specifically are calling for:

- Open, transparent and equitable funding of grassroots and elite level football with women and girl's football at the very least on a par with other "minority" funding streams and ultimately comparable to that for boys.
- A solid foundation for the development of elite women's football, bolstered by public investment and supported by commitment across England's biggest and richest football clubs.
- An increase in the quantity and an improvement in the quality of safe and accessible football facilities.
- Local and regular opportunities for women and girls to play and enjoy football regardless of their ability and experience and to train to be the coaches and officials of the future.

As stated at the beginning of this report football stand in a uniquely powerful position. No other sport has access to such vast media coverage and public interest and it is within football that huge opportunities exist to get women and girls fit, healthy and engaged in life changing levels of activity. We commend the Committee for its decision to examine the position of women's football and hope that this can indeed be the threshold of a transformation in the women's game.

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