

KICK OUT



FOOTBALL UNITED

Year One Impact Report: 2025-26

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FOREWORD

Kick It Out is on a mission to unite football and end discrimination.

We have a vision where everyone is included, whether it's in grassroots or professional football in the men's or women's game.

We've been doing this for over 30 years, but we recognise that football and the world is ever-changing. That's why we launched a new strategy called Football United at the start of 2025-26 season.

It has four clear goals: to ensure everyone is included, everyone is represented on the pitch, everyone can lead off the pitch, and everyone stands up to discrimination.

It builds on the success we've had and the lessons we've learned over the last 30 years, but it also recognises that the challenges are evolving and we cannot do it alone.

It also has growth in mind. We want more of our work to reach more people and make a difference to their lives. We know from research that those we support want more action and more collaboration to make that happen.

So, what are we doing? We've grown our education programmes for academy players, parents, fans and match officials, but we've hired new people to grow them further.

We're increasing our campaign and policy work so that we can tackle some of football's stubborn issues to make sure football is always welcoming – to everyone.



We're growing our support for people from underrepresented communities to build careers in football and thrive. And we'll continue tackling discrimination wherever it happens – from your local park to the Premier League to your social feed.

After the first year of 'Football United', we want to highlight what we've done, who we're working with and what impact our work is having.

Over the next few pages, you will see how we're educating and developing participants in football, uniting partners, influencing change and tackling discrimination.

You'll also see how we're delivering against our commitments as we continue to evolve as an organisation, and what's to come in the coming season.

We know our work isn't done. This is year one of a five-year strategy. It will take more work and more collective action to reach our goals, but we're determined to make football united at a time when the world is becoming more divided.

If you want to join us on that journey, please get in touch via the details on the back page of this booklet.

Samuel Okafor, Kick It Out CEO

FOOTBALL UNITED

Kick It Out strategy 2030

VISION:



A game that welcomes everyone

MISSION:



Unite football to end discrimination

OUR GOALS:



EVERYONE IS INCLUDED

Create a football culture that includes everyone, at every level.



ON THE PITCH: EVERYONE REPRESENTED

Significantly increase top-level representation for players and officials by 2030.



OFF THE PITCH: EVERYONE CAN LEAD

Significantly increase top-level coach and senior leadership representation by 2030.



EVERYONE STANDS UP TO DISCRIMINATION

Ensure football meets abuse head-on with courage and consistency.

OUR ROLE:



EDUCATE AND DEVELOP

We train the next generation. From those already in football to those taking their first steps, everyone deserves support that changes behaviour and develops potential.



UNITE PARTNERS

We don't do it alone. We build a network of collaborations with clubs, community groups, like-minded organisations and campaigners to drive impact.



INFLUENCE CHANGE

We hold power to account. Using data, insight and evidence we will work with governing bodies, tech platforms and policymakers to take real action in line with our goals.



TACKLE DISCRIMINATION

We call it out and back it up. From our leading reporting tools to targeted campaigns, we work to challenge abuse and show the benefits of accountability.

FOOTBALL'S LANDSCAPE IN 2025-26

What does football look like in relation to our goals?

EVERYONE IS INCLUDED

Racism accounts for almost half of discrimination reports received by Kick It Out. More than 50% of women have experienced sexism in football settings, which rises among ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ+ community.

Faith-based abuse is on the rise, and disabled fans still face significant barriers. New Kick It Out research shows that one in five Britons has experienced discrimination in pubs, but eight in 10 think pubs should strive to be inclusive.



OFF THE PITCH: EVERYONE CAN LEAD

According to the Black Footballers' Partnership, 34% of players in the EFL are black, rising to 43% in the Premier League, but those figures are not reflected in board, leadership or senior coaching positions.

Under FA Rule N, club workforce diversity data was published for the first time in 2025, but it showed that many clubs don't reflect their local communities from a gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ or disability perspective. More than half of clubs fall below their local community populations in all four of the above metrics. In 2027, clubs will publish workforce data for the women's game in addition to the men's game.



ON THE PITCH: EVERYONE REPRESENTED

The percentage of professional players from South Asian heritage in the men's and women's game has now passed 1%, according to the PFA. Black and mixed heritage players are underrepresented in the women's game.

Among match officials, there is progress. In the grassroots game, 11% are from historically underrepresented communities, while among professional referees, it's 10%. In May, Akil Howson became the first black official to feature at an FA Cup final.



EVERYONE STANDS UP TO DISCRIMINATION

Kick It Out received a record 1,744 reports of discrimination in the 2025-26 season, which represents a 25% increase on the previous season. Incidents passed the 1,000 mark for the first time. But the increase in reports shows a growing awareness of reporting tools and an intolerance of abuse at a time of divisive rhetoric from some leaders and society.

The rise has also been helped by reporting partnerships with Her Game Too, The Frank Soo Foundation and Football v Homophobia, which has led to increased confidence in reporting.

EDUCATE AND DEVELOP

What we've done in year one:

Aided by our partnership with the Premier League, we expanded our rehabilitative Fan Education programme, leading to a record 148 fans being educated about their discriminatory behaviours. We also hit a landmark, with 500 fans now being educated through the programme in total.

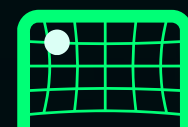
Developed new Academy courses on race, racism and sectarianism, helping learners recognise and report discrimination, with 1517 grassroots and professional referees completing them through FA and ProRef partnerships.

Revised our Equality Inspires workshops to increase inclusion awareness among 815 club academy players, parents and staff

this season. More than 4,000 participants have taken part since 2022-23.

A record 583 attendees took part in our Raise Your Game programme, which featured events, workshops, webinars and work experience focused on media, women in football, coaching and backroom roles. Some delivered content and presented at events for us.

Through our partnership with McDonald's Fun Football, 100 bursaries were awarded to coaches from underrepresented communities. We also delivered an event at St George's Park for 70 coaches, exploring inclusion practices they can use in their communities.



11,000+

A record number of people had access to our education programmes last season (including registered users on our online learning platform, [The Academy](#))

95%

The percentage of people who attended Raise Your Game and said it was helpful to their career development



"Women's Raise Your Game was honestly a turning point for me. At the time, I doubted myself, but being in such an empowering space gave me the confidence to back myself, which eventually led to a BBC placement."

Jannat, Raise Your Game delegate.



'Football has a responsibility to educate its fans'

"I recognise that my behaviour was unacceptable," says one supporter referred to Kick It Out's Fan Education programme. "The things I have learned will ensure I never engage in that kind of behaviour again, knowing the impact it can have on other people."

Since launching in 2022, the programme has supported more than 500 fans referred by clubs or police for discriminatory behaviour at matches or online. Through bespoke one-to-one sessions, Kick It Out's Fan Education Manager Alan Bush and the expanded delivery team help supporters understand the impact of their actions to make lasting change.

The aim is rehabilitation, not simply punishment. Only a small number of participants offend again, and feedback shows many go on to challenge or educate their peers around them.

"The vast majority of fans don't understand the gravity of what they've done," says Alan, who is a staunch Newcastle fan himself. "We can't just ban fans from football, because that pushes the issue back into society. Football has a responsibility to educate its fans. If, after a session, someone reports or challenges discrimination, that has to be a far better outcome."

1.25%

The percentage of fans who have reoffended since taking part in our rehabilitative Fan Education programme



UNITE PARTNERS

What we've done in year one:

Launched a new partnership with Guinness 0.0 and Greene King to make pubs more welcoming. More than 3,000 Greene King colleagues have received Kick It Out education, helping staff recognise discrimination and enabling customers to report discrimination when it happens.

An increase in the number of match officials from ethnically diverse backgrounds has come after collaborative work between Kick It Out, Bamref, ProRef and FA refereeing. "Our partnership with Kick It Out reflects what can be achieved when organisations move beyond words and work together with shared purpose," says Bamref CEO Aji Ajibola.

UCFB, Goals and Visit Tampa Bay helped host our Raise Your Game programme events, leading to a record 583 attendees at sessions dedicated to media, women, coaching and backroom roles in football.

Continued our long-standing partnership with McDonald's Fun Football, embedding inclusion across one of the country's biggest grassroots football programmes. Alongside education for coaches, the partnership has supported 100 bursaries designed to make coaching pathways more accessible to people from underrepresented communities.

Sky Sports pundit Gary Neville and presenter Bela Shah took part in the launch of our new five-year strategy with other presenters leading our Raise Your Game media event. The Sky partnership, which has helped with campaign and education programmes, will continue into a seventh year in 2027.



3,000+

Greene King colleagues educated through our Guinness 0.0 partnership, helping create more inclusive environments for football fans in pubs.

99%

The percentage of Greene King staff who said they felt confident recognising and responding to discrimination after completing Kick It Out training.



"We're proud of what we've achieved together so far and look forward to building on this partnership."

Diageo GB ESG lead Elisabeth Rochford



Football culture does not stop at the stadium gates

Millions of supporters experience matches in pubs, bars and other social spaces, but research commissioned by Kick It Out showed that not everyone feels equally welcome in those environments.

With eight in 10 people wanting pubs to be more inclusive, our partnership with Guinness 0.0 and Greene King set out to change that.

Rather than running a standalone campaign, we brought together the different strengths of all three organisations. Kick It Out provided expertise in discrimination and inclusion; Greene King provided access to its people and pubs across the country; and Guinness 0.0 used the reach and influence of one of football's most recognisable brands to help champion more inclusive matchday experiences.

During the first year, 3000+ Greene King colleagues received Kick It Out education designed to give them greater confidence to recognise and respond to discrimination. The partnership also created opportunities to engage football fans directly.

Importantly, the partnership is designed to develop rather than end after a single campaign. In year two, we are exploring further fan engagement and club collaborations.



INFLUENCE CHANGE

What we've done in year one:

Advocated for the Independent Football Regulator to establish board-level accountability on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at clubs, and representation targets for board and senior leadership positions. We also advocated for the creation of an EDI advisory board to ensure the issue remains an ongoing priority.

Joined Online Hate in Professional Football Working Group alongside other governing bodies, Ofcom, and UK Football Policing Unit to tackle online abuse, with a draft manifesto for change set to be launched this season.

Collaborated with spoken-word artist Myndstate to produce a film which shows the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusion (below). We've also showcased footballers from Muslim and South Asian heritage to celebrate success and highlight how representation must improve.



We campaigned to make pubs more welcoming after research we commissioned showed that eight in 10 people thought pubs should strive to be inclusive. Our partnership with Guinness 0.0 means thousands of Greene King staff are now trained to recognise and respond to discrimination.

Produced a film that educates fans on the history and impact of a chant sung towards Chelsea supporters that has been used by clubs including Manchester United.

11.2M

Social media reach – a 109% increase on the previous season.

Influencing the Football Regulator

The Independent Football Regulator offers a major opportunity to improve football's financial sustainability and engagement with fans, but long-standing issues around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) remain. These include the lack of representation from a wide range of communities among board and senior leadership positions within clubs, showing why stronger action is needed. We wanted the IFR to help accelerate the change many across the game want to see.

Using publicly available FA Rule N data, we conducted research into how representative the 92 professional clubs were off the pitch. Alongside insights from the University of York to highlight how other regulators view EDI, this informed our campaign for a stronger EDI mandate within the IFR's Code of Governance.

We brought together more than 20 like-minded organisations so their views could support our submissions to the IFR consultation. As a result, the IFR published its Club Code of Governance, recommending that clubs set diversity targets for their boards and senior leadership teams for the first time, and show what action they are taking.

This is important progress, but only a first step. In year one of our strategy, our work shows how evidence, partnership and expert oversight can help football move forward to improve representation.

“

“Seeing people from diverse backgrounds in coaching or leadership positions makes a difference for the next generation. I've been happy to support Kick It Out's work in ensuring that representation continues to be top of the Football Regulator's agenda.”

Chris Hughton, former Premier League manager

20+

Over 20 like-minded organisations supported our letter to the Football Regulator to ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion remains top of their agenda.

TACKLE DISCRIMINATION

What we've done in year one:

Kick It Out received a record 1,744 reports of discrimination across the professional game, grassroots football and social media, suggesting that people are more willing to report than ever.

Those figures were helped by expanding our reporting network through three new partnerships with Her Game Too, The Frank Soo Foundation and Football v Homophobia. This helped create more accessible, consistent and trusted routes for individuals to report discrimination.

Our new partnership with Guinness 0.0 and Greene King, created a first-of-its-kind reporting route within their pubs and extended our reach to where millions watch football.

Delivered multiple Hate Crime awareness events across universities in Manchester, working with Greater Manchester Council and other partners to increase awareness of discrimination among students, and encouraging more victims and witnesses to come forward and report incidents.

25% 100+

The increase in reports Kick It Out received during the 2025-26 season compared to 2024-25

More than 100 reports came in through our new reporting partners

“

“Our reporting relationship is built on trust, collaboration and a shared commitment to tackling discrimination, ensuring that those who experience sexism and misogyny feel heard, supported and empowered to come forward.”

Roopa Vyas, Her Game Too COO



'A relationship built on trust and shared commitment'

Kick It Out launched a campaign to tackle sexism and misogyny in 2024 after finding that over half of women had experienced sexism at football matches.

The focus was to raise awareness of sexist behaviour and encourage reporting after we found that 85% of women who'd experienced sexism thought there was no point reporting it because they had no confidence that anything would happen.

We collaborated with partners Sky Sports and created a relationship with Her Game Too to drive up reports, which have risen from 115 during the season before the campaign to 216 last season. While it sounds counter-productive to take interest in more incidents being reported, it also shows how prevalent the behaviour is.

Her Game Too COO Roopa Vyas says: "Having a strong partnership with Kick It Out means we can help ensure reports are directed through a trusted and established reporting framework, giving victims confidence that their concerns will be taken seriously. It ensures that those who experience sexism and misogyny feel heard, supported and empowered to come forward."

We are also discussing wider policy change with the government as part of their strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls.

THE FRANK SOO
FOUNDATION



FOOTBALL
v
HOMOPHOBIA
FOOTBALL FOR EVERYONE



OUR COMMITMENTS

Champion inclusion

We launched an internal People and Culture committee to strengthen employee voice. Three inclusive policies were introduced, including sabbaticals, enhanced paternity leave and summer hours. A new engagement and benefits platform was also rolled out to improve colleague connection, wellbeing awareness and access to benefits.

Invest in our people

A range of internal training was delivered, including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, psychological safety, compliance, management, media and AI training. External speakers were organised for away days, covering topics relating to strategy and EDI.

New values were approved and rolled out for the mid-year reviews. Peer feedback was also introduced for end-of-year reviews and we've partnered with Flying Iguana to introduce personality profiles for leaders across the organisation. Sessions have focused on strengthening leadership capabilities, building self-awareness and enhancing how we collaborate and will be rolled out to the whole team in the coming season.

Scale impact

Over 11,000 people had access to our education programmes in the 2025-26 season, including a record number of participants in our rehabilitative Fan Education (148) and Raise Your Game (583) programmes. With two new people hired to deliver Fan Education and an

increase in Raise Your Game events planned, next season's totals should increase further.

Focus on beneficiaries

Our submission to the Independent Football Regulator followed engagement with more than 20 like-minded organisations across football to help shape our recommendations.

Reporting relationships with Her Game Too, Football v Homophobia and the Frank Soo Foundation ensure that a wide range of communities have further confidence in reporting discrimination. We also invested in a new reporting form for a more future-proof and reliable experience, which has also been rolled out in non-league football.

New courses on the history of racism and racism in football will be rolled out in 2026-27, helping to educate more people about the most common form of discrimination reported to Kick It Out.

Use tech, data and insights

As part of our partnership with Guinness 0.0, we conducted research with More in Common to show that eight in 10 people thought pubs should strive to be inclusive and that underrepresented communities felt less safe in pubs on matchdays.

Our analysis of workforce diversity data in clubs and insights from the [University of York](#) into how other regulators value Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) helped engagement with the Independent Football Regulator.



WHAT'S TO COME IN 2026-27 SEASON?

Educate and Develop

Increase grassroots anti-discrimination and inclusion education for under-12s and above after rises in discriminatory behaviour in youth football.

Enhance the number of Fan Education sessions delivered to offenders after expanding our team to four members.

Expand the Raise Your Game programme to include more participants than ever before, with events dedicated to media, e-sports, women, coaching and backroom roles and increasing opportunities to attend other industry events.

Unite Partners

Build on our Guinness and Greene King partnership to expand education for pub staff, delivering inclusive watch parties and strengthening reporting opportunities for fans.

Enhance our relationship with Football Manager to increase the number of partner-led Raise Your Game events, highlighting further opportunities in football for underrepresented communities.

Support girls' teams in West Yorkshire through Morrisons Foundation and Gift of Kit, by supplying 30 teams with new kit, offering education and new opportunities.

Develop our McDonald's Fun Football programme after extending our partnership for another four years.

Influence Change

Continue working with the Independent Football Regulator on their State of the Game report, and to ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion accountability remains a priority for clubs. Also continue our work with Ofcom, governing bodies, authorities and politicians to tackle online abuse.

Evolve our faith-based working groups to enhance how football tackles Islamophobia and Antisemitism.

Conduct research exploring new solutions to longstanding issues of South Asian representation across football, and black senior leaders to help push forward the efforts for greater inclusion within the game.

Build on our existing campaign to tackle sexism and misogyny, and work with partners across a range of sectors to tackle the rising level of abuse towards women within football.

Tackle Discrimination

Expand our reporting partnerships to include Level Playing Field, who tackle ableist abuse and enhance disability inclusion, the British Muslim Trust and the Isthmian League to strengthen our ability to tackle discrimination, build confidence in reporting and drive more outcomes.

WE WON'T
STOP
UNTIL **IT**
STOPS





Contact us: info@kickitout.org

Find out more: www.kickitout.org

Report discrimination: www.kickitout.org/report

Follow us: @kickitout



With thanks to our partners



Professional
Footballers'
Association

