

Level Playing Field

For disabled sports fans



Disability identifiers guide

#AccessForAll

What are disability identifiers?

Some disabilities are clearly visible, whilst others may be less evident, or non-visible. Disability identifier schemes can be used by disabled people to make customer service staff aware that they may need extra support, particularly if they have a non-visible disability and support may not be as readily offered. These schemes are commonly used at airports, supermarkets, and elsewhere.

The identifiers in this guide are the ones most commonly used within sports stadiums, though there may be others. They are either worn by the disabled supporter - like the lanyard, wristband or badge - or carried by the supporter, to show to stewards and other customer service staff.

At some clubs, disability identifiers are offered to disabled supporters by the club itself, and at others they are provided through the Disabled Supporters' Association (DSA). Some of them will have club branding on them, whilst others may have sunflower imagery (explained below). Many clubs do not use disability identifiers, and are not required to, but they should still be aware of their use.

Optional use

If used by clubs, disability identifiers should be made available only to disabled people, but they should be optional, **NEVER** mandatory - many disabled people would not want to be identifiable. Because of this, they should **NOT BE REQUIRED** by customer service staff in order for disabled fans to make use of accessible services and facilities, such as accessible toilets or priority use of lifts. The refusal of these services to a disabled person who requires them may constitute discrimination.

The purpose of the identifiers is solely to facilitate additional support, where required. They are not intended to be used as a form of supporting documentation to show that someone is disabled. It is important that club staff are made aware of this, and about non-visible disabilities more broadly. Disability identifiers like the generic sunflower items are often freely available at places like supermarkets and are also available to purchase online. For this reason, there is no guarantee that they will be used only by disabled people, but it is not a club's responsibility to interrogate their use. Club-branded disability identifiers, which are issued directly to disabled supporters by the club, are less likely to be misused, but are still not intended for use as supporting documentation. We have additional guidance on supporting documentation, available on request.

Visible vs Discreet

Disability identifiers generally fall into two categories—those that, by design, are highly visible and those that are intended to be used discreetly. Some identifiers may attempt to achieve both of these benefits, such as the sunflower badges, but these run the risk of losing the benefits of both.

For highly-visible disability identifiers, such as the sunflower lanyard, pictured, their visibility is both their main benefit and their primary detractor. They can be easily seen by customer service staff, who can therefore identify and offer help to those disabled individuals who may require additional support. However, as previously mentioned, many disabled people would not want to 'highlight' their disability to others, so would choose not to wear one. Discreet disability identifiers can be shown to service staff at the user's discretion, but cannot be seen otherwise. There is no reason why a club could not implement both a visible and a discreet scheme, offering disabled supporters the choice of either.



Sunflower scheme wearables

The scheme was first trialled at Gatwick Airport in 2016, using green lanyards with sunflowers. The use of sunflowers is to represent non-visible disabilities, such as autism, dementia or learning disabilities. People with non-visible disabilities can wear sunflower-printed lanyards, badges or wristbands to signify that they may need extra support from staff. The scheme is now used in many airports and supermarkets too.

Clubs who have implemented the sunflower scheme include Walsall, Leicester Tigers and Fulham (pictured), who all use club-branded lanyards.



Instruction cards

These cards can be used to give specific instructions to customer service staff, particularly stewards. The disabled supporter just needs to show the card to request support, for example: 'Please scan my ticket for me'.

These are particularly useful for supporters with communication disabilities, including many with learning difficulties or autism.

The image on the right shows some examples from Watford.



Information cards

Similar to the instruction cards above, some disabled people may carry cards which are primarily intended to convey information rather than to request specific support.

This could be particularly beneficial for people with non-visible disabilities, who may have been challenged by others when using accessible services and facilities in the past.

The example on the right is a 'Just Can't Wait!' card, provided by the Bladder & Bowel Community, which is designed to inform people that the holder has a medical condition and needs to use a toilet quickly.



Accessibility Passport

Access/Accessibility Passports are a discreet type of identification system, which are usually club-branded and printed onto thick card.

They are dual purpose, including information about the club for the supporter's benefit (e.g. contact details of the Disability Liaison Officer), and also information about the disabled person (e.g. name and specific access requirements). The supporter can then show the passport to staff when asking for support.

For example, the access requirement information may instruct a steward to write down directions to the concourse rather than communicate them verbally.

The example shown is from Newcastle Utd.



Additional guidance

The disability identifiers in this guide can be useful tools for clubs to better support their disabled fans. They can serve to mitigate the difficulties and potential embarrassment for supporters asking for additional help, particularly for those who are non-verbal. Clubs do not have to use disability identifier schemes, but where they choose to, there should certainly be no pressure or expectation placed on disabled fans to use them if they do not want to. When new schemes are launched and promoted by clubs, it should be clearly stated in all communications that they are optional.

Whether or not one of these schemes is implemented, we would encourage all clubs to make their customer-facing staff aware of their existence and to offer guidance on what to do if they see/are presented with one. Whilst stewards are the most likely to interact with them, supporters may present them to any customer service staff, so all should be made aware of them, including any external stewards and catering staff. Even for clubs who are not officially participating, visiting spectators may still present them to staff. Suitable training should be provided in advance of launching any scheme and should then be included in the training/induction for new staff.

It is also important to ensure that the disabled supporters who will be using them understand what they are and how they should (and should not) be used. It would be good to have this information available in various formats: online with a text-to-speech option; printed form; meeting in-person. Clubs should also be mindful of how they promote the scheme, raising awareness of its implementation, whilst emphasising that it is reserved for disabled spectators only.

For more information about this or anything else relating to disability access and inclusion, please get in touch with Level Playing Field.



Level Playing Field

The Junction, Station Rd
Watford, WD17 1ET

levelplayingfield.org.uk

01923 545370

info@levelplayingfield.org.uk



@lpftweets



@lpftweets



@levelplayingfielduk

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