



Annual fan survey 2022

Results summary

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Survey overview



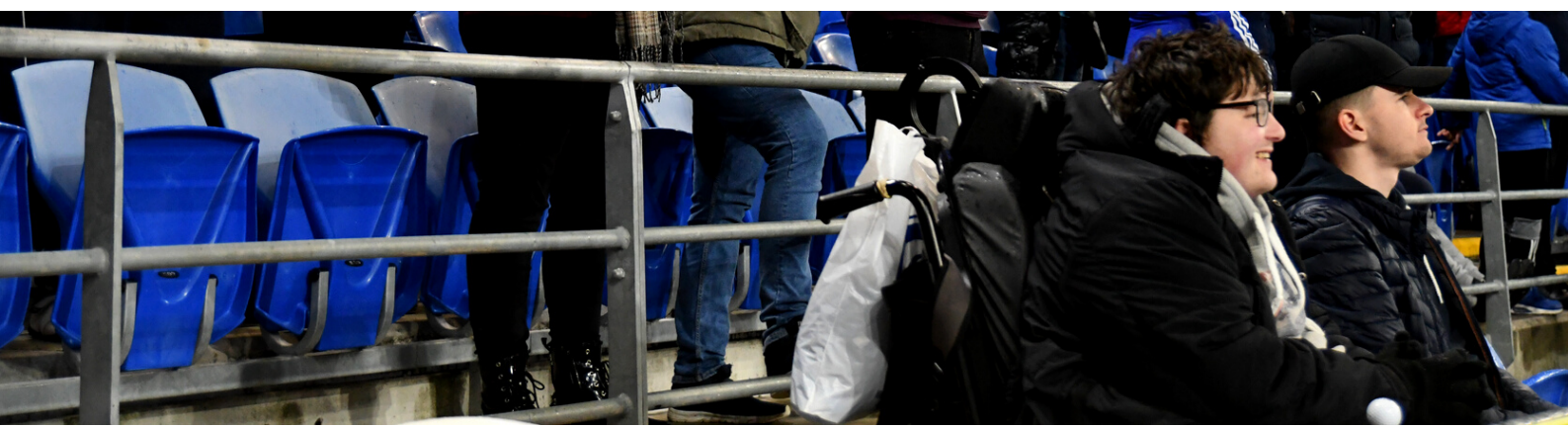
Level Playing Field is a registered charity in England and Wales that exists to improve the experience of disabled sports fans attending live matches and sports events. As a campaigning and advisory organisation, we work with both fans and organisations across all sports to help drive these improvements.

One of the key ways that we do this is by engaging with disabled spectators to better understand their experiences and to ask what they require on matchdays. The annual survey helps us to gather this information and is our biggest survey each year, with over 1000 disabled sports fans participating. This is the second year the survey has been conducted.

The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey and was sent out to disabled supporters through Disabled Supporters Associations (DSAs), club contacts and also via social media. The survey was live for a month, running from Tuesday 5th July through to Friday 5th August 2022. Responses were anonymous unless the respondent chose to give their name.

This summary report details the results of the survey and compares many of these results with last year's findings. Throughout this report, the term 'pp' will be used as an abbreviation for percentage points when comparing percentages. For example, an increase from 10% last year to 15% would be 'Up 5pp'.

The results of the survey will be used to advise clubs on how best to improve the matchday experience of disabled fans. It will also be used to advise governing bodies, DSAs and non-disabled supporter groups on disability access & inclusion.



Key findings

Attitudes of others

The amount of fans for whom 'Attitudes of others is a barrier when attending live sport' has almost doubled.

The figure jumped from 15% in 2021 to 28.5% this year.



Anxiety barriers

Over a quarter of disabled fans said that 'anxiety or lack of confidence is a barrier when attending live sport'.

This was an increase from last year - rising from 24.5% to 26.5% - despite covid-19 restrictions abating.



Ticketing difficulties

There was also a significant increase in the number of fans for whom 'difficulty purchasing tickets' was a barrier.

This rose from 17% of fans in 2021 to 24% this year.



Inaccessible Venues

The number of disabled fans who said they are unable to attend certain sports or sporting venues due to lack of accessibility has increased to 36.5%.

This is a significant increase from 30.5% in 2021.



About the respondents

Disabilities represented



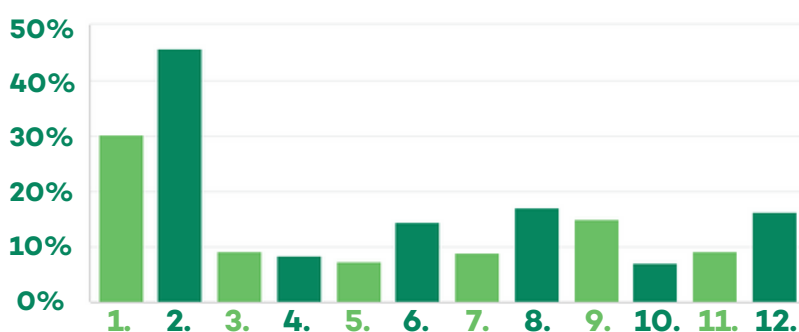
The survey was answered by 1309 disabled sports fans who between them support 111 different clubs. The first three questions of the survey were about these fans who took the survey - their age, disability and how often they attend live sport.

1309 survey responses

The results to these three questions are presented below and on the next page, and comparisons are made with last year's results.

We asked supporters 'What do you consider your disability to be?' and provided them with several disability categories to select from. Respondents were asked to select all categories that applied. This question was optional, but was answered by the large majority. The results are shown below.

Figure 1: Disabilities represented



1. Wheelchair users - **30%**
2. Ambulant disability - **46%**
3. Hearing disability - **9%**
4. Sight disability - **8%**
5. Learning disability - **7%**
6. Neurodivergent - **15%**
7. Neurological condition - **9%**
8. Mental health condition - **17%**
9. Pain or nerve related - **15%**
10. Motor skills/speech related - **7%**
11. Fatigue/low immunity - **9%**
12. Other unseen disability - **16%**

Overall, there are a wide range of disabilities represented by the survey. Many respondents selected multiple options, with the highest represented disability categories being ambulant disabled people (46%) and wheelchair users (30%). The results are very similar to last year's, with the biggest change being an increase in the percentage of wheelchair users who answered the survey, from 26% to 30%.

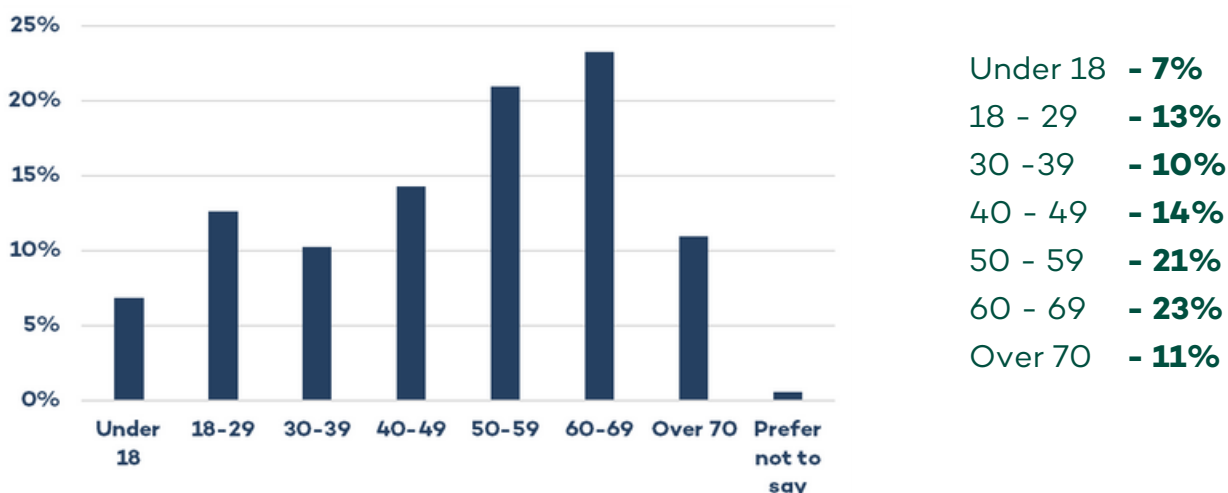
About the respondents

Ages & leagues represented



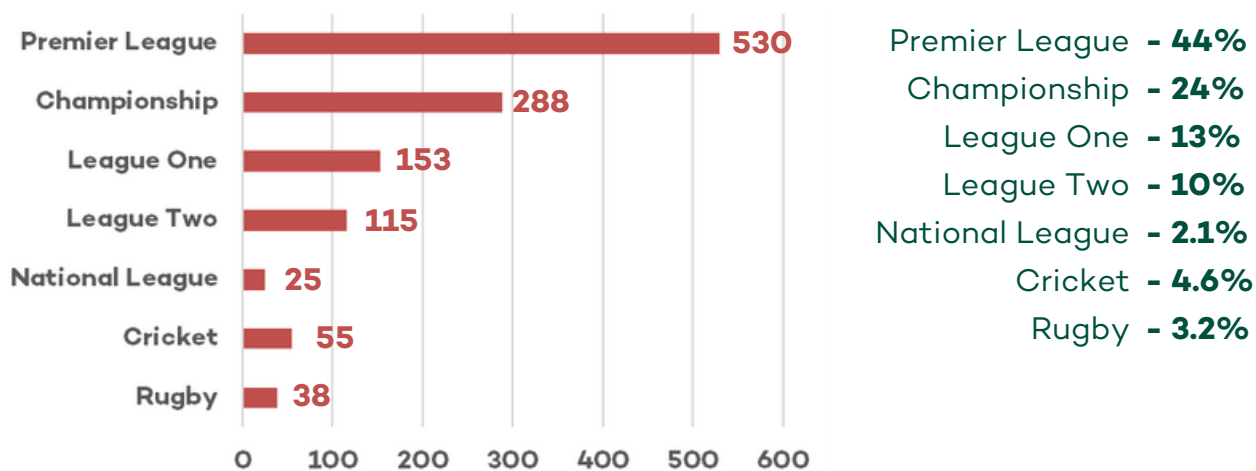
There was a good spread of ages represented in the survey, with over 100 people from each age bracket, except under 18s. Compared to last year, there was a small drop in the number of under 18s and over 70s who took the survey, and a small increase in responses from those in their 20s and 40s. As with last year, the highest response rate was from those aged 50-70. The full results are shown below.

Figure 2: Ages represented



We asked respondents to identify which team they support. The chart below shows how many respondents there were from different leagues/sports.

Figure 3: Number of survey responses by league/sport



About the respondents

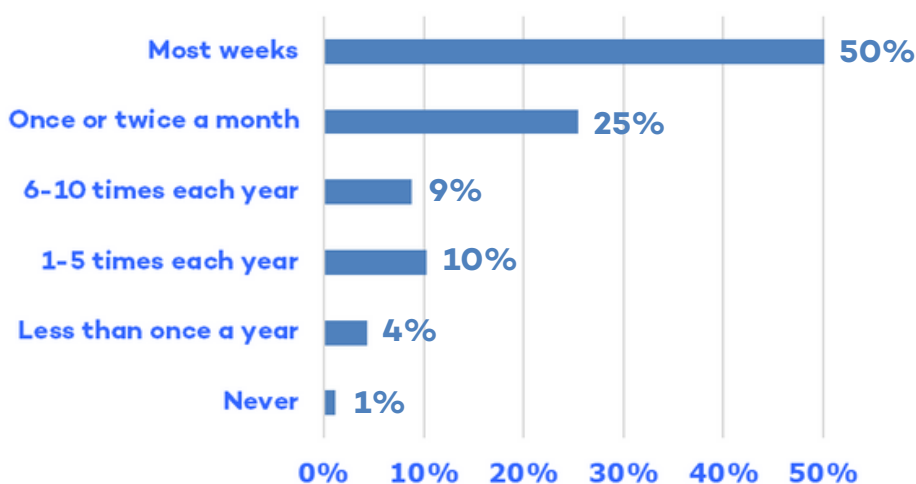
Attendance



There was a significant increase from in the number of responses from Premier League fans - from 401 to 530 responses - and also in the number of responses from rugby and cricket fans, which more than quadrupled.

We asked respondents how often, on average, they attend live sporting events. The chart below shows the results.

Figure 4: Frequency of attendance



Half of the respondents who participated in the survey said that they attended live sport 'most weeks'. This is actually a drop of 6.5pp from 2021. It may be that following the Covid-19 pandemic, some disabled fans no longer feel comfortable attending live sport on a weekly basis, or it could be that disabled fans attend less frequently due to some of the barriers identified on the following pages.

There was also a slight decrease in the number of disabled fans who said that they 'never' attend live sport, meaning that there was an overall increase in those fans who do attend, but less frequently than 'most weeks'.

Barriers to attending

Top 10 barriers



We asked respondents to identify all of the disability-related barriers they face when attending live sport. Below are the ten biggest barriers selected:

- 1 Physical access at stadiums – **36.5%** (Up 5pp)
- 2 Attitudes of others – **28.5%** (Up 13.5pp)
- 3 Anxiety or lack of confidence – **26.5%** (Up 2pp)
- 4 Difficulty purchasing tickets – **24%** (Up 7pp)
- 5 Cost of attending – **20%** (Up 1pp)
- 6 Unable to travel to stadium – **18%** (Up 2.5pp)
- 7 Inaccessible public transport – **17.5%** (Up 1.5pp)
- 8 "I don't think stadiums are inclusive for disabled people" – **17%** (Up 0.5pp)
- 9 Lack of information – **16%** (Up 5pp)
- 10 Lack of support from club staff – **10.5%** (Up 3.5pp)

'Disabled fans are experiencing more barriers now than last year.'

We had expected to see some of these barrier categories increase and some of them decrease compared to last year. We were surprised to see an increase in the percentage of disabled fans who faced these matchday barriers for EVERY one of the 13 barriers we asked about.

There was also a dramatic drop in the percentage of respondents who said that they 'didn't experience any barriers when attending live sport' - from 27% last year to just 16.5% this year.

The most notable statistic from the barriers listed above is the huge increase in fans stating that 'Attitudes of others' is a barrier for them when attending live sport. The percentage of fans who identified this as a barrier has almost doubled since 2021.

Barriers to attending

Fan feedback



Several fans also left additional comments about the barriers they face. These include a lack of accessible parking; not being able to sit with family and friends; barriers resulting from scheduling or rescheduling; fan behaviour (surges); having to queue for extended periods; and a lack of services and facilities.

“ My son is my carer and he wont take me to any away footie matches because of the way our fans surge forward when our team scores. They land onto of the fans in the front rows. ”

“ Parking availability when you are disabled but don't have a blue badge. ”

“ Matches scheduled in midweek rather than weekend - travelling from East Midlands impossible on my own to then attend. ”

“ Stewards who don't understand disabilities and are unhelpful and sometimes rude and officious. ”

“ One massive issue is buying food. Having to be in a queue is hard but a stadium queue is massive, it's too much for me to stand alone. ”

“ Unable to hear announcements especially safety announcements. / Can't hear the PA and there is no transcription on the big screen. ”

Barriers to attending

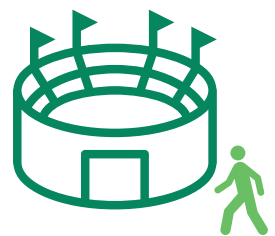
Recommendations



With 26.5% of respondents saying that 'anxiety or lack of confidence' is a barrier, much more needs to be done to support disabled fans to have greater confidence when attending live sport. For clubs, this could include...

...non-matchday stadium visits

An invitation to visit the empty stadium before attending a match could be very helpful for many disabled fans.



...virtual navigation tools

Many people would benefit from being able to look at and navigate around your stadium virtually.



...up-to-date club information

Disabled fans, on the whole, will have greater confidence attending live sport when they can access accurate and accessible information prior to attending.



...provision of services and facilities

Disabled fans will also have greater confidence knowing that their access requirements will be met.



Clubs should also ensure there is a clear process for fans to report any disability discrimination they experience on a matchday, and that this process is known to fans. Any reports should be investigated and responded to.

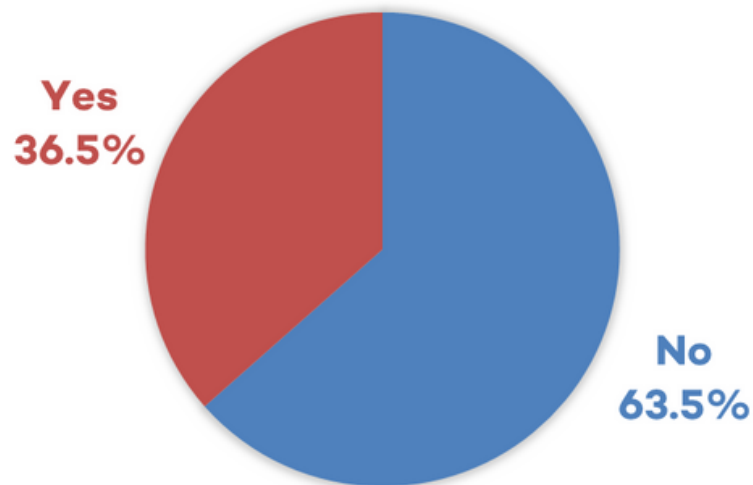
Barriers to attending

Inaccessibility



We asked respondents "Are there any sports or sporting venues that you feel unable to attend due to lack access for disabled spectators?" The chart below shows the results.

Figure 5: Supporters unable to attend a sport or sporting venue



The fact that 36.5% of fans answered 'yes' to this question represents a significant increase from the 30.5% of fans who answered 'yes' in 2021.

This indicates that the number of disabled fans unable to attend some sports venues and stadiums, due to inaccessibility, is increasing.

Given that well over a third of disabled sports fans feel excluded from some venues because of poor access, there is clearly lots of work that needs to be done by clubs to improve accessibility.

Whilst this figure represents the percentage of supporters rather than the percentage of stadiums that are inaccessible, it's clearly unacceptable for ANY sports venue to be considered entirely inaccessible to disabled fans.

Services and facilities

Matchday planning & travel



Often the services and facilities available for disabled fans within stadiums are the main consideration in relation to accessibility, but planning a matchday and travelling to the venue are also key accessibility considerations. We asked respondents which of the following services and facilities they might benefit from when planning for and travelling to matches. Below are the results.

- 1 Accessible parking – **64%** (Up 7pp)
- 2 The option to bring a PA – **53%** (Up 9pp)
- 3 Accessible entrances – **46%** (Up 9.5pp)
- 4 Accessibility information – **44.5%** (Up 7.5pp)
- 5 Contactable Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) – **38%** (Up 6.5pp)
- 6 Drop-off and pick-up points – **28.5%** (Down 0.5pp)
- 7 Accessible transport for away matches – **24%** (Up 1pp)
- 8 Visiting the stadium on a non-matchday – **13.5%** (Down 4pp)
- 9 Additional communication support – **4.5%** (Down 1.5pp)
- None of the above – **8.5%** (Down 4.5pp)

There is a significant increase in the percentage of disabled fans who would benefit from the first five of these services and facilities, compared to last year. And there is a notable drop in the percentage of respondents who said that 'none of the above' services would benefit them on a matchday.

With almost two-thirds of disabled supporters benefitting from accessible parking, it is likely that most clubs will fail to meet the demand. This highlights the importance of clubs providing suitable alternatives, like drop off points or accessible 'park & ride' services.



With 44.5% of respondents saying they benefit from 'accessibility information' and 38% wanting to have a contactable DLO at the club, it is clear that access to information is vital for fans. This information should be clear, relevant, up-to-date and easy to find.



Services and facilities

Stadium services



We asked respondents which of the following 19 services and facilities they might benefit from whilst inside stadiums. The results are shown below.

- 1 Accessible toilets – **53.5%** (Up 8pp)
- 2 Easy access seating – **41%** (Up 1pp)
- 3 Accessibility stewards – **38.5%** (Up 7pp)
- 4 Additional legroom – **36%** (Down 1.5pp)
- 5 Priority use of lifts – **34.5%** (Up 7pp)
- 6 A wheelchair user space – **31%** (Up 6.5pp)
- 7 Disability identifiers – **26%** (Unchanged)
- 8 A seat near to toilets/food – **26%** (Up 0.5pp)
- 9 Easy-access toilet cubicles – **25%** (Up 0.5pp)
- 10 Low-level counters – **17.5%** (Up 2.5pp)
- 11 Quiet room/area – **13%** (Down 2pp)
- 12 Changing Places toilet facility – **9.5%** (Up 0.5pp)
- 13 Sensory room – **6.5%** (Unchanged)
- 14 Sensory pack – **6%** (Up 0.5pp)
- 15 Audio descriptive commentary (ADC) – **5.5%** (Up 1pp)
- 16 Hearing loops – **4%** (Down 1pp)
- 17 Provisions for assistance dogs – **3.5%** (Unchanged)
- 18 Colour contrast in key areas – **3%** (Down 1pp)
- 19 Additional communication support – **3%** (Down 0.5pp)
- None of the above – **6%** (Down 5.5pp)

These results show how varied disabled fans' access requirements are on matchdays. There was a significant increase in the number of respondents who said they would benefit from accessible toilets, priority use of lifts and wheelchair user spaces. It's likely that this is at least partly due to the higher proportion of wheelchair users and ambulant disabled fans completing the survey.

Services and facilities

(continued)



There was also a big increase in the number of respondents who said they could benefit from having dedicated accessibility stewards at matches, with almost 2 in 5 disabled fans identifying this as a beneficial service.



This high demand illustrates the importance of clubs ensuring their stewarding teams are well briefed on disability access, which may include disability awareness training, particularly for lead accessibility stewards.

Accessible toilets were the most selected facility, with over half of respondents saying they would benefit from them. One in four fans would benefit from easy access toilet cubicles, whilst almost 10% (120 people) would benefit from a Changing Places facility.



Dozens of fans also commented about the additional services and facilities they benefit from. These include accessible ticketing; space for accessibility equipment; support/understanding with medication; additional handrails; and protection from weather.



“

Seating areas that take in to account weather conditions. Had to leave grounds because seating had been at the pitch edge and I got soaked . Also [I've been situated] directly in the sun and was near to hyperventilating.

”

“

I need somewhere to leave my wheelchair.

”

“

An easily identifiable page on a venue's website with clear information regarding how to purchase accessible tickets.

”

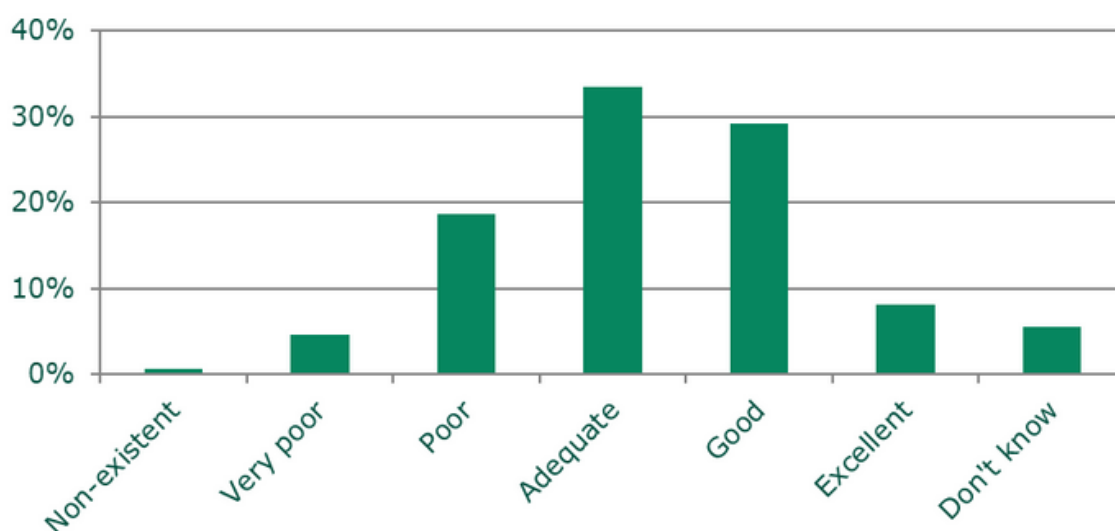
Club ratings

Nationwide



We asked respondents "Overall, how would you rate sports stadiums / clubs in England and Wales on access and inclusion?" The chart below shows the results.

Figure 6: Accessibility ratings for stadiums in England and Wales



- ▶ Non-existent – **0.5%** (Unchanged)
- ▶ Very poor – **4.5%** (Down 1pp)
- ▶ Poor – **18.5%** (Up 1.5pp)
- ▶ Adequate – **33.5%** (Up 2.5pp)
- ▶ Good – **29%** (Down 2.5pp)
- ▶ Excellent – **8%** (Down 0.5pp)
- ▶ Don't know – **5.5%** (Down 1pp)

Overall, fans gave an average rating between 'Adequate' and 'Good', which is the same as last year. However there was a decrease in the number of fans who rated access and inclusion as 'good' and a similar size increase in the number of fans who rated it as 'adequate'. Whilst these changes are fairly small, this is clearly a shift in the wrong direction, as we would hope to see access and inclusion improving each year at stadiums in England and Wales.

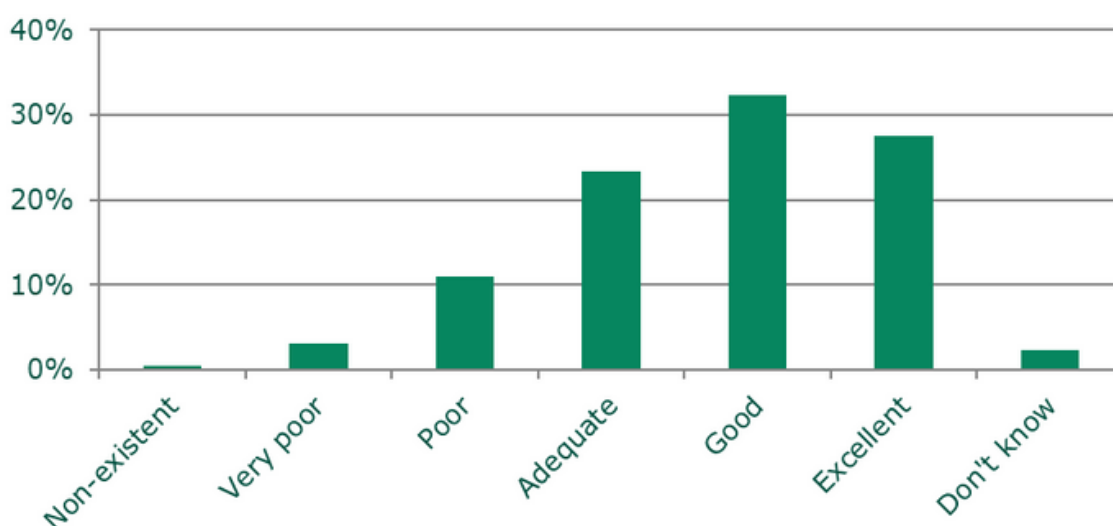
Club ratings

Supporter's club



We asked respondents "Overall, how would you rate your club/stadium on its access and inclusion for disabled fans?" The chart below shows the results.

Figure 7: Accessibility ratings for the respondent's own club



- ▶ Non-existent – **0.5%** (Unchanged)
- ▶ Very poor – **3%** (Down 0.5pp)
- ▶ Poor – **11%** (Up 2pp)
- ▶ Adequate – **23.5%** (Up 3.5pp)
- ▶ Good – **32.5%** (Up 1pp)
- ▶ Excellent – **27.5%** (Down 3.5pp)
- ▶ Don't know – **2.5%** (Down 2pp)

Overall, fans tended to rate their own club more highly than stadiums in England and Wales generally, giving an average rating of 'Good'. From the 'Away Fan Survey' we conducted earlier this year, we know that disabled fans typically have a worse experience as an away supporter, which goes some way to explain this.

Despite the fact that respondents rated their own club more highly than stadiums nationally, these ratings have still dropped since last year. There was a notable drop in the number of fans who rated their club's access and inclusion as 'Excellent' and a similar size increase in the number of fans who rated it as 'adequate'. Again, this is clearly a shift in the wrong direction.

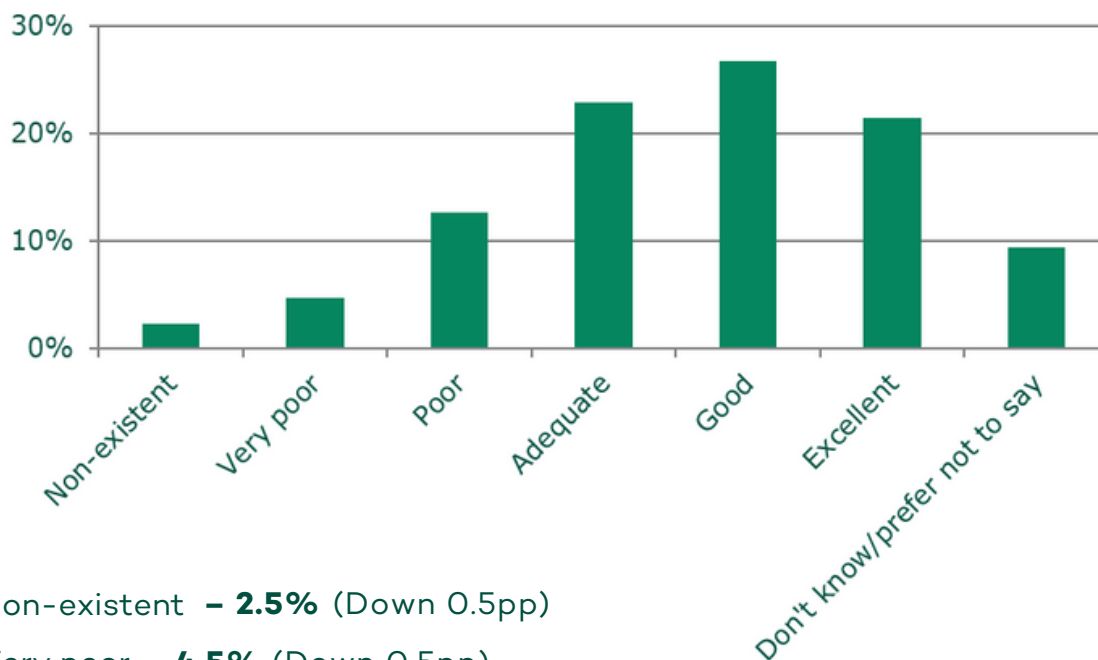
Club communication

Club ratings



We asked respondents "Overall, how would you rate your club on its communication to disabled fans?" The chart below shows the results.

Figure 8: Communication ratings for the respondent's own club



- ▶ Non-existent – **2.5%** (Down 0.5pp)
- ▶ Very poor – **4.5%** (Down 0.5pp)
- ▶ Poor – **12.5%** (Unchanged)
- ▶ Adequate – **23%** (Up 2.5pp)
- ▶ Good – **26.5%** (Down 1.5pp)
- ▶ Excellent – **21.5%** (Down 0.5pp)
- ▶ Don't know – **9.5%** (Unchanged)

Overall, the rating that fans gave for their clubs' communication was lower than the rating they gave for its access and inclusion generally, with many more fans giving a rating of 'very poor' and 'non-existent'. This is roughly the same situation as last year, meaning that this continues to be a particular area of weakness for clubs, and that fans want to see improvements in communications to disabled supporters.

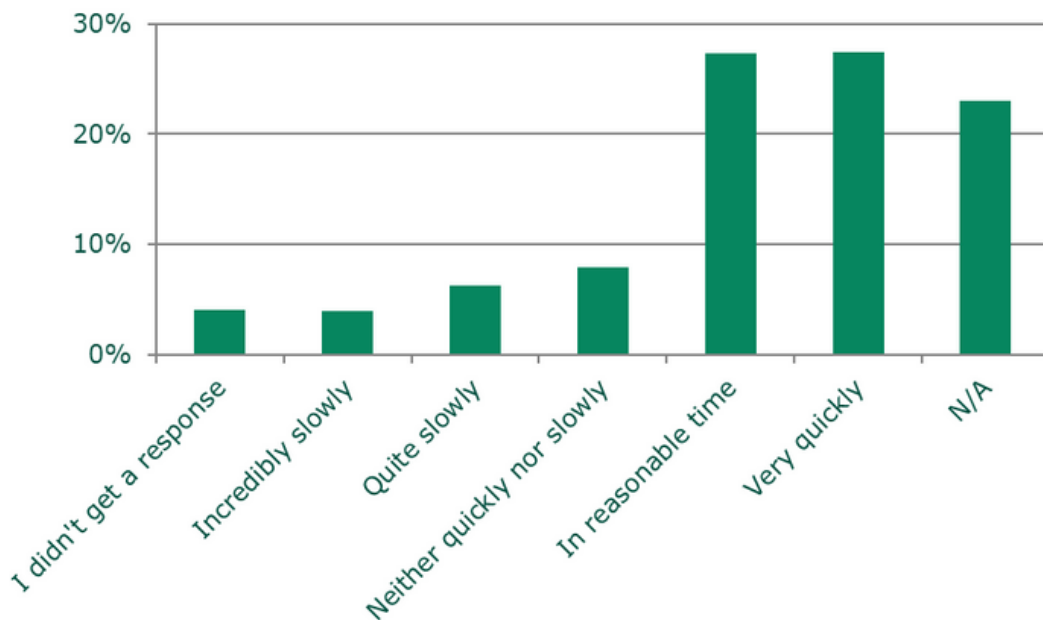
Club communication

Response rate



We asked fans "If you have contacted your club in the past about something relating to disability access and inclusion, how quickly have they responded?" The chart below shows the results.

Figure 9: Club's speed of reply



These results are generally quite positive, with 78% of fans saying either that the question wasn't relevant or that they received a reply from their club 'very quickly' or 'in reasonable time'. However, it isn't acceptable that 4% of respondents (47 people) said that they didn't get a response at all. Clubs should make it a priority to respond to fans in a timely manner, particularly as many disabled fans will require additional information in order to attend a match.

We also asked fans what was their preferred means of contacting their club about something relating to disability access and inclusion. Here are the results.



Email
46.5%



Phone
33%



Conversation
12.5%

Fan comments



Throughout the survey, fans were given the opportunity to provide additional comments, to give greater insight into their experience as a disabled supporter. Below are some of the responses we picked out.

“ What I need is patience and understanding from others, including occasionally other fans. I should not need to explain that I suffer stress and major anxiety issues and occasionally need a longer time to absorb situations. ”

“ I need to be hoisted from my wheelchair and should not have to lay on the floor to have my pad changed. ”

“ Often, non-disabled spectators crowd into areas that are for people with disabilities, making it difficult to manoeuvre one's wheelchair... and feeling very awkward and embarrassed when wanting people to move. ”

“ I dislike grounds where disabled supporters are forced to be segregated from the rest of the travelling support. ”

“ Supporters with Mental Health Conditions are not treated the same as physically disabled supporters... and in my experience are not taken seriously. ”

“ I feel that clubs do have provisions in place but they don't share that. Me and my disabled friends feel unwanted there and that we are an extra hassle. Having information on like websites or around the stadiums of where you can get support can help to have an attitude shift. ”

Fan suggestions



We asked the survey respondents "If you could suggest one improvement to make matchdays more accessible and inclusive for disabled spectators what would it be?" Below are some of the responses we picked out.

“ It would be good for clubs to understand the nature of disabilities and the effects it can have on health. Like unable to control body temperature. Being in an elevated position as my vision is limited, etc. ”

“ When buying tickets more information about the number of steps to climb should be provided ”

“ Each club should have a DLO who takes the time to think (& perhaps experience) what visiting their club as an away fan is like, & have a plan for how to improve. ”

“ Accessible pathway to exit the ground, not having to push through fans leaving in the opposite direction. ”

“ Allow families of disabled children to be able to sit together in suitable areas ”

“ Listen to ACTUAL disabled people about what their needs are instead of just deciding for us. / Get to know your disabled fans and don't see them as a hindrance. ”

Conclusion



There are many barriers that disabled people face in life, but most of these barriers can be removed through effective dialogue and sharing good practice. Following the survey, clubs were sent an individualised report with just their supporters' responses. Clubs who had at least one respondent were sent a report - 111 clubs in total. Our hope is that by communicating the results and comments from this survey, clubs can be better informed and can make the improvements to their services and facilities that will most benefit their fans.

Level Playing Field will continue to support and advise sports organisations and governing bodies around the removal of the barriers we've highlighted. In particular, we would encourage them to consider the following:

- ▶ Engaging with visiting disabled fans to find out about their matchday experience, in particular what barriers they may experience.
- ▶ Is there anything more you can do to support the 26.5% of disabled fans for whom 'anxiety or lack of confidence' is a barrier when attending sport?
- ▶ Ensure that your ticketing policy is fair and that disabled fans can purchase tickets in the same ways as non-disabled fans.
- ▶ Fans have clearly expressed the importance of being able to sit with their friends, family, and fellow supporters. Where this isn't currently possible, what steps are being taken to change or improve this?
- ▶ Given that so many fans highlighted 'attitudes of others' as a barrier, is there a clear process by which fans can report abusive or discriminatory behaviour against them, and are these taken seriously and followed up on?
- ▶ Can you improve your club info and communications for disabled fans?
- ▶ Clubs and service providers should review the individual venue-specific report shared by Level Playing Field, to better understand specific access requirements and suggested improvements of their disabled fanbase.
- ▶ Engage with Level Playing Field for support in enhancing experience.

Chair's review

Tony Taylor



Firstly, I want to start by highlighting how important this survey has been in ensuring that we improve the matchday experience of disabled sports fans. By sharing individual fan experiences, we can correct or address specific cases; with a collective voice and large representation we can make strides towards delivering equality and inclusion.

I am very pleased that we have again broken the 1000-participant barrier with this survey. This serves as a good sample size to engage with all our stakeholders, who share with us the responsibility of delivering an accessible and inclusive matchday. I would particularly like to thank the 1300+ disabled fans who gave up their time to take part in the survey, as well as the Disabled Supporters' Associations, clubs and partners who shared it across their networks.

Of course, the results of the survey are concerning, particularly the increased barriers experienced by fans compared to last year. The standout being the 36.5% of fans who said that there are sporting venues they are simply unable to attend due to a lack of access (a 6 point increase). In 2022 this is quite simply unacceptable, and a laser focus must be applied across all sport to ensure that this is addressed.

Delivering access and inclusion for disabled sports fans simply cannot rest at the feet of individuals at clubs – there must be a collective mandate for change from the boardroom to customer-facing staff, from fans to governing bodies, and from other stakeholders. Together, we must turn the tide on the issues identified and drive higher standards.

We are fortunate, however, that there is a lot of good work taking place across sport with clubs delivering often innovative work to ensure that disabled fans' voices are heard, providing clubs with the opportunity to reflect the communities which they serve.

Chair's review

(continued)



Looking at some of the solutions in delivering greater access, there are some easy wins available, along with some larger scale projects and developments required. If there is one thing we can ensure, it is that we will prioritise the information we provide and ensure it is always updated and available in multiple sources.

Level Playing Field looks to position itself as being a part of the solution, and now, more than ever, we continue in that vein. So if a club, individual or DSA is unsure of what to do or needs help, do please reach out and we will support and work with them.

Tony Taylor

Level Playing Field Chair

Level Playing Field

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