



Women's football disabled fan survey 2023

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Survey overview



Level Playing Field is a registered charity in England and Wales that seeks to improve the experience of disabled fans attending live sport. We work with fans, clubs and governing bodies to advise and campaign for these improvements.

Women's football has grown significantly in popularity over the last few years, both in terms of those participating and those watching the sport. The average attendance at matches this season has more than trebled compared to the previous season. With so many fans now eager to watch their women's team play live in stadiums across the country, Level Playing Field decided to conduct a first-of-its-kind survey to find out about the experiences of disabled supporters as they attend women's football.

The survey was carried out using SurveyMonkey and was sent out to disabled supporters through club contacts and via social media. The survey was live for two months, running from Friday 10th February through to Friday 7th April 2023. Responses were anonymous unless the respondent chose to give their name.

This summary report outlines the results of the survey and includes some quotes and specific feedback from disabled fans. Throughout the report, comparisons will be made with our most recent Annual Fan Survey (2022), which provides baseline data for the experiences of over 1300 disabled fans across all sports.



Key findings

Lack of information

Over a quarter of disabled fans (26%) stated that 'lack of information' is a barrier for them when attending women's football matches.

This figure is significantly higher than the 16% of fans who said this was a barrier in our most recent Annual Fan Survey 2022 (AFS).



Attitude and anxiety barriers

Over 28% of disabled fans said that 'anxiety or lack of confidence' was a barrier for them attending women's football. One of the contributing factors to this anxiety is likely to be 'the attitudes of others' which 24% of respondents identified as a barrier.

This is very similar to our AFS, where the figures were 26% and 28% respectively.



Attending matches

In general, disabled fans attended women's football matches less frequently, with only 34% attending 'most weeks', compared to 50% of fans in the AFS. One issue highlighted by several fans was that the 'home' ground wasn't always the same venue, making planning difficult.



However, the cost of tickets was less of a barrier for disabled fans attending women's football.

About the respondents

Disabilities represented



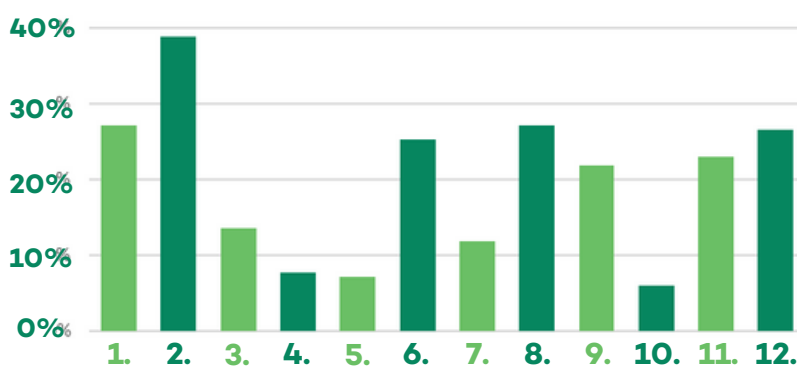
The survey was answered by 190 disabled sports fans who between them support 33 different women's teams. The first three questions of the survey were about these fans who took the survey - their age, disability and how often they attend live sport.

190 survey responses

The results to these three questions are presented below and on the next two pages, and comparisons are made with the Annual Fan Survey 2022 (AFS).

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 - **27%**
2. Ambulant disability - **39%**
3. Hearing disability - **14%**
4. Sight disability - **8%**
5. Learning disability - **7%**
6. Neurodivergent - **25%**
7. Neurological condition - **12%**
8. Mental health condition - **27%**
9. Pain or nerve related - **22%**
10. Motor skills/speech related - **6%**
11. Fatigue/low immunity - **23%**
12. Other unseen disability - **26%**

Overall, there are a wide range of disabilities represented by the survey. Despite 'ambulant disability' being the most represented category, at 39%, this was notably lower than the AFS, in which 46% of respondents were ambulant disabled. However, there were significantly higher proportions of fans in this survey who had hearing disabilities (14%, compared to 9%); were neurodivergent (25% compared to 15%); had mental health conditions (27%, compared to 17%); had pain or nerve related conditions (22%, compared to 15%) and who had fatigue/low immunity conditions (23%, compared to 9%).

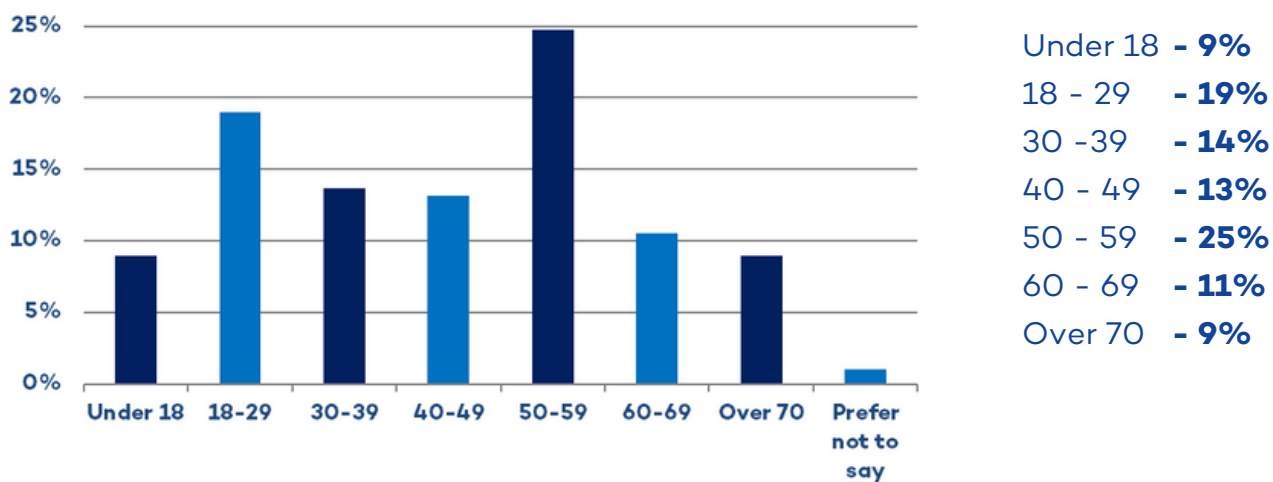
About the respondents

Ages represented



There was a good spread of ages represented in the survey, with at least 9% of respondents in each of the seven age brackets. The average age of those who took the survey was notably lower than for the Annual Fan Survey. A much higher proportion of the disabled fans attending women's matches were under 40, whilst the most common age represented was people in their 50s, rather than 60s for the AFS.

Figure 2: Ages represented



It is likely that this lower average age is reflected in the wider fanbase for women's football too, not just for disabled supporters, though we don't have supporting data.



About the respondents

Clubs and attendance

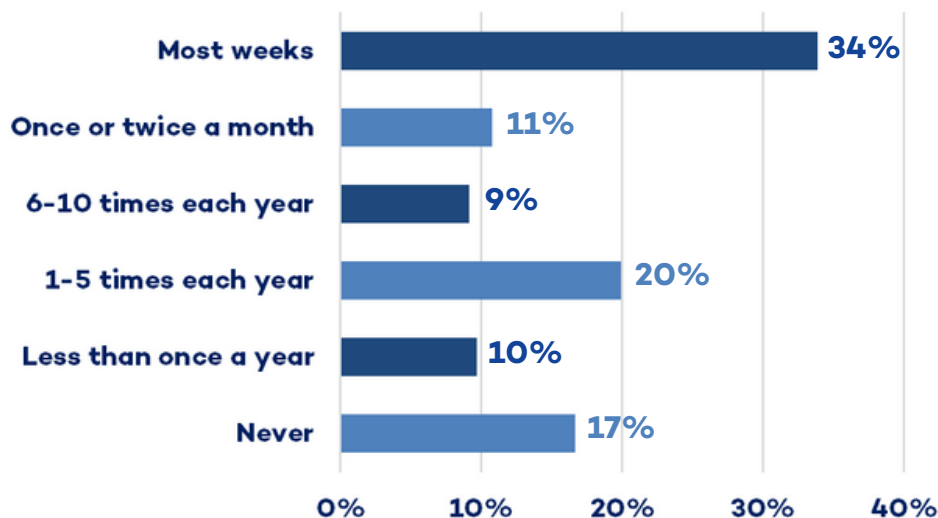


We asked respondents which league their supported team plays in. The results are:

- ▶ Women's Super League - **66%**
- ▶ Women's Championship - **16%**
- ▶ Other leagues - **18%**

We also asked respondents how often, on average, they attend women's football in a typical season. The chart below shows the results.

Figure 3: Frequency of attendance



Just 34% of disabled fans stated that they attended women's football matches 'most weeks' compared to 50% of fans who 'attended live sport most weeks' in our Annual Fan Survey. Additionally, 17% of respondents said that they 'never' attended women's football matches, compared to just 1% of fans in the AFS who 'never attended live sport'.

These results indicate that, overall, disabled fans are attending women's football matches less frequently than other teams and sports.

Fan comments



Throughout the survey there were opportunities for fans to leave comments about their experiences of attending women's football. Here are some of the responses:

“ Think the club does a good job at everything with inclusion but it does depend on which ground we use... ”

“ I have to think what seats we can get, will I have enough leg room??.. if the answer is no, we don't go. ”

“ People block sight lines by standing in the seated areas. [Sight lines are also blocked] in standing areas, as stadiums do not consider women height i.e. 5” 3. ”

“ Lack of audio headsets. / No audio commentary. ”

“ The DLO and familiar face stewards are incredible nothing is too much trouble, there is a sensory room and accessible toilet close to the quiet zone. ”

“ Bought a women's season ticket (£35) in the expectation that there would be regular games through the season at the stadium. I think there has been 2 or 3 so far, the rest have been played at [other] venues that have no facilities for fans, e.g. having to watch through railings or with no cover from the rain, situation made worse, by the dates of games constantly being cancelled.. ”

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 – **29%**
- 2 Anxiety or lack of confidence – **28%**
- 3 Lack of information – **26%**
- 4 Attitudes of others – **24%**
- 5 Unable to travel to stadium – **21%**
- 6 Difficulty purchasing tickets – **17%**
- 7 "I don't think stadiums are inclusive for disabled people" – **13%**
- 8 Cost of attending – **12%**
- 9 Stadium policies and rules – **10%**
- 10 Lack of support from club staff – **10%**

'Lack of information is a significant barrier.'

The most noteworthy result from this list is that over a quarter of fans (26%) stated that 'lack of information' was a barrier for them attending women's football matches. This is significantly higher than the 16% of fans in the Annual Fan Survey who selected the same barrier.

Whilst 'physical access' was still the biggest barrier for disabled fans attending women's football, the percentage was not as high as in the AFS - 29% compared to 36.5%. There were also more respondents who said that they 'didn't experience any barriers when attending live sport' - 22% compared to just 16% in the AFS. This may be due to the fact that a higher proportion of the fans had neurological, neurodiverse or mental health conditions, rather than physical disabilities.

The 'cost of attending' and 'difficulty purchasing tickets' were both less of a barrier for disabled fans attending women's football. However the barriers of 'anxiety or lack of confidence' and 'attitudes of others' remain disappointingly high, at similar percentages to the AFS.

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 women's matches. Below are the results.

- 1 Accessible parking – **55%**
- 2 Accessibility information – **46%**
- 3 Accessible entrances – **42%**
- 4 Contactable Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) – **40%**
- 5 The option to bring a PA – **39%**
- 6 Accessible transport for away matches – **31%**
- 7 Drop-off and pick-up points – **24%**
- 8 Visiting the stadium on a non-matchday – **16%**
- 9 Additional communication support – **3%**
- None of the above – **13%**

As with the Annual Fan Survey, the service/facility that fans most required, in terms of matchday planning and travel, is accessible parking. Over half of respondents (55%) said they would benefit from having an accessible parking space. Where clubs are not able to meet the demand, it's important to provide suitable alternatives, like drop off points or accessible 'park & ride' services.



Next on the list was 'accessibility information', which was only 4th on the list in the AFS. This again highlights an area of particular concern in women's football at present, with almost half of disabled fans requiring accessibility info, but over a quarter a fans stating that 'lack of information' is a barrier to them attending. It is clear that access to information is vital for fans, and 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 inside stadiums at women's games. The results are shown below.

- 1 Accessible toilets – **47%**
- 2 Additional legroom – **33%**
- 3 Easy access seating – **32%**
- 4 A wheelchair user space – **30%**
- 5 Priority use of lifts – **29%**
- 6 Accessibility stewards – **29%**
- 7 A seat near to toilets/food – **21%**
- 8 Disability identifiers – **21%**
- 9 Low-level counters – **17%**
- 10 Quiet room/area – **17%**
- 11 Easy-access toilet cubicles – **16%**
- 12 Changing Places toilet facility – **9%**
- 13 Sensory pack – **7%**
- 14 Sensory room – **7%**
- 15 Audio descriptive commentary (ADC) – **5%**
- 16 Colour contrast in key areas – **5%**
- 17 Hearing loops – **4%**
- 18 Provisions for assistance dogs – **2%**
- 19 Additional communication support – **1%**
- None of the above – **15%**

These results show how varied disabled fans' access requirements are on matchdays. On the whole, the requirements for the above services and facilities were lower than for the Annual Fan Survey. This is confirmed in the figure of 15% of fans who said they would benefit from 'none of the above', compared to just 6% in the AFS. That said, there is a greater requirement for a quiet room/area in women's football (17% compared to just 13%) and also sensory packs and rooms.

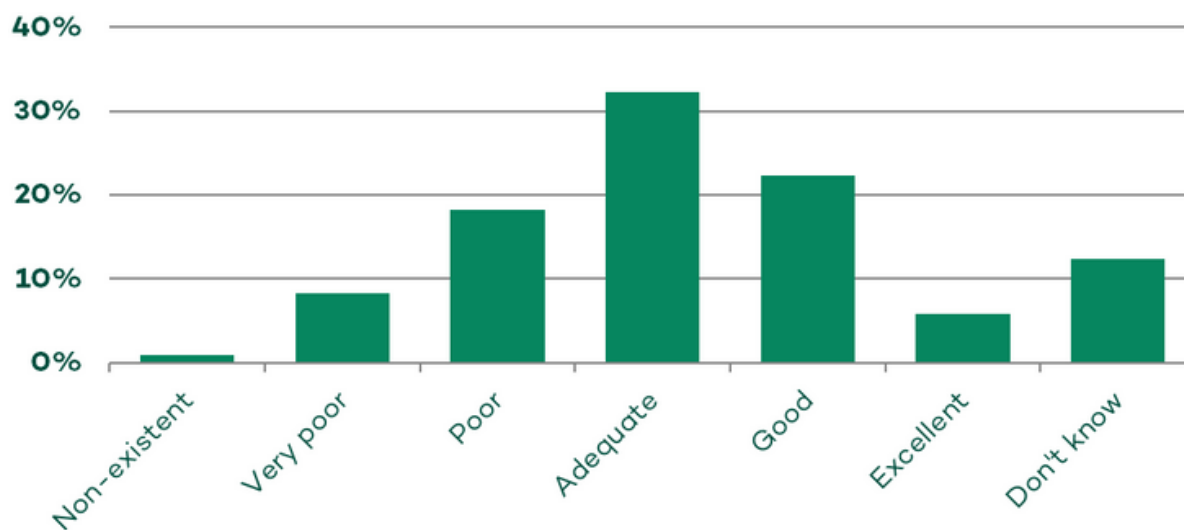
Accessibility ratings

Nationwide



We asked respondents "Overall, how would you rate the stadiums in the women's game in England and Wales on access and inclusion?" The results are below.

Figure 4: Accessibility ratings for women's football stadiums



- ▶ Non-existent - **1%**
- ▶ Very poor - **8%**
- ▶ Poor - **18%**
- ▶ Adequate - **32%**
- ▶ Good - **22%**
- ▶ Excellent - **6%**
- ▶ Don't know - **12%**

Overall, fans gave an average accessibility rating of 'adequate' for the stadiums used for women's football, with roughly a fifth of fans rating access as 'poor' and another fifth rating the access as 'good'. This is slightly worse than in the AFS.

A total of just over 9% of fans rated accessibility as either 'very poor' or 'non-existent' compared to just 5% of fans in the AFS.

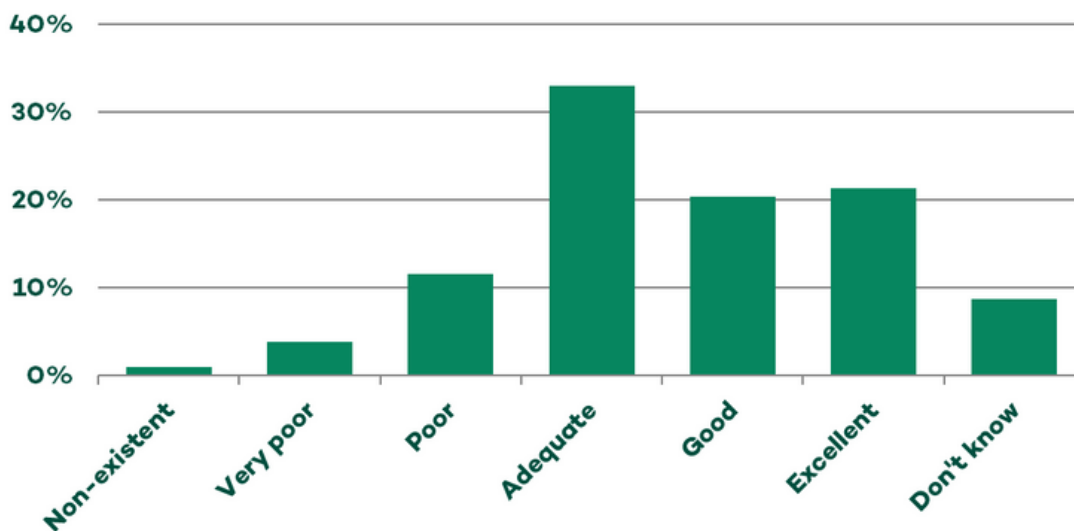
Club ratings

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 5: Accessibility ratings for the respondent's own club



- ▶ Non-existent – **1%**
- ▶ Very poor – **4%**
- ▶ Poor – **12%**
- ▶ Adequate – **33%**
- ▶ Good – **20%**
- ▶ Excellent – **21%**
- ▶ Don't know – **9%**

Overall, fans tended to rate their own club more highly than stadiums in England and Wales generally, giving an average rating of between 'adequate' and 'good'.

We know that disabled fans typically have a worse experience as an away supporter, which may go some way to explaining this.

Despite the fact that respondents rated their own club more highly than stadiums nationally, the average rating is still notably lower than that in the Annual Fan Survey. There were just 42% of disabled fans who rated their women's team's stadium accessibility as 'good' or 'excellent', compared to 60% in the AFS. Clearly there is work to be done to improve accessibility in women's football.

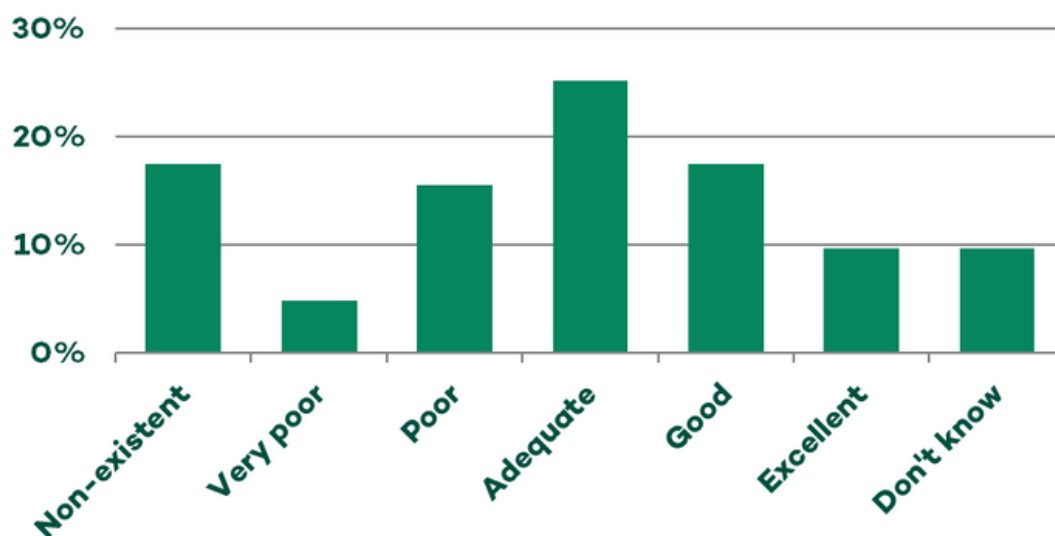
Club communication

Club ratings



We asked respondents "Overall, how would you rate your club's communication and marketing when it comes to attracting disabled fans into watching women's football?" The chart below shows the results.

Figure 6: Club ratings for attracting disabled fans to the sport



- ▶ Non-existent – **17%**
- ▶ Very poor – **5%**
- ▶ Poor – **16%**
- ▶ Adequate – **25%**
- ▶ Good – **17%**
- ▶ Excellent – **10%**
- ▶ Don't know – **10%**

Whilst the average, and most common, rating given was 'adequate', it is concerning that 38% of respondents gave ratings below 'adequate'. This includes 17% of respondents who said that their club's communication and marketing for attracting disabled fans into watching women's football was 'non-existent'.

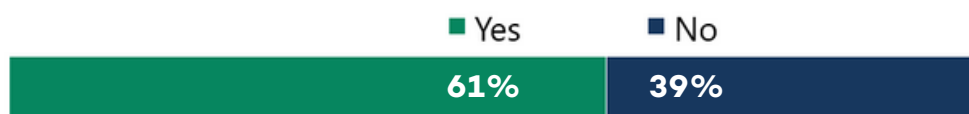
With the significant growth in women's football in recent years, it's important that disabled supporters are included and encouraged to be a part of that growth. This comes both from making improvements to access and also through effective communication and marketing. Women's football clubs should be considering how they can be more inclusive to disabled supporters.

Other findings



We asked fans "Does your club have a clear point of contact for disability-related queries?" The results are shown below.

Figure 7: Club's point of contact for disabled fans



Whilst we recognise that not every women's team will have a staff member dedicated to supporting their disabled fans, there should still be a clear point of contact for disability-related queries, including accessibility and ticketing.

For the 61% of fans who responded 'yes' to the question above, most of their comments and feedback were very positive about how contactable and responsive the club point of contact is, which is encouraging.

Reasons for not attending women's football

Earlier in the survey, we asked respondents how often they attend women's football matches. For those who answered 'less than once a year' or 'never', we asked the follow-up question of why that was.

The top 5 answers given were:

- 1. Lack of information (28%)
- 2. No interest in the women's game (28%)
- 3. Unable to travel to the stadium (21%)
- 4. Distance to the stadium (21%)
- 5. Anxiety or lack of confidence (14%)

This again highlights the need for women's teams to make essential accessibility information available to disabled supporters, ahead of matches. Clubs should also consider how to make matchdays easier to travel to, and what can be done to give fans greater confidence to attend women's matches.

Conclusion



This is the first ever nationwide survey of disabled fans attending women's football matches and it provides a good snapshot of their experiences.

The key issue that fans told us about was the lack of information available to them ahead of matches. For many disabled fans, having information about ticketing, travel, parking, entering the stadium, accessible services & facilities, etc, can be the difference between them being able to effectively plan their matchday, and therefore having the confidence to attend, or not. This issue appears to be exacerbated by the fact that some women's teams are not currently playing their home games at a consistent venue. This uncertainty and inconsistency can make it more difficult for all fans to plan their matchdays, but this is particularly the case for many disabled supporters.

Following the release of this report, women's clubs will be sent an individual report with just their supporters' responses. Clubs who had at least one respondent will be sent a report - 33 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 women's clubs to consider the following:

- ▶ Is there anything more you can do to support the 28% of disabled fans for whom 'anxiety or lack of confidence' is a barrier to attending?
- ▶ Can you improve your club comms and information for disabled fans?
- ▶ If your home ground changes regularly, what can be done to help fans plan their matchdays, and to progress towards a more consistent experience.
- ▶ 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 from their disabled fanbase.

Manager's review

Ruth Hopkins



"The growth in women's football in recent seasons has seen significant increases in attendances and revenue. With that, provisions for disabled supporters must also be improved.

"Given the unique and rapidly changing landscape, the decision was made to launch a specifically targeted survey while maintaining the place of women's football within our annual fan survey across all sports.

"A 'lack of information' has been highlighted as a key barrier through the survey and this is therefore an area we hope clubs see an opportunity to make a dramatic and immediate difference.

"More complex issues include the inconsistency of home venues for many clubs limiting the capacity for disabled supporters to plan their matchdays. This requires careful consideration from the stakeholders, in relation to how venues impact disabled fans.

"Inclusivity has been a key consideration for women's football and the inclusion of disabled fans must be recognised as an essential part of that.

"Level Playing Field are eager to work alongside clubs, governing bodies and disabled supporters' associations, to improve the matchday experiences of disabled fans of women's football.

"We must recognise the need for a bespoke approach to how we deliver the match day experience in the women's game. While there are lessons to learn and good practice to take from men's football, differences need to be acknowledged during the development phase."

Ruth Hopkins

**Level Playing Field General Manager
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