



## Level Playing Field

Promoting Good Access For All Fans

# Annual Report

## 2015/16

26 September 2016



Department  
for Culture  
Media & Sport



**The Football Stadia  
Improvement Fund**  
*supporter of the football foundation*

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## President's Foreword

In my 9<sup>th</sup> year as President, I am delighted to welcome you to Level Playing Field's annual report.

As always, I am struck by the dedication of Joyce Cook and her team as they continue to operate so successfully with only limited resources and to ensure that the issues still facing many disabled sports fans remain high on the agenda.

There is still a great deal to do but as this year's report once again testifies, progress continues with key representatives adding further support to Level Playing Field's aims and objectives to ensure an inclusive matchday experience for all sports fans.



During this last period, Joyce and I met with Government Ministers and other key stakeholders to discuss the various issues and Level Playing Field Vice President, Lord Richard Faulkner of Worcester took part in a range of related debates in the House of Lords and in proposing his timely private members 'Accessible Sports Grounds' Bill. Alongside this political progress, our topic gained still further traction in the media with a high profile BBC sports investigation underlining the key issues for many disabled fans at Premier League clubs.

We were therefore delighted by the Premier League announcement in September 2015, with their clubs pledging unanimously to meet the Accessible Stadia minimum standards by August 2017. This marks a significant step forward and we now look to the clubs to deliver on their promise.

In closing, I wish to thank the Board of Trustees, the Ambassadors and my fellow Honorary Officers for their unwavering support and commitment to Level Playing Field and to helping to solve the issues still faced by many disabled sports fans in England and Wales.

Level Playing Field is a small charity with a big heart and I am very proud to be its President. As such, I am looking forward to another exciting and successful year ahead.

With my very best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Bernstein". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

**David Bernstein CBE, LPF President**

## Chair's Report

In reflecting on the last year and its many successes, it is my great pleasure to start by warmly thanking our President, David Bernstein CBE, Lord Richard Faulkner of Worcester, Lord Rosser of Ickenham, David Davies OBE and their fellow Honorary Officers for their unwavering support.



As David mentioned in his foreword, it has been quite a year with debates in parliament, Select Committee enquiries, high profile media stories, and the Government announcement that the Sports Grounds Safety Authority would take a more active role in stadium accessibility and with the launch of the Accessible Stadia Supplementary Guidance in 2015.

Lord Richard Faulkner of Worcester has continued to press for change in the House of Lords along with his cross party peers including Lord Richard Rosser, Lord Chris Holmes, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson and with many others calling for action.

Lord Faulkner also tabled a private members bill – Accessible Sports Grounds Bill - which drew support from across the chamber. This high level support has enabled Level Playing Field to keep the issues still facing many disabled sports fans at the top of the agenda and we are very grateful to everyone involved in helping us push for these much needed access and inclusion improvements.

It is worth remembering that the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) first came into practice 20 years ago followed by the Equality Act in 2010. Whilst, there has been some progress, it has not been enough and there is much still to do before we can claim that sports grounds and venues are truly accessible and inclusive to all.

As such, we have very much appreciated the ongoing support of the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

We also welcomed the findings from the joint DCMS and DWP survey. This survey laid bare the challenges faced by many disabled sports fans, and urged sports clubs and venues to build on the successes of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games where access and inclusion were at the heart of the decision making.

We were all delighted by the Premier League announcement in September 2015, with its clubs unanimously pledging to “achieve compliance with the Accessible Stadia Guide by August 2017”.

In May this year Level Playing Field was invited to give oral evidence in the House of Commons to the DCMS Committee 'Accessibility of Sports Stadia' enquiry. In giving evidence, we sadly expressed our increasing concerns that more than a third of Premier League clubs looked unlikely to meet their pledge. In this same enquiry, the then Minister for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson, promised that Government would be monitoring progress and that the Premier League one-year to go report would be made public.

Just as we go to press, we have heard that the Premier League and some of its leading clubs are facing a parliamentary grilling over the projection that the pledge to meet minimum standards for disabled fans will be broken next year. Additionally, the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Chief Executive has written to the DCMS Select Committee to ask that individual clubs, as well as the Premier League, are held to account over their progress.

Surely, there can be no more excuses given the extreme wealth and rich resources at their disposal. Let's face it, there never seems to be a problem when it comes to hospitality improvements and in meeting the new broadcasting requirements at Premier League clubs. Indeed, we understand that the new broadcasting requirements (e.g. extra TV camera positions and high-calibre floodlighting) have to be met by Championship clubs before they can be promoted. So why doesn't the Premier League insist on minimum access requirements too?

On behalf of all disabled fans, I urge each Premier League club to meet the promise it made to its disabled fans last year and to set the standard for others to follow. You made us a promise and you must now honour that promise – that is all we ask of you!

Level Playing Field's key aims and objectives remain very clear and they are to ensure that football and other live sporting events are fully accessible and inclusive and welcoming to all fans in England and Wales.

We are therefore delighted to be working once again with the English Football League on its disability awareness educational and training packages for its clubs, with the FA, the FA Wales and in other sports with the English Cricket Board, Premiership Rugby, the Rugby Football Union and Rugby Football League. We also continue to work closely with individual clubs and venues and to support disabled fans whenever they need us.

The charity still operates with only limited resources and I urge our funders to reconsider the current levels of funding offered to Level Playing Field. Our expertise and services are in ever increasing demand and we need to be adequately funded to be able to continue to meet those demands.

That said, I wish to add my personal thanks to our grant funders, the Football Stadia Improvement Fund 'Fans Fund' (core and project funding), to those that have donated ad-hoc funding in 2015 including DCMS, the FA and the National League and to our benefactors, Veale Wasbrough Vizards LLP (legal advice), David Davies (media and PR), Albury Associates (accounting) who have so kindly provided their professional expert services as charitable pro-bono donations this year. We simply couldn't do it without you – thank you!

I also wish to sincerely thank my fellow Trustees and the Level Playing Field staff and volunteers for their dedication and support in the important works we share.

Lastly, I wish to send a huge massive thank you to each and everyone of you at the clubs, sports venues, governing bodies, disabled supporters associations, partner NGOs, in politics, the media and elsewhere who continue to work tirelessly, often behind the scenes, to ensure a fairer and more equal experience for all fans. We know who you are and we thank you!

All in all it has been quite a year – certainly one to celebrate - but we should not be complacent – we have much still to do. I look forward to the year ahead and to sharing more successes together.

As always, with warmest wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jea', written in a cursive style.

**Photo: Bradford City DSA 'Disability Dash'**

# Treasurer's Report

**1 September 2014 – 31 December 2015**

A copy of the full accounts of the National Association of Disabled Supporters (NADS), trading as Level Playing Field (LPF), for the period are available on request. Please note the extended period for 2014-15 as the members agreed to a new fiscal year-end at 31 December at the last AGM.

During this period, the Board of Trustees has continued to safeguard the good name and values of the Charity and to support our members, partners and key stakeholders with a relatively modest level of funding.

2014-2015 saw an extension to the Working Together Project funding and continuation of our existing core funding by the Football Stadium Improvement Fund 'Fans Fund'. The Football Association and the National League provided charitable donations (£15k & £1k) and the English Football League commissioned Level Playing Field to support a training programme for its clubs. In April 2015, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport provided a funding grant of £30k to Level Playing Field (LPF) to disseminate accessibility information and guidance to sports governing bodies and their clubs. These funding streams and grants have been most welcome.

The LPF Access Audit programme gained further momentum with commissions from Premiership Rugby and the English Cricket Board to audit their top-flight clubs and grounds. And our expert services include LPF's new Disability Access Awareness Training packages and we anticipate commissions in 2016-17

LPF continues to seek further funding through other funding streams and sponsors but in the current economic climate this is no easy task.

In closing, we wish to thank our funders, our donors and our benefactors who have generously provided expert professional services to Level Playing Field in 2014/15 as a charitable pro-bono donation including; Veale Wasbrough Vizards LLP (legal advice), David Davies (media and PR), Albury Associates (accounting).

We very much hope that much needed additional funding will be forthcoming from football and other sports in the years ahead. This will enable us to continue with our important projects and core activities that see an ever increasing demand on the organisation and its associated levels of work.

Looking to 2016 and beyond, we are in early discussions with the Premier League and the Football Stadium Improvement Fund 'Fans Fund' in the expectation that our core funding will be increased and extended beyond the current funding current period which ends in May 2017.

**Rosie Perkins, LPF Treasurer**

## General Manager – Introduction

Having worked for Level Playing Field since early 2013, I was delighted to be promoted to General Manager and Head of Access & Development in February 2016.

As such, I am pleased to head up a small but dedicated team of staff that supports the Chair and Board of Trustees in delivering the aims and objectives of Level Playing Field. The team is proud of the charity's reputation and achievements to date and we are excited by the future. We look forward to continuing to help make a difference for disabled sports spectators across England and Wales.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Joyce and the Board of Trustees for their confidence in my ability to help them in taking Level Playing Field forward and for their ongoing advice and support. And I wish to thank the LPF staff for their hard work and commitment to our works and projects over the last period.

To follow is a summary of Level Playing Field's core activities and projects during the last year.

**Ruth Hopkins, NRAC Auditor**  
**LPF General Manager and Head of Access & Development**

## About Level Playing Field

Level Playing Field (LPF) is the trading name for the National Association of Disabled Supporters. LPF is a campaigning and advisory organisation that is responsible to its membership.

LPF works with key stakeholders to improve access and inclusion to live sports events and represents the views, issues and concerns of disabled supporters to football and sports governing bodies, and to government in England and Wales.

The organisation is led by a Board of Trustees that are elected by its members and is further supported by its President and Vice Presidents (Honorary Officers) who act in an advisory and ambassadorial capacity.

Level Playing Field's key objectives are to promote an inclusive agenda, to raise awareness and to enhance wellbeing through sport by ensuring an equality of spectator experience for all fans. LPF supports the Social Model of Disability, which states that people are only disabled or excluded by the barriers that still exist within our society, whether they be attitudinal, physical, sensory or intellectual.

Our works encompass a wide range of support services and our stakeholders include architects, local planners and access officers, clubs, managers of sports stadiums

and other venues, policy makers, politicians and all party groups, media representatives, other fans groups, equality and disability organisations and not least disabled people, disabled sports fans, disabled supporters associations and their advocates.

Level Playing Field is proud of its achievements to date and the impact and influence it has made in improving the match day experience for so many disabled people who enjoy watching live sports or aspire to do so, but there is still so much more to do to ensure 'Inclusive Access for All Fans'.

## ***Aims & Objectives***

The aims of Level Playing Field remain very clear and they are to ensure that football and other live sporting events are fully inclusive and welcoming to all fans in England and Wales. Our key objectives are:

- To be a voice for all disabled sports spectators
- To campaign for an inclusive spectator experience
- To enable more disabled people to enjoy watching live sports
- To enrich the lives of disabled people through football and other sports
- To raise disability and access and inclusion awareness

## **The Importance of Making Sports Stadia Accessible**

More than 15% of the population is disabled with one in four families having a disabled member. At any given time an estimated 40% of the population requires easy access including families with young children and pregnant women, senior citizens and people with temporary injuries or ill health. More than 50% of disabled people have never participated in leisure or sport activities or attended a live event.

It is important to recognise the moral, legal and good business cases for providing truly accessible stadiums and other sporting venues. In 2014, the Department of Works and Pensions estimated the "purple (disability) pound" to be worth more than £212 billion to the UK economy.

Sports clubs and venues looking to diversify and to increase their customer base and revenue should take note of this increasing market opportunity. Furthermore, they should realise the reputational value and influence of disabled people as consumers and indeed loyal sports fans. Disabled people do not attend events in isolation but usually with family and friends. Providing an inclusive stadium which enables disabled fans to sit alongside their fellow supporters is quite simply good for business.

More than twenty years after the Disability Discrimination Act came into force we are still seeing an overall shortage of wheelchair accessible viewing areas and inadequate easy access and amenity seating for ambulant disabled supporters. Too often, wheelchair users are located only at pitch side with no choice of viewing positions. Sightlines are often compromised, hospitality areas often inaccessible, and there is a lack of accessible amenities at some grounds. Disparity between ticketing policies for disabled and non-disabled fans continues and there is still a distinct lack of access and inclusion awareness training amongst staff at many sporting venues.

Poor accessibility of sports stadia is a serious issue; it excludes disabled people and it is discriminatory.

## **Level Playing Field's Services**

### **Disability Inclusion and Etiquette Training**

This is a bespoke, competitively priced training package aimed at increasing awareness including looking at different models of disability (Social v Medical), current equality legislation, the barriers disabled people face, disability etiquette and practical advice and guidance on how to engage with disabled people. The training can be tailored to the needs of an organization and its personnel both in terms of the content and the duration of the session.

### **Club Mediation**

We offer a professional mediation service for clubs, individuals and fan groups to help resolve issues affecting disabled supporters. We mediate on numerous access issues such as ticketing policies, transport issues, availability and quality of accessible seating, sightlines and the provision of accessible amenities and services. We offer this service to all sports and complaints are dealt with by an expert in-house Access and Development Team that includes professional National Register Access Consultants (NRAC) and Auditors. Complaints may be anonymous, if the complainant does not wish to be identified, or resolved by more direct mediation.

### **Access Audits**

We offer professional access audits which are undertaken by NRAC auditors specialising in sporting venues and live match and event services. LPF Access Audits are comprehensive as they look at all areas of the fan experience not just the built environment. This includes a match day assessment, talking to key personnel, looking at the clubs' policies and procedures, in-house access and inclusion training, on-going support and access advice. The service includes a detailed Access Audit Report and Action Plan which is designed to help the club/venue identify areas for further development and improvement in the future. An Access Audit is the first step in helping organisations to meet the requirements of the Equality Act (2010). It will demonstrate a commitment to improving access for disabled people and if used properly, should help to increase custom, turnover, to enhance reputation and could also help to mitigate clubs against claims of disability discrimination.

### **Design Appraisal Service**

We offer expert advice and guidance to clubs and venues looking to make stadium improvements and/or to build new sports venues. This service involves appraising architectural designs and offering ongoing support and advice. We are able to talk through potential accessibility issues to ensure design plans incorporate the needs of disabled supporters. We work closely with the Football Foundation on all Football Stadium Improvement Fund (FSIF) applications and appraise the accessibility of the designs before the application is approved and the funding is released.

*For more information on our range of services please do not hesitate to contact one of the LPF Team.*

### **Mediating and expert advice and guidance**

Day-to-day operations and projects are delivered by a small team of staff and consultants who collectively provide ongoing support to our members and stakeholders. We provide independent expert advice on all matters related to accessible sporting venues and to inclusive match and event day experiences for disabled fans.

Level Playing Field currently handles around 400 complaints per year from disabled fans. As the numbers of disabled people continue to rise, and their expectations quite rightly increase too, we expect this number to increase unless measures are put in place across all sports to ensure more inclusive facilities and services.

LPF recognises that some sports clubs are making improvements for their disabled fans and we are keen to work with them to offer support and advice when changes are made to policies, procedures and the physical environment. We have many examples of achievable good design solutions for existing and new stadia as well as no cost and low cost suggestions to becoming more accessible.

New stadia, along with any other public buildings, should of course be designed to be inclusive with at least the minimum of legislative requirements in place. We are therefore disappointed when stadium design teams do not meet these minimum requirements as we expect all professional sporting venues to deliver a fully inclusive spectator experience. It is our view that all sports venue building projects should appoint a professional access consultant with sports stadia experience to oversee and advise throughout the whole project.

Evidence shows that some of the best progress happens where there is a proactive pan-disability, user-led Disabled Supporters Association (DSA). Having an independent democratic group of disabled fans, with a good working dialogue with their club, helps to raise awareness and to ensure that accessibility is on the agenda.

Our 'Working Together Project' has received funding (from the Fans Fund) for a further two years (to October 2017). This project aims to help set up more Disabled Supporters Associations.

We work closely with sports governing bodies and Government and the leagues and clubs themselves to ensure we remain the “go to” organisation for advice regarding disabled supporters.

## Level Playing Field Day to Day Activities

LPF works closely with sports governing bodies and their clubs to ensure more accessible facilities and services for disabled supporters. During the past year we have met with the Football Association, Premier League, Football League, National League, The Independent Football Ombudsman, the England & Wales Cricket Board, Premiership Rugby, Rugby Football Union, the Sports Ground Safety Authority, The Jockey Club, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Government. We also continue to provide support to Rugby Football League and to the Football Association Wales.

LPF continues to sit on the Kick It Out Professional Game Guidance Group to advise on disability access issues and we work in partnership with other disability and equality organisations across England and Wales.

We have delivered a large number of Access Audits over the past year including several to football clubs, 17 First Class grounds for the England & Wales Cricket Board and 15 Premiership Rugby grounds. The audits are carried out by our in-house team of National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC) accredited auditors. The audits are competitively priced, in line with our charitable status and are specifically written for sports grounds.

Clubs and sports governing bodies are recognising the importance of disability and inclusion awareness training for staff and stewards. The LPF Disability Inclusion and Etiquette Training has recently been updated and we are pleased to be offering this service across all sports.

The LPF administrator keeps the LPF website and club information updated as well as preparing our regular newsletters and maintaining our social media presence. We are very grateful to all supporters who leave fans comments on our website. This feedback can be of great value to clubs and sports venues – whether positive or more critical – and often acts as a catalyst for positive change and for sharing best practice examples.

The LPF website can now be viewed on numerous platforms including smart phones, tablets, laptops and desktops and the feedback from users has been very positive.

And Social Media is now playing a bigger part than ever. We have seen a steady increase in the number of Twitter engagements, especially during high profile media articles. **Follow us via Twitter @lpftweets or via Facebook @ Level Playing Field**

## Working Together Project

In October 2015, the initial Working Together Project came to an end with nine newly established Disabled Supporters Associations (DSAs) at football clubs in England and Wales. As the project drew to a close we recognised that there was still going to be a need for this support and advice and we were fortunate to secure further funding from the FSIF Fans Fund for a two year project extension to October 2017.

To date, the DSAs set up under the Working Together Projects include:

Bradford City, Newport County, Swansea City, Tottenham Hotspur, Norwich City, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Portsmouth, Chester, Wrexham, Tranmere Rovers, Crawley Town, Crystal Palace, Gillingham and with support to re-establish the Watford Enables group.

Regional Forums, where local DSAs can share their experiences have already been established in Wales and the South Coast and we are in early discussions to arrange the first Regional Forum in the North West.

## Level Playing Field Weeks of Action

The 2016 Weeks of Action was a great success as Level Playing Field built on the support for previous campaigns. Thank you to everyone who got involved this year and we look forward to your increasing support in the future.

The LPF Weeks of Action helps to highlight the positive initiatives undertaken by clubs, sporting venues and their governing bodies in partnership and celebration with disabled sports fans and disabled supporters associations.

We were especially pleased to welcome the support of the Football League who designated the Johnstone's Paint Trophy final to promoting Weeks of Action, as well as Manchester United who provided LPF Weeks of Action banners to all Premier League and Championship Clubs. Thank you for your amazing support!

As usual the main element of the LPF Weeks of Action was the events and activities hosted by clubs throughout England and Wales, and this year we saw an increase in clubs participating from 49 in 2015 to 75 in 2016 with a variety of events and activities taking place around the grounds.

Name	2016	2015
Premier League	13	6
Football League	33	15
Non-league	2	4
Disabled Supporters Associations	14	15
Others ( Partners / Bloggers )	13	8
Non-football clubs	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>49</b>

An area we are looking to expand the project is to gain involvement from other sports and we will be reaching out to cricket and rugby ahead of the 2017 LPF Weeks of Action.

Plans are already underway for LPF Weeks of Action 2017 from Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March. Please do contact LPF if you wish to get involved.

## **A special thank you to all our supporters**

LPF shares offices with our sister charity, the Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE) and we value that relationship and the support they give us as part of our ongoing works. The LPF staff were pleased to attend and to support the 2<sup>nd</sup> International CAFE Conference in Paris last autumn with 200 delegates attending from around the world to discuss best practice accessible stadia solutions.

Level Playing Field wishes to thank our President, David Bernstein CBE and our Vice Presidents, Ambassadors and volunteers for their continued support.

Thank you to all our funders and sponsors; namely the Football Foundation (Football Stadia Improvement Fund – Fans Fund), the Football Association, the English Football League and the National League. We are also very grateful to those who generously provide professional services and expertise to Level Playing Field as a charitable pro-bono donation including Veale Wasbrough Vizards LLP (legal services), David Davies (media and PR) and Albury Associates (accountancy).

Finally, thank you to all who have generously donated funds to LPF and those who have given their time to support our aims and objectives.

We quite simply couldn't do what we do without your support. Thank you!



**Photo: Arsenal Disabled Supporters**

# LPF Trustees, Honorary Officers and staff

(September 2014 –December 2015)

## **Management Trustees:**

Joyce Cook OBE Chair  
Rosie Perkins Treasurer  
Antony Taylor Secretary  
Keith Graham

## **Executive Trustees:**

Kush Kanodia  
Jamie Beddard  
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Jo McNicol

## **President:**

David Bernstein CBE

## **Vice Presidents:**

Lord Faulkner of Worcester  
Lord Rosser of Ickenham  
David Davies OBE  
Chris Bird  
Chris Heaton-Harris, MP  
Jim Froggatt  
Phil Friend OBE

## **Ambassadors:**

Danny Wallace  
Danny Mills  
Steven Johnson  
June Wratten  
Janet Ireland (co-opted member of Board)

## **Patron of the LPF Weeks of Action:**

Sir Trevor Brooking

## **Staff:**

Ruth Hopkins, General Manager & Head of Access and Development  
Nicky Baker, Access and Development Officer  
Chris Summersell, Administration and Communications Officer  
Kieran Reynolds, Project Coordinator - Working Together Project

**Level Playing Field is the trading name of the National Association of Disabled Supporters**



# Level Playing Field

**Promoting Good Access For All Fans**

**Level Playing Field**

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