



PARTICIPATION PLAN 2026-2036

Football Association of Wales

INTRODUCTION

Whether someone is involved in the game recreationally or they make it to the national team, all experiences in football begin at the grassroots level. These first experiences can ignite a lifelong connection to the beautiful game. Football not only inspires individuals, but it also strengthens communities. Clubs all across the country are anchors of their communities bringing people together through a shared passion for the game.

As the most popular team sport in Wales, participation across the country continues to grow. In early 2026, we reached over 120,000 registered players. Over the next decade, we hope to continue growing the game to over 160,000 players. With the rise of women and girls' football across the country, we anticipate half of this growth to be made up of new female players. Unless specifically mentioned, this plan for football participation in Wales covers both male and female football, taking an inclusive approach to our efforts and investment. Inclusive football extends beyond gender, ensuring opportunities for people of all abilities, backgrounds, skill levels and socio-economic circumstances.

While players are at the heart of our game, football relies on many other people involved in the game giving their time and energy.

These people include coaches and referees, along with the off-pitch workforce made up of administrators, facility operators, and many other volunteers.

Over the course of this strategic period, all clubs in Wales will have access to support for their development. However, we will be proactive in identifying priority clubs for more in-depth collaboration. Priority clubs will be identified based on potential for greater impact in their community and developing the game across Wales.

The next ten years have the potential to be transformative for football across Wales. It is now our responsibility to turn this plan into action, bringing this vision into reality.



PARTICIPATION IN NUMBERS AND RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS

#1 Team sport in
the country by
participation



850+ Grassroots
Football Clubs

6411 Active
Coaches

Grassroots
Leagues
(Senior &
Junior)

67

120,000+ Players (including 20,000+ women & girls)  



926 registered disabled players
(x3 increase since 2024)

7258 Club Administrator & Volunteers

72% Grassroots football matches 
officialiated by a qualified referee



6 Area
Associations

9138 Teams

58% Perception of
behaviours
in grassroots football:
'Good' to 'Excellent'

£30M+ Funding into Grassroots Football facilities

4632 players with an ethnically diverse heritage (40% increase since 2024)

47% Grassroots
administrator
satisfaction rates:
'Good' to 'Excellent'





72%

**Grassroots
football matches
officiated by a
qualified referee**



STRATEGY FRAMEWORK – LLUNIO CYMRU

This Participation Plan aligns its strategic framework with the overarching organisational strategy, **LLUNIO CYMRU**.

- Participation covers all football activity from first experience to being invited to the elite talent pathway.
- Performance is related to football activities from being included within the elite talent pathway to youth and senior national teams.

As the sub-plan for the participation pillar, this document outlines additional detail on the objectives, actions, and measures of success across the three pillar themes: People, Pathways, and Places.

To support our work in participation, there are 14 enablers. Each of the enablers have an aligned sub-plan outlining their contributions and efforts towards both pillars.



- | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Competitions | • Communications | • Finance | • Governance & Compliance | • Environmental Sustainability |
| • Facilities | • Commercial & Marketing | • Human Resources | • Integrity | • Equality, Diversity and inclusion |
| • Coaches & Referees | • External Affairs | • Data & Insights | • Safeguarding | |
| | • Culture & Welsh language | | | |





THE FAW APPROVED FOOTBALL PATHWAYS

One game. Many pathways. Lifelong opportunities



FAW APPROVED PERFORMANCE PATHWAY



TALENT ID

Identify and support players with potential.



PROFESSIONAL CLUB ACADEMIES

Elite training and development for youth within professional clubs.



FAW ACADEMIES

Talent hubs to develop domestic players within our Welsh Way identity.



PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

Compete at the highest level.



DOMESTIC COMPETITIONS

Compete in the domestic game.



REPRESENTING WALES
IN NATIONAL TEAMS



FAW APPROVED PARTICIPATION PATHWAY

FAW AFFILIATED CLUBS



EARLY YEARS

(2-5 years)

Fundamental movement skills and parental engagement.



SMALL-SIDED FOOTBALL

(6-13 years)

Make friends, develop skills and understanding. 6-11 yrs non-competition.



JUNIOR FOOTBALL

(14-17 years)

Develop potential, compete & prepare for adult football.



YOUTH & ADULT FOOTBALL

(16 years +)

Stay active, enjoy the game and support others.

FAW APPROVED FLEXIBLE FORMATS

Example formats available



FUTSAL

Small, sided, fast paced. Technical.



DISABILITY FOOTBALL

Inclusive football for all.



VETERANS FOOTBALL

Football for 35s, 45s, 55s and over.



WALKING FOOTBALL

Stay active, stay involved.



SMALL SIDED FOOTBALL

Health and wellbeing.



FAW PROGRAMMES

Non-competitive accessible & inclusive.



FOOTBALL
FOR LIFE



Throughout the pathway, the participation stream remains wide, welcoming anyone to play the game. There are both recreational and competitive opportunities which are offered in participation environments.

However, we recognise that development is not a linear pathway which is why the player pathway in Wales is fluid, allowing players to switch between participation environments and elite performance in professional environments.

Some players may even be involved in both pathways at the same time. It is important to note that these pathways only include affiliated opportunities as the FAW can ensure high standards and strict regulations are being implemented, ensuring these environments are developmental and safe.



PEOPLE.



CORPORATE OBJECTIVE.

Grow, support, and develop the people who deliver community football on and off the pitch.



PRIORITIES

- Recruit, inspire, engage and celebrate off pitch volunteers, by providing accessible, engaging and meaningful opportunities to learn, develop and connect.
- Train, deploy, and retain coaches to deliver fulfilling experiences for players of all abilities.
- Recruit and retain match officials to ensure competitions are fair and well organised.
- Support and resource educational practitioners and FAW partners to deliver quality playing opportunities outside of grassroots affiliated football.
- Develop inclusive and representative pathways for coaching, refereeing and volunteering across Welsh football, removing barriers and creating equitable access at all levels of the game.

MEASURE OF SUCCESS

- Grow the number of affiliated, qualified coaches by 30%.
- 75% of volunteers report feeling supported & equipped to succeed in their role.
- By 2035, every competition match at U12s+ to be officiated by a qualified neutral referee.
- Achieve at least 70% positive perception ('good' to 'excellent') experience in football for club administrators.
- Grow the number of affiliated, qualified female coaches by 40%.
- Quadruple the number of registered female referees, with 80% of qualified female referees being active.



PATHWAYS.



CORPORATE OBJECTIVE.

Provide participation opportunities to grow and retain the number of people playing football.



PRIORITIES

- Create and deliver fun, age- appropriate experiences to engage and recruit new players into the game.
- Focus retention efforts on players aged 12-17 to address key drop-out points and encourage lifelong involvement in the sport.
- Develop inclusive, flexible and representative pathways for participation across Welsh football, removing socioeconomic barriers and creating equitable access at all levels of the game.
- Collaborate with Regional Sports Partnerships, Local Authorities, and Community Organisations to increase football opportunities in areas of deprivation with lower participation.
- Promote and champion the grassroots game through clear, targeted and personalised communications that inspire participation, increase awareness of opportunities, improve understanding of the player pathway, and strengthen engagement across Welsh football.

MEASURE OF SUCCESS

- Increase the number of registered players from 120,000 to 160,000 with at least 20,000 of the new players being women and girls.
- 50% of all players aged 2-4 years old are female.
- Increase the number of registered girls aged 5-11 by 100%.
- 10% increase in registered boys aged 5 – 11.
- 50% reduction in players aged 12-17 leaving the game .
- Deliver targeted projects in the 100 most deprived and diverse communities to grow football participation in these areas.



CORPORATE OBJECTIVE.

Develop modern and flexible playing formats that meet the future needs of community football and pathways.



PRIORITIES

- Work with Partners to shape and deliver sustainable competition structures and recreational opportunities that respond to the evolving needs of players, clubs, and communities, driving increased participation, stronger competitive balance, and long-term player retention.
- Provide inclusive, accessible, and development-focused competition pathways that enable players of all ages, genders, abilities, and backgrounds to enter, remain, and progress with grassroots football.
- Establish opportunities for disabled people to play football, including recreational, club-based, education, impairment specific, and integrated formats.
- Develop a consistent, sustainable and well-governed grassroots game in Wales across Area Associations, leagues and private providers through modern standards, improved governance, consistent quality, and collaborative ways of working.

MEASURE OF SUCCESS

- Achieve at least 70% positive perception ('good' to 'excellent') of experiences in football for players.
- 100% of schools providing girls football opportunities.
- Double the number of registered adult female players, including 2,000 more women playing recreational football.
- Triple the number of registered adults playing recreational football.
- Triple the number of registered Disability players, including 500 registered women and girls.
- 100% of grassroots leagues achieve minimum League Accreditation standards.



PLACES.



CORPORATE OBJECTIVE.

Create safe, welcoming, and
positive environments for
everyone involved in football.



PRIORITIES

- Improve behaviour of players, parents, coaches, officials, and spectators within community football through an FAW dedicated education and behaviour change programme.
- Maintain and enhance robust safeguarding standards and a person-centred culture across grassroots football in Wales to mitigate risk.
- Continue to respond, report, and record safeguarding incidents responsibly to strengthen trust across grassroots football.
- Increase awareness and accessibility of safeguarding education, resources and reporting pathways for all participants.
- Eliminate hate and discrimination across all levels of the game.

MEASURE OF SUCCESS

- Achieve at least 70% positive perception ('good' to 'excellent') of behaviours in football.
- Achieve at least 70% positive inclusion and belonging score in annual surveys.
- 100% of Club Safeguarding Officers holding the Level 1 safeguarding award.
- 100% of registered coaches in the junior game holding the Level 1 safeguarding award.
- Carry out benchmarking to further understand to rollout of the Level 2 safeguarding award.
- Reduce incidents of hate and discrimination by 70% by 2036, with 100% of discrimination reports fully investigated.



CORPORATE OBJECTIVE.

Develop inclusive and sustainable football clubs that enhance the lives of their community.



PRIORITIES

- Transform the club network across Wales by implementing the community football club of the future vision through a nationally recognised Quality Club Programme that drives continuous improvement, strengthens club capability and ensures clubs are equipped to meet the changing needs of their communities.
- Champion safe, welcoming and inclusive football clubs that strengthen wellbeing, belonging and social cohesion across communities in Cymru.
- Provide support to priority clubs for inclusive development planning and delivery of community health programmes.
- Embed digital systems for club administration to be more efficient and easier to carry out for volunteers.
- Build a climate resistant football ecosystem that supports clubs, leagues and area associations, to adapt to environmental risks, protect nature and contribute to a fair and globally responsible Cymru.

MEASURE OF SUCCESS

- Establish and sustain a national network of FAW Quality Club Programme clubs, with 30% of affiliated clubs achieving Quality Club standards by 2036.
- 100% of clubs meeting affiliation and compliance standards as set by the FAW.
- All clubs are actively engaged in a structured development journey.
- By 2036, all clubs, leagues, and Area Associations will be signed up to the FAW Together Greener Programme, pledging to deliver two low level Green Goals that contribute to a more sustainable football environment.



CORPORATE OBJECTIVE.

Ensure everyone has
access to quality, inclusive,
and sustainable facilities.



PRIORITIES

- Improve access to existing facilities for priority clubs, leagues, and recreational programmes, exploring opportunities to adjust pitch scheduling to improve utilisation.
- Integrate the needs of women and girls in all facility development projects to drive growth and retention.
- Support more clubs to develop their own inclusive and community focused facilities.
- Implement local facility plans to establish community hubs that link priority clubs, leagues, and recreational programmes to identified facility development priorities.
- Embed current and future needs for disability football into Cymru Football Foundation projects.

MEASURE OF SUCCESS

- There are quality football facilities within 15 minutes of every community in Wales, giving priority to those who need it most.
- Carry out a holistic review of pitch usage, and increase priority pitch access for women and girls by at least 50%.
- Improve the quality of grass pitches so that at least 50% of grass pitches are rated as "Good" by the FAW/CFF assessment framework.
- Develop a methodology to understand the impact that improved access to quality football facilities has on participation, retention, and inclusion in community football.



TIMELINE OF MILESTONES

2026

Connect grassroots football to the U19 Men's European Championships - our first.

2027

Launch new quality club programme

2028

EURO 2028 Impact & legacy: Focus on volunteers, growing participation and disability football.

2029

Women's Champions League Final: Growing participation, improving facilities and inspiring volunteers.

2030

**100 new / upgraded pitches
across the country.**

2031

1550 registered disabled players

2032

**80% of all matches officiated
by a qualified referee**

2033

4 Disability Leagues with full pathways (U12, U16, Adults at all ability levels).

2034

**Quality football facilities
within 15 minutes of every
community in Wales.**

2035

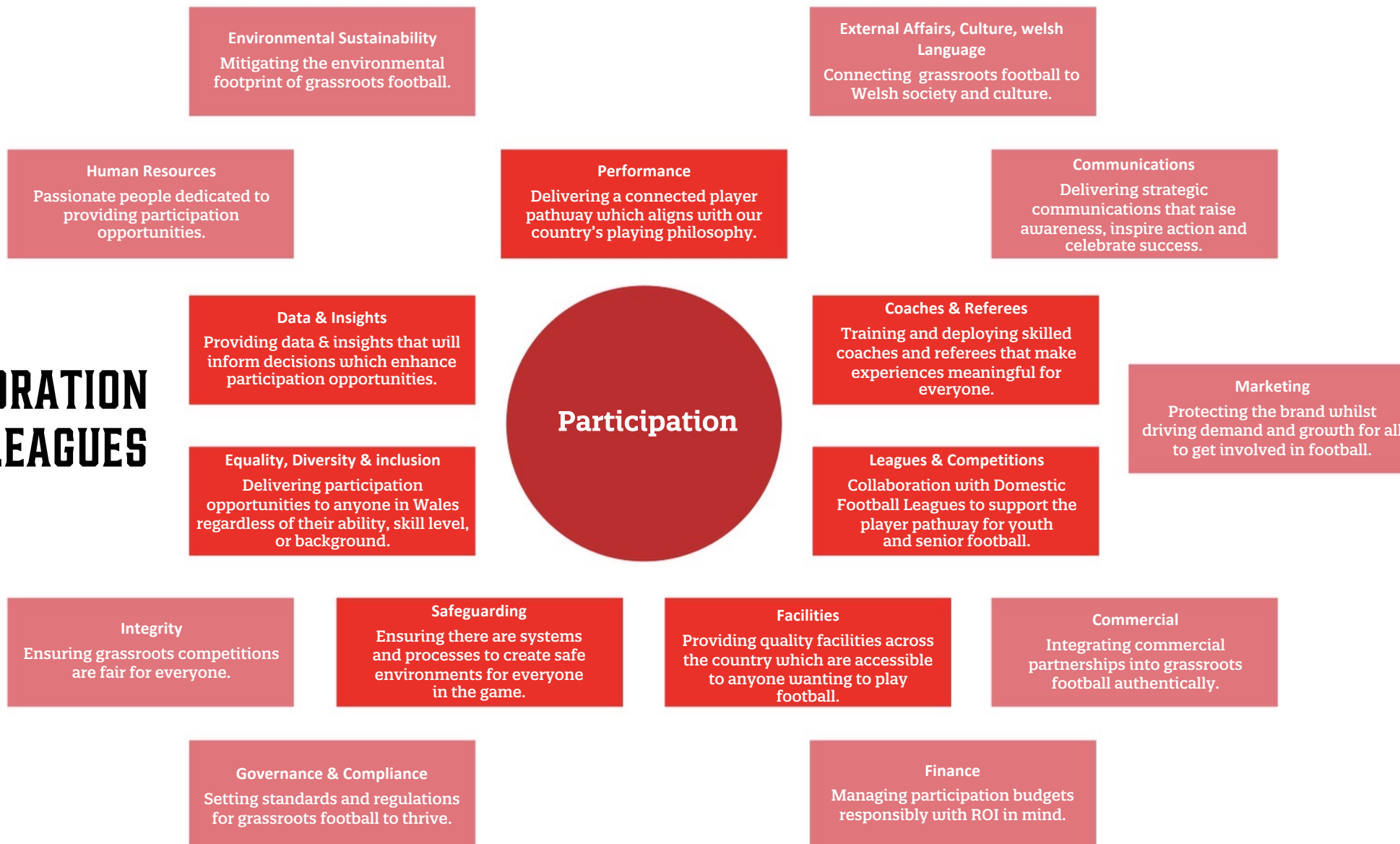
**Connect grassroots football to
the FIFA Women's World Cup
– our first.**

2036

160,000 registered
players



COLLABORATION WITH COLLEAGUES



SUCCESSING WITH STAKEHOLDERS



AREA ASSOCIATIONS
Overseeing the delivery of football across the country in collaboration with FAW.

DOMESTIC LEAGUES & CLUBS
Engaging in a collaborative way for mutual benefit and wider development of Welsh football.

SCHOOLS & EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
Offering accessible, alternative playing opportunities outside of community football.

SPORT WALES
Investing in grassroots football, setting frameworks and regulations which enhance the delivery of grassroots football.

GOVERNMENT
Investing in grassroots football as an avenue for community development.

FACILITY OPERATORS
Providing environments which players and people involved in football feel safe and welcomed at.

FIFA & UEFA
Connecting with other national associations to share knowledge and learn from best practice.



GETTING INVOLVED IN GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

Whether you aspire to play, coach, referee, volunteer, support from the sidelines, or contribute as a commercial partner, there is a meaningful place for you in grassroots football. Every person who steps forward builds a confident, successful, and inclusive Cymru through football.

To learn about how to get involved in grassroots football as well as accredited clubs, you can find information [here](#).





DIOLCH.