



CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION IN FOOTBALL

A GUIDE FOR CLUBS



INTRODUCTION

Football should be a game where everyone can participate, feel respected and have the opportunity to enjoy and develop through the sport.

Discrimination has no place in football and can affect people at every level of the game. It can have a significant impact on individuals, teams, Clubs and communities.

Tackling discrimination requires more than responding when an incident happens and requires a proactive approach. Everyone has a role to play, and Clubs can help prevent discrimination by setting clear expectations, educating their members, encouraging reporting and creating an environment where people feel confident to speak up.

This guide provides practical information to help Clubs recognise discrimination, respond appropriately, report incidents and create a culture where everyone understands their role in challenging discriminatory behaviour.

This resource will help you to:

- Recognise different forms of discrimination and discriminatory behaviour.
- Understand the impact of language, stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes.
- Respond appropriately when discrimination occurs.
- Know how and where to report an incident.
- Understand the FAW Discrimination Regulations.
- Understand the FIFA three-step procedure for discriminatory crowd abuse.
- Support people affected by discrimination.
- Access education, guidance and support.
- Use football as a platform for positive social change.
- Take practical steps to create a more inclusive Club environment.





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DISCRIMINATION

What Is Discrimination?

Discrimination involves treating someone less favourably than someone else because of a protected characteristic. This includes behaving in a way that offends or is likely to offend the dignity of a person or group because of characteristics such as age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity or race, religion or belief, or language.

It can happen on and off the pitch, on the sidelines or in the stands, in changing rooms, in Club communications, online or anywhere connected to football.

Intent Does Not Always Change Impact

If behaviour is discriminatory, saying “I didn't mean it that way” does not remove its potential impact. “Banter” is sometimes used to excuse comments, jokes, gestures or behaviour that target someone's identity.

A joke can still cause harm, a comment can still reinforce stereotypes and a behaviour can still make someone feel unwelcome.

The important question is not simply:

“Was it intended as a joke?”, it is also, “What impact could this behaviour have?”

Ignoring discriminatory behaviour can normalise it and make others less likely to challenge or report it.



REGULATIONS

The FAW Discrimination Regulations

Know The Rules

The [FAW Discrimination Regulations](#) address discriminatory attitudes and behaviours within, or connected to, football regulated by the FAW.

They apply to Members, Associate Members and/or Subordinates and cover discriminatory conduct relating to characteristics including:

- Age.
- Disability.
- Gender.
- Gender reassignment.
- Sex.
- Sexual orientation.
- Ethnicity or race.
- Religion or belief.
- Language.

The Discrimination Regulations also recognise that conduct can be considered discriminatory even where a specific person cannot be identified as having heard or seen it.

Always refer to the current Discrimination Regulations for the full legal and disciplinary position.





RECOGNISING

Recognising Discriminatory Behaviour

Discrimination can take many forms. It can be obvious and direct, such as discriminatory language, insults, threats or physical abuse, but it can also be less visible, including exclusion, stereotyping, unequal treatment, offensive jokes, online abuse or behaviour that creates a hostile or intimidating environment.

Discrimination can be deliberate or unintentional, and it can occur on or off the pitch, in changing rooms, on social media, within Club activities or among supporters. It can also be directed at an individual or a group because of a range of characteristics. Recognising these behaviours is the first step towards challenging them and creating a football environment where everyone feels respected, included and able to participate. Discrimination can also be embedded in systems, processes or decisions that unintentionally disadvantage particular groups.

The definition of discriminatory incident is 'any incident which is perceived to be discriminatory by the victim or any other person.'

Examples can include:

- Discriminatory name-calling, insults or jokes.
- Stereotyping or making assumptions about people.
- Refusing to cooperate with someone because of who they are.
- Discriminatory chants, gestures, banners, flags or slogans.
- Ridiculing someone's religion, culture, identity or characteristics.
- Encouraging others to behave in a discriminatory way.
- Threatening or abusive behaviour.
- Physical violence or intimidation.
- Discriminatory comments or content on social media.
- Excluding someone from opportunities because of a protected characteristic.





DON'T IGNORE IT

If You Witness Discrimination, Don't Ignore It, Report It

When discrimination happens, doing nothing can leave the person affected feeling unsupported and can allow the behaviour to continue.

Where it is safe to do so:



You do not need to be an expert to report a concern or need to decide whether an offence has occurred.

Your role is to make sure the concern is raised with the appropriate person or relevant authority.





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RESPONDING

Responding To An Incident

When an incident occurs, individuals and Clubs should take it seriously and respond as soon as possible. It's important to act promptly and calmly. Do not investigate beyond your role or promise a particular outcome.

Where appropriate:

- Ensure everyone's immediate safety.
- Separate those involved if necessary.
- Listen to the person affected.
- Avoid dismissing the incident as “banter” or “just a joke”.
- Explain clearly why the behaviour is unacceptable.
- Record what has happened.
- Inform the appropriate Club official or match official immediately.
- Follow the relevant reporting and safeguarding procedures.
- Report the matter to the relevant authority where required.
- Offer appropriate support to the person affected.





SUPPORT

Supporting People Affected

Discrimination can have a profound impact on a person's wellbeing, confidence and future involvement in football. The first response matters. Give the person an opportunity to speak, listen without judgement and avoid asking them to justify or minimise what happened.

Where appropriate, explain what will happen next, what information will be shared and who will be involved. The aim should be to ensure that people affected by discrimination feel heard, supported and empowered to remain involved in football.



Victim Support Programme

The FAW has established a Victim Support Programme in partnership with [Victim Support Cymru](#). Anyone affected by discrimination in football can access free, confidential and independent support. The programme guide provides advice and support and helps people understand the FAW investigation process.

The [FAW Discrimination Regulations](#) also set out requirements around providing support information to people affected by reported discrimination.

For further information download the [FAW Victim Support Programme Guide](#).





REPORTING

Reporting Discrimination

Reporting discrimination helps Clubs and relevant authorities understand what is happening and take appropriate action.

It can:

- Ensure incidents are formally recorded.
- Help identify repeated or emerging issues.
- Support investigations.
- Identify education and training needs.
- Help Clubs improve preventative measures.
- Give people confidence that concerns are taken seriously.

Reporting an incident does not automatically mean that someone will be punished. However, where an individual is charged and an allegation of an offense is proven, appropriate consequences will follow under the relevant regulations.





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Reporting Routes

There are two key reporting routes for Clubs depending on if an incident is an internal Club incident or an external incident involving another Club or individual outside of the Club’s membership.

Internal Incidents

Where the incident involves people within your Club, follow your Club's internal reporting and safeguarding procedures. The Club Safeguarding Officer should be involved where appropriate, particularly where children or young people are involved.

For incidents involving Club members, Players, Coaches, volunteers or other people connected to the Club:

- ENSURE SAFETY** Take reasonable steps to protect those involved.
- REPORT INTERNALLY** Notify the appropriate Club Official and Club Safeguarding Officer.
- RECORD** Record what was reported, when it happened, who was involved and any action taken.
- SUPPORT** Listen, provide appropriate support and explain what happens next.
- FOLLOW PROCEDURE** Follow safeguarding, complaints, disciplinary and anti-discrimination procedures as appropriate.
- ESCALATE** Serious incidents, criminal behaviour or matters requiring FAW/Area Association/league involvement should be referred appropriately.





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External Or Matchday Incidents

Where an incident happens during a match, involves another Club, individual, spectator, match official or another external person, it should be reported through the appropriate football authority.

If discrimination occurs during a match:

REPORT TO
OFFICIAL

Report the incident to the match officials and stadium security/officials where applicable.

The current FAW Discrimination Regulations state that anyone who witnesses, or is made aware of, an alleged discriminatory incident should report it to the match official where applicable and to the appropriate authority.

Match officials must report alleged discriminatory conduct that they witness or that is brought to their attention.

Clubs should also record any incidents internally and notify their designated PAWB Equality Champion, Safeguarding Officer and other relevant Club officials.

Reporting Serious Incidents

Some incidents may also involve safeguarding concerns, threats, violence or potential criminal behaviour or take place outside of a match day or training session.

Where there is an immediate risk to someone's safety, contact the emergency services by calling 999. Safety comes first!

For non-emergency police matters, use the appropriate police reporting route. Where an incident may constitute a hate crime or another serious offence, Clubs should seek appropriate advice and report it to the police where necessary.

Do not put yourself or others at risk when attempting to intervene.





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The Three-Step Procedure

What Happens If Racist Crowd Abuse Occurs?

The FAW Discrimination Regulations outline the process for FIFA's three-step anti-discrimination procedure when discriminatory abuse from the crowd occurs during a match.

Clubs should understand the procedure so they can respond appropriately if the referee implements it.

The three steps are:



The referee is responsible for implementing the procedure.

Step 1: Stop & Warn

If the referee becomes aware of serious racist discriminatory behaviour from the crowd, the match may be stopped. A public announcement is made instructing spectators to stop the discriminatory behaviour.

The match can resume once the announcement has been made and the referee is satisfied that the appropriate action has been taken.

Club role:

- Support the referee and match officials.
- Use stadium staff and stewards to help address the behaviour.
- Do not attempt to take over the referee's role.





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Step 2: Suspend - Give A Clear Final Warning

If the discriminatory behaviour continues after the match restarts, the referee may suspend the match and the teams may return to their dressing rooms.

The suspension can provide time for:

- The discriminatory behaviour to stop.
- A further public announcement to be made.
- Security and safety measures to be considered.
- Relevant match officials and authorities to discuss next steps.

Step 3: Abandon - A Last Resort

If the discriminatory behaviour continues after the match restarts, the referee may, as a last resort, abandon the match.

This decision involves consideration of safety and consultation with relevant match, security and police authorities.

Where a match is abandoned because of discriminatory conduct, the matter can subsequently be considered by a Judicial Body, including whether the match should be forfeited.

Abandonment is not the Club's decision. It is a decision for the referee under the relevant procedures.



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Step-by-step: What Clubs Should Do

Support The Process

If the referee implements the three-step procedure:

1. STOP

Support the referee's decision and follow matchday instructions.

2. RESPOND

Deploy appropriate Club personnel to the relevant area of the crowd to help stop the abuse.

3. SUPPORT

Where possible, assist the affected Player or Official and help identify those responsible.

4. RECORD

Ensure the incident is recorded and reported through the appropriate processes after the match.

5. FOLLOW UP

Cooperate fully with any subsequent investigation or disciplinary process.





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The FIFA Anti-Racism Gesture

A Clear Signal To The Referee

A Player or Official who is the victim of discriminatory crowd abuse can alert the referee using the appropriate FIFA gesture or by another means.

The gesture involves:

- Crossing both forearms at the wrists to form an “X” shape.
- This provides a clear visual signal that discriminatory abuse has taken place.

Club Message

Players and Officials should know what the gesture means and understand that they can also communicate with the referee by other means.





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Public Address Scripts

Suggested Wording

Pre-match Message

“Welcome to the stadium. Please remember that there is no place for discrimination in football. We ask everyone to respect the Players, Officials and fellow supporters and help everyone enjoy the match.”

The Three-Step Procedure

Step 1

“Attention please. Because of discriminatory behaviour amongst spectators, the referee has indicated that the match may be suspended. Discrimination in football will not be tolerated. Please stop this behaviour immediately. If it continues, the match may be suspended and could ultimately be abandoned. Thank you.”

Step 2

“Attention please. Because of continuing discriminatory behaviour amongst spectators, the match has been suspended. We remind everyone that discrimination in football will not be tolerated. If this behaviour continues, the match may be abandoned. We ask everyone to follow the instructions of the match officials, stewards and security personnel.”

Step 3

“Attention please. Because of continuing discriminatory behaviour amongst spectators, the referee has decided to abandon the match. We ask all spectators to leave the stadium safely and follow the instructions of stewards and security personnel. Further information will be provided by the Club.”



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Recording Incidents

What Should a Club Record?

Avoid making conclusions about whether an offence has occurred. That is for the relevant authority to determine. It’s important to record facts, not assumptions.

A useful incident record should include:

Date, time and location.	Fixture or activity involved.	What was said or done.
Who was involved.	Who witnessed the incident.	Whether the match officials were informed.
What immediate action was taken.	Whether safeguarding concerns were identified.	Whether the police or another organisation was contacted.
What follow-up action was taken.	Any support offered to the person affected.	





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The Reporting Process - What happens after a report is made?

Under the FAW Discrimination Regulations, the relevant authority will:

ACKNOWLEDGE

The report will be acknowledged within two Business Days.

SUPPORT

Where possible, information about the FAW Victim Support Programme and guide will be provided.

RECORD

Record what was reported, when it happened, who was involved and any action taken.

INVESTIGATE

The report will be investigated, including requesting relevant statements and evidence.

UPDATE

Relevant individuals will be updated on the progress of the investigation at least every four weeks until the matter is concluded.

CHARGE

Where there is sufficient evidence, a disciplinary charge may be issued and considered by an appropriate disciplinary panel.





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Report It

Clubs should make it clear how people can report discrimination and encourage people to speak up.

Clubs should promote reporting information through:

- Club websites.
- Social media.
- Matchday programmes.
- Posters and signage.
- Player and parent communications.
- Club inductions.
- Team meetings.

A simple message can make a difference:

See It. Report It. Challenge Discrimination.

How To Report

You can report an incident of discrimination at any level of the game in Wales by filling in the online FAW '[Discrimination Reporting](#)' form or by contacting the relevant authority:

Football Association of Wales (Tiers 1-3) – discipline@faw.cymru

North Wales Coast FA – discipline@nwcfa.org

North East Wales FA – discipline@newfa.co.uk

Central Wales FA – cwfadiscipline@gmail.com

West Wales FA – discipline.secretary.wwfa@gmail.com

South Wales FA – discipline@southwalesfa.co.uk

Gwent FA – kevin.jones@gwentfa.co.uk

You can also email ReportIT@FAW.Cymru for further advice.





SANCTIONS

Discrimination Can Have Serious Consequences

Where a charge is proven, sanctions under the current FAW Discrimination Regulations can include:

- Match or time-based suspension.
- Financial penalties.
- Mandatory 'Challenging Discrimination in Football' education.
- Club financial penalties.
- Partial or full ground closure.
- Points deductions or competition disqualification in appropriate circumstances.
- Requirements for Clubs to develop an anti-discrimination action plan.

The seriousness of an incident and relevant mitigating or aggravating factors are considered when determining sanctions.

The [FAW Discrimination Regulations](#) should always be consulted for the current position.



EDUCATION

Education Is Part Of Prevention

Education is essential to creating a football environment where discrimination is understood, challenged and prevented.

Players, Coaches, Officials, volunteers, parents and supporters all have a role to play.

Education can help people:

- Recognise discrimination.
- Understand its impact.
- Challenge discriminatory behaviour.
- Understand their responsibilities.
- Know how to report concerns.
- Build confidence to be an active ally.

Education And Safeguarding Are Central

The FAW's Discrimination Regulations contain specific provisions for education. Irrespective of whether a charge is given the appropriate authority can require completion of the 'Challenging Discrimination in Football' educational course or participation in a workshop.

Clubs should always consider safeguarding, welfare, education and the individual's circumstances when responding to incidents particularly those involving children and young people.





Club PAWB Programme

Make Education Part of Club Life

Don't wait for an incident to happen. Education should not only happen after something goes wrong.

Consider providing regular opportunities for:

- Players.
- Coaches.
- Volunteers.
- Club officials.
- Parents and guardians.
- Team managers.
- Supporters and matchday volunteers.

Use induction, team meetings, coach development, parent meetings and Club communications to reinforce your expectations.

Prevention is stronger when anti-discrimination becomes part of everyday Club culture.

FAW PAWB Education Programme

The FAW PAWB programme provides education and resources to support equality, diversity and inclusion across football.

Clubs can access resources covering areas including discrimination, language, inclusion and specific forms of prejudice.

The Challenging Discrimination in Football (CDIF) course provides education designed to increase understanding and support positive action.

Visit the FAW's [PAWB website](#) for educational resources and the FAW's Off-Field Education platform [Dosbarth](#) for educational courses.



LANGUAGE

Language Matters

Words can shape culture and language influences how people understand themselves, other people and the world around them.

Words can reinforce stereotypes, create barriers and make people feel excluded.

Language also changes over time, and people may have different preferences about how they describe themselves.

The best approach is to:

- Listen.
- Be respectful.
- Avoid assumptions.
- Ask where appropriate.
- Use the language people use for themselves (where appropriate).
- Educate others.
- Challenge discriminatory language when you hear it.

Learn More About Respectful Language

For more detailed guidance on appropriate, respectful and discriminatory language, download the FAW's '[Language & Terminology Guide](#)'.

The guide provides further information to help individuals and Clubs understand terminology and recognise language that may be discriminatory or offensive.





CAMPAIGNING

Campaigning in Football

Football can be a vehicle for change and has an enormous ability to reach people, influence conversations and bring communities together.

Clubs can use their visibility to challenge prejudice, celebrate diversity and encourage people to take positive action.

Campaigning does not need to be complicated. A matchday message, social media post, player video, community activity or educational session can help start a conversation.

Effective campaigning should:

- Have a clear message.
- Explain why the issue matters.
- Encourage positive action.
- Use accessible language.
- Give people somewhere to find further information.
- Promote reporting where appropriate.
- Involve players and club members.
- Reflect the club's values throughout the season.

Campaigns work best when they are part of a wider commitment rather than a one-off activity.





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Campaign Resources

Clubs can support established campaigns and use FAW resources to raise awareness.

Examples include:

Show Racism the Red Card – campaign using football to challenge racism and promote anti-racism education.

Football v Homophobia – A campaign challenging discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in football.

FAW PAWB Campaign Resources

Resources are available on the [Resources](#) page of the FAW's PAWB website to help Clubs raise awareness and campaign against discrimination.





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CLUB CULTURE

Make Anti-discrimination And Inclusion Part Of Your Club Culture

Every Club should have clear arrangements for preventing and responding to discrimination.

Consider having:

- A named [PAWB Equality Champion](#).
- A registered [Club Safeguarding Officer](#).
- Clear reporting routes.
- Appropriate [Codes of Conduct](#).
- An [equality and anti-discrimination policy](#).
- Accessible complaints and grievance procedures.
- Regular education and awareness activities.
- Clear matchday procedures.
- Appropriate recording and monitoring of incidents.
- A process for reviewing lessons learned.

The aim is not simply to respond to incidents. It is to build a culture where discrimination is challenged before it becomes normalised.





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Everyone Has A Role To Play

Together, we can challenge discrimination at all levels of football. Creating a more inclusive game is not the responsibility of one person, one Club or one organisation.

Clubs set expectations and create culture. Coaches and officials model behaviour and challenge concerns. Players can speak up and support teammates. Parents and supporters influence the environment around young people and teams.

Everyone can recognise, challenge and report discrimination and football should be a place where people can participate, belong and enjoy the game without being targeted because of who they are.

Challenge Behaviour, Not People

If it is safe to do so, challenge discriminatory behaviour when you see or hear it. Keep your response, calm, clear and proportionate.

If you see discrimination:



Football is for everyone, everywhere in Wales.





Club PAWB Programme

CLWB PAWB

Club PAWB

The Club PAWB Programme provides Clubs with a framework to strengthen equality, diversity and inclusion.

Clubs can use the programme to consider how their approach:

Creates Opportunity

Everyone has meaningful opportunities to participate.

Creates A Welcoming Environment

People feel respected, included and able to belong.

Reflects Diversity

The Club recognises and reflects the diversity of its community.

Takes Positive Action

The Club actively challenges barriers and discrimination.

Appointing a named PAWB Equality Champion can help provide ownership, coordination and accountability within the Club.

Visit the [Club PAWB Programme](#) website for further information.





Club PAWB Programme

FURTHER SUPPORT

Challenging discrimination is everyone's responsibility and creating an inclusive football environment does not happen through one policy, campaign or training session. It is built through the everyday actions of Clubs, Players, Coaches, volunteers, parents, supporters and Officials.

If you need advice, guidance or support, there are a range of FAW resources and programmes available to help your Club understand, prevent and respond to discrimination.

Resources available:

FAW Discrimination Regulations

Understand the current [Discrimination regulations](#), reporting requirements and potential sanctions.

PAWB Resources

Access [education](#), [educational courses](#) and [practical resources](#) to support equality, diversity and inclusion.

Challenging Discrimination In Football

Complete the FAW [Challenging Discrimination in Football course](#) to develop understanding and confidence in challenging discrimination.

Victim Support Programme

Access free, confidential and independent support through the [Victim Support Programme](#) if you have been affected by discrimination.

Club PAWB

Find out how your Club through the [Club PAWB Programme](#) can strengthen its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion and create a more welcoming environment for everyone.

Campaign Resources

Use FAW and partner campaign [resources](#) to raise awareness and encourage positive action within your Club and community.

Further information can be found at www.PAWB.Cymru. For further guidance or support, please contact PAWB@FAW.CYMRU.