Watford FC Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2025-2029

Watford FC equality

THE ORIGINAL FAMILY CLUB

COMMUNITY SPORTS & EDUCATION TRUST

REGISTERED CHARITY NO: 1102239

FOREWORD

It's a pleasure to write this opening statement for our updated EDI Strategy and re-iterate our commitment to making our workplaces and stadium as inclusive as possible.

Through this document, we aim to share our ongoing belief that a true commitment to EDI is born of actions much more than words. And the driving of those actions by dedicated and committed staff, who are passionate about making a difference for our supporters, local community contacts and the town of Watford itself.

We are proud to be one of only two clubs to hold the Advanced Health check level of the Premier League EDI Standard and the Gold Standard of the EFL EDI Code of Practice concurrently and have consistently demonstrated our passion for remaining at the forefront of the work being done across the game to improve equality.

Our senior leadership team will continue to support our objectives at every turn. We will draw on the club's proud history of being 'The Original Family Club' and continue to enhance the great work we've done since we first started our EDI journey in the 1970s and 80s, holding ourselves accountable for our progress at all times.

Everyone at the club regardless of their background or beliefs, continues to be proud of the campaigns we've run and the work we do to make our club as inclusive as possible on matchdays, in our workforce and in our local community.

Our 'Watford Welcomes' initiative is about to enter its seventh season and has continued to go from strength to strength. As part of this campaign, the 'We Allies' group of supporters and local community contacts have helped further enhance relationships with representatives from a wide range of beliefs, faiths and purposes.

Awareness and education are vital tools for positive change, and we use those as part of our 'We Campaign', which was launched in 2019 and encourages the calling out of all forms of discrimination – wherever they may occur in relation to the Club's activities – with over 200 reports now received since its inception, and appropriate action taken with all.

As we said in our last strategy document, we know there is no finishing line for this important work and our ongoing journey of inclusive development will continue. With our activities representing and engaging with the heart and soul of the community which surrounds it, Watford FC will always be a club for everyone.



Scott Duxbury
Chairman and CEO

INTRODUCTION

This strategy document sets out our continuing commitment to grow and develop our processes, policies and priorities relating to all of the protected characteristics.

Our club-wide EDI Action plan will accompany this document to provide focus and enable us to measure our progress. The action plan will be the central pillar of our work and will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis throughout the duration of this strategy. Detailed action plans for each department will be produced at the start of every season.

The work we continue to undertake will form our submissions to the EFL EDI Code of Conduct. We will continue to work towards meeting the Gold Level of this standard until the club is promoted, at which point we will return to the Premier League EDI Standard.

KEY OBJECTIVES

The club's key objectives (listed below) demonstrate that equality, diversity and inclusion are business-wide priorities and that our Watford Welcomes initiative is supported by the Board.

- Build a common understanding of the purpose, vision and direction of Watford FC supported by the values and behaviours of Watford Welcomes and embraced by the Watford FC family.
- Develop a high-performance culture where people are respected, rewarded and empowered to reach their full potential regardless of the 9 Protected Characteristics.
- Develop a sustainable business model which reduces the dependency on media and match day income together as a whole team.
- Develop a team of disciplined, hungry footballers who are role models for young people of all backgrounds while playing a brand of exciting attacking football.
- Build a premier stadium with supporting infrastructure, thus being inclusive of our diverse fanbase and guests.
- Establish effective communication within the whole team, creating a united integrated team philosophy with equality for all.

CORE STRATEGIES

The club's Internal EDI Working Group created our core strategies when our Watford Welcomes initiative was launched at the start of the 2018/19 season. These values have been reviewed at the start of each EDI Strategy

- **DIVERSITY:** Work together within our diverse local community to deliver our EDI vision
- **EMPOWERMENT:** Empower all those involved with our club
- **EQUALITY:** Treat everyone fairly and equally without exception
- **FAMILY:** Continue to champion our reputation as the original family club
- **INCLUSION:** Commit to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment
- **RESPECT:** Promote a safe and supportive culture of respect amongst all staff and supporters.
- **TOGETHER:** The Board, senior leadership team and staff acknowledge that everyone has a role to play in our EDI work.

EDI RESOURCE

In order to further our ambitions, the club will continue to employ an EDI Lead to oversee our ongoing commitment to inclusion and manage all related activities across the club.

The EDI Lead will also manage the We Campaign to ensure all discrimination is dealt with effectively and efficiently and work with the club's Senior Management team to provide leadership on EDI related issues across all areas of the club.

Our EDI Internal Working Group will continue to include representatives from every area of the club and work with the EDI Lead to ensure our work is embedded at all levels. The group will meet regularly to review progress against our departmental Equality Action Plans.

The Mat Robinson awards recognise the immense contribution made to our EDI work by our late colleague Mat, who was an original member of the club's Internal Working group. The awards are given to three members of staff who are nominated by colleagues and have gone above and beyond to reflect our core values and/or made a significant contribution to our EDI work.

EDI CALENDAR

At the start of each season, the Club and Trust's EDI team will produce an EDI Calendar, which will provide staff with a selection of key dates, awareness campaigns, learning & development opportunities and events taking place across the course of the year.

The calendar will be a resource for all staff to demonstrate a visible and supportive role, which helps us on our commitment to respecting and celebrating diverse communities, cultures, and faiths.

As part of the club's continued commitment to the Premier League and EFL Equality, Diversity & Inclusion standards, all employees should attend one EDI Awareness session, and a minimum of one additional course/session from this calendar, each season.

The calendar will also help break down barriers and enhance our inclusive environment, detailing the latest inclusive terminology, providing information about different religious festivals and supporting staff in organising their own inclusion campaigns, events, and activities.

WORKFORCE GOALS

We have identified long-term aspirational goals in relation to our workforce, allowing us to measure the success of our inclusion work. These goals are driven by the census data for the town of Watford.

We will measure our progress against these goals through the annual data collection window for our workforce, which will take place in October each year, and publish the data we collect bi-annually as part of our adherence to FA Rule N.

We are keen to have a workforce which represents the community in which we operate and engage in. Having met the goal identified in our previous strategy for Disability and following analysis of the data collected during the most recent window in October 2024, we have chosen to increase our focus on the characteristics listed below.

- Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage
- Female

We will also use the data collected each season to continue monitoring staff numbers for other protected characteristics, to ensure they continue to reflect the local census data.

The tables below show our goals, as a percentage of our workforce.

Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage		
Year		% Goal
2025	Baseline	13.7%
2027	2 years	20.4%
2029	4 years	27.1%

Female		
Year		% Goal
2025	Baseline	37.6%
2027	2 years	44.5%
2029	4 years	51.4%

Actions related to these goals are identified and detailed in each season's EDI Monitoring Report, created in January each year, in order to meet the percentage increases. All actions are also included in the club's EDI Action Plan.

WATFORD FC WOMEN'S TEAM

The club will continue to support the further development of the Watford Women's first team and development squads, with the overall aim of playing at the highest levels of women's football.

Regular use of the club's training ground already takes place and the team's social media accounts are also fully utilised to encourage more attendance at matches.

Each season, a number of fixtures will be played at our Vicarage Road Stadium to help continue building the profile of both the team, and women's football in general, across our town, with the longer-term goal to play all matches at our home stadium.

To further support the team, we will continue to seek innovative ways to attract further investment in the women's team from outside the club and our head of women's football will continue to sit on the club's senior leadership team.

SUPPORTER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The 'Watford Welcomes' initiative brings our historic family club ethos together with our ongoing work in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

As with our workforce goals, our work under the Watford Welcomes initiative is driven by fan data, collated on a bi-annual basis, allowing us to spot trends and make evidence-based decisions.

As a result of the most recent 'Getting to Know You' survey data, collected in May 2024, we continue to focus on the following areas:

- Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage
- Disability
- Age
- Female engagement
- LGBTQ+
- Religion

Our 'We Allies' External Equality Advisory group has played a key role in developing our work with the communities identified. We Allies aims to create a safe space for members to be themselves without fear, share the work they all do, and in which we respect and value people's differences, be they visible or otherwise.

We Allies has also become a space where all members can further educate each other on EDI related topics on which some of us might be less knowledgeable, and to learn from one another's lived experiences, ideas and perspectives. Our annual Mat Robinson awards for staff are selected by a panel of members from We Allies, and their input has been sought and included within this strategy document.

We will continue to consult with the We Allies to advise, guide and support us as we gather a better understanding of different cultures, beliefs and backgrounds. This will enable us to maintain the strong, day to day relationships we've forged with the group members, so they feel comfortable in being able to give advice and correcting us when needed.

The links we have built place the club at the very centre of each community. The groups we've worked with have the confidence to recommend further ties with new groups and charities, while job vacancies are also shared with all groups to support our drive to meet the club's workforce targets.

Membership of the group is not limited, and we will continue to explore opportunities to add individual supporters, groups and local community partners to We Alles. Meetings are held at least twice each season, and all members receive invitations to events relating to the club's EDI work which take place throughout the year.

Groups representing the Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage communities such as the Watford Muslim Youth Centre Trust, Watford Indian Association, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Watford Chinese Community, Watford African Caribbean Association, Watford Kenyan Association, Watford Gurdwara, Bhaktivedanta Manor and the Al Zahra Centre are all in regular contact with our EDI Lead and have members within the We Allies.

The club will also continue to support and participate in national awareness campaigns that are relevant to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage communities, both on matchdays and using our social media channels and websites. These include Black History Month, South Asian Heritage Month, Islamophobia Awareness Month, Windrush Day and others.

Women Of Watford FC, a dedicated group for women who follow our teams and the first of its kind in football, was created by supporters at the end of the 2020/21 season. The group has given women more of a voice within the club and also aim to inspire and empower future generations of female fans. We will continue to work closely with the group to develop and deliver a range of initiatives to help them achieve their aims.

Our annual Women at the Game week awareness campaign aims to amplify the voices of women connected to the club and will continue to be part of our calendar. We have also developed partnerships with Watford Women's Centre and continue to support the Her Game Too campaign, White Ribbon Day and World Menopause Day, which we support by hosting 'Make Menopause Matter', a bespoke event which sees a panel of experts discuss all aspects of the menopause.

Since making our commitment to meeting the accessible stadia guidelines in 2015, our provision for supporters, workers and visitors with disabilities has dramatically improved.

We will continue to identity further opportunities to enhance our provision and work closely with Watford FC Enables, the disabled supporters' association, to manage our existing facilities and ensure they are involved in all discussions relating to accessibility.

Given the impact of the ageing population being reflected in our supporter base, which we identified in the Getting to Know You survey, we will also continue to review our provision for supporters with mobility requirements and other health related concerns.

We will also work closely with Level Playing Field to support their activities and are planning to undertake a full access audit during 2025/26. The club has also reached level 2 of the Disability Confident employer's scheme and works with a number of local organisations to promote disability in the workplace, such as Mission Employable and Step2Skills, with the aim of reaching level 3.

The club's ongoing dialogue with Proud Hornets, our LGBTQ+ supporters' group, led to the creation of Hornets Pride Week, our own annual awareness campaign, in 2022 and we have further strengthened ties to our local LGBTQ+ community beyond our supporter base by becoming sponsors of Herts Pride, an annual event held in Watford each year.

Our local commitment continues with our support for Proud Watford, a volunteer-led group which aims to deliver a range of events working alongside Watford people, groups, organisations, businesses and other allies. The club will also continue to support the national Football v Homophobia campaign, which aims to challenge discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression at all levels of football.

Launched in 2021 the Jewish Hornets supporters' group were also the first group of its kind in football and have been instrumental in providing advice and guidance relating to Jewish people. Working with the Jewish Hornets we have also established links with local Synagogues and worked with Maccabi GB and the Holocaust Memorial Trust to provide education for players and staff around antisemitism.

ESEA Hornets are another supporters' group who represent people from East and South-East Asian backgrounds, with strong ties to the town's Chinese community. We have arranged regular coaching sessions at the club's training ground with members and supported the Frank Soo Foundation.

Our ongoing relationships with all of the groups and community partners detailed have led to the successful hosting of several events to celebrate religious and cultural festivals across the year, including Chanukah parties, Lunar New Year celebrations and Iftar events for both adults and children during Ramadan, as well as hosting a Christmas party for our Junior Hornets supporters' group at the stadium.

The Watford Welcomes initiative will continue to underpin the supporter and community engagement aspect of our work.

TACKLING DISCRIMINATION

The club's We campaign was launched at the start of the 2019/20 season as a result of racist abuse aimed at our black players following the FA Cup semi-final against Wolves in April 2019.

The campaign provides a clearer route for supporters to report incidents of discrimination. In our most recent 'Getting to Know You' supporters survey, more than 75 per cent of supporters were aware of the campaign, which sees dedicated club staff working with the hate crime unit at Herts Police and an external consultancy we work with in relation to offensive social media posts, to investigate and take appropriate action with all incidents reported.

We continue to encourage incidents to be reported to us on matchdays and on our social media accounts. All incidents are recorded to track progress and review areas of concern which may need more focus as part of our EDI Action Plan. The data below shows the total number of incidents, with recorded outcomes, since the Campaign's launch.

Discrimination	2024-25	2023-24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	Total
Racism	25	16	24	24	7	10	106
Homophobia	11	6	4	14	3	10	48
Sexism	5	6	3	7	1	1	23
Antisemitism	2	1	2	3	0	1	9
Homophobia & Racism	3	1	0	4	0	0	8
Disablism	3	2	0	1	0	0	6
Homophobia & Sexism	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
Transphobia	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
Racism, Homophobia & Sexism	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Islamophobia	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Ageism	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Antisemitism & Islamophobia	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Racism & Disablism	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Racism & Sexism	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Grand Total	52	36	38	56	11	22	215

Outcome	2024-25	2023-24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	Total
Unable to Progress	20	8	14	18	3	11	74
Education	15	16	12	17	5	5	70
Shared with away club	7	4	2	4	1	1	19
Yellow cards	2	2	4	9	0	0	17
Social Media accounts blocked	3	5	2	2	2	1	15
Stadium Ban	0	0	2	3	0	1	6
Behaviour Agreement	1	1	1	1	0	2	6
Police investigation ongoing	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Police Caution	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Suspension (Trust events)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Warning (Trust events)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Exclusion (Trust events)	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Employee Dismissed	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Grand Total	52	36	38	56	11	22	215

Through the help of our supporters, we strongly believe these outcomes are a positive reflection of the processes we have put in place and reaffirm our clear message that there is no place for discriminatory language and behaviour at our matches, home or away, and that reporting these incidents can lead to strong action being taken against individuals.

All staff and players will continue to be strongly encouraged to use the We Campaign to highlight incidents of discrimination in the workplace. The Club is also committed to providing a summary of reports and outcomes each season and will be reviewing our reporting process on regular basis.

We will continue to support the work of Kick It Out and Show Racism The Red Card to educate supporters, players and staff as part of the Campaign. We will also continue to find ways to help our players, staff and people associated with the club in vocalising and representing their views and beliefs.

WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITY, SPORTS & EDUCATION TRUST

Working closely with the Trust's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Officer, we will continue to ensure that the Club and Trust remain aligned in order to achieve our goals. Members of Trust staff are included and participate fully in the club's internal equality working group, as well as managing their own sub-groups.

The Trust's action plans are regularly reviewed to ensure they accurately mirror the club's objectives wherever possible. The Trust are also audited independently; the Capability Code of Practice contains EDI elements and is managed by the Premier League Charitable Fund.

We will also work closely with the Trust to develop EDI knowledge and awareness for all staff. The well-being of our staff is of paramount importance. Using the Trust's expertise in working with people experiencing mental health issues, our EDI Lead and Safeguarding team will ensure that all staff members are given full support as well as raising awareness of issues across the business.