



Here for every goal

An academic-led report examining the positive influence women's and girls' football can have on society; creating impact on and off the pitch.

March, 2024



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Introduction

This report looks at how the growth of professional women's football, alongside facilitating participation in the game for young girls, can have a significant and positive impact on society now, and in the future.

The life skills developed through participation in football can play a crucial role in the development of confidence, leadership, teamwork and other psychological and psychosocial life skills. The skills gained can even shift perceptions in young girls about their future career prospects and set them up for success in all areas of life.

No matter what your goal is, football can help provide life skills that set you up for success.

The future is looking bright for the women's game, and inspiration is everywhere.



**The impact will be felt beyond the pitch.
That's why we're here for every goal.**

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Contributors



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The benefits of growing the game at the grassroots level

This section presents the findings of a literature review to highlight the benefits of growing women's and girls' football at the grassroots level, and how this can set women and girls up for success in all areas of life.

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The benefits of participation: life skills

Through our literature review, we've found that playing football is meaningful, with girls who play gaining life skills that go beyond participation in sport, directly contributing to personal growth and identity formation.

Team sport, in general, contributes to the development of positive individual skills such as resilience, emotion management and self-esteem (psychological skills), connectedness and reduced social anxiety (psychosocial skills) and cooperation, respect and teamwork (social skills) ^[1].

Football, specifically, builds girls' confidence.

Research highlights that 80% feel more confident as a result of playing in their team and 48% more confident than other girls their age ^[2].

For some girls, football is pivotal to their identity construction and 'provided the principal, or even only space in which they felt they achieved and excelled' ^[3].

For many girls who play for a club, their football identity is key, and it formed their present and future aspirations ^[4].

"From my own experience with playing football, I know just how much the sport can help develop life skills that go beyond the pitch. In my more recent experience as a coach, I've seen the power of participation in action, seeing players not only gradually build confidence, but also seeing the teamwork and leadership skills developing through how they organise themselves on the pitch."

Kelly Smith, Barclays Football Ambassador

The power of participation

Participation in team sports such as football builds life skills that go beyond the playing field, improving girls' confidence, self-esteem, resilience, and ability to work in a team.

For some girls, their football identity is core to who they are, and playing allows them to express themselves, offering a space to excel. Involvement in football can play a role in the perceptions of girls' future lives and career choices, and the life skills learnt provides players with the tools needed to build their future successful selves.



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The benefits of participation: social skills

Beyond the significant benefits in development of personal and life skills, we've also found that football is integral to developing social relationships and enabling collective empowerment in young girls.

Research has found that girls love football, it brings them pleasure and they value playing, seeing their friends, and ultimately, the freedom participation brings ^[10].

In Australia, research on girls playing male-dominated sports has highlighted the significance of social connectedness in girls' continued participation ^[11,12].

Playing team sports such as Australian rules football, cricket and football allowed girls to create a 'sisterhood', a bond unlike other friendships in that it provided a 'safety net' to challenge the perception of girls who play these sports ^[11].

This allowed girls to feel part of a movement, enabling them to break down barriers in normalising girls' involvement in male-dominated team sports ^[11]. This also contributed to retaining girls' participation, a significant finding given the challenges associated with girls' participation in team sports. Football acts as a sanctuary, affording players safety and comfort from everyday life pressures ^[10].

Empowered sisterhoods

Football can be integral to developing social relationships and fostering a sense of community for girls.

This togetherness comes from joining and creating a footballing community that has wide-reaching benefits for players. The 'sisterhood' that develops in sports such as football enables girls to feel part of something special that extends beyond their team. As a collective, girls can feel empowered to break down barriers and change the narrative on girls in football.



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The benefits of participation: workplace skills

This personal growth also has a proven correlation to success in business and later life – meaning increasing access to football for young girls could increase the number of potential future female leaders.

It has long been assumed that the 'principles of elite performance in sport are easily transferable to the business context', including ideas connected to leadership, teamwork and coping with stress^[5]. Early learning experiences in sport have been highlighted as important for leader development^[6], and in the US it's been shown that women who have been athletes during high school earn more when they enter the workforce^[7].

Recent global research has highlighted the significance of sport participation on the success of female business leaders, where it was found that nearly all (94%) senior executive women had played sport, with 72% of these women indicating that sport could help to accelerate a woman's career^[8].

In Ireland, research in 2023 highlighted similar findings: three quarters (75%) of female business decision makers had participated in sport, a figure that increased to nearly all (90%) of the female Chief Executive Officers^[9]. These women also saw the value of sport in their workforce, with most (88%) believing that skills learned through sport – such as teamwork, confidence, communication, leadership and

self-belief – can be easily transferred into the boardroom, and almost half (45%) of the female business leaders look for sport participation in job applications^[9].

Creating a generation of leaders

There has long been a link between sport and business, with many ideas about effective business teams and leadership coming from the sports world.

Research indicates that lots of women who are senior executives have played sport, and of those, many of those women recognise the valuable skills learnt through playing sport – teamwork, leadership, communication, confidence and self-belief – that has enabled success in their business careers. Some of these women look out for other sportswomen when reviewing job applications.



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Barclays' participation programmes

Barclays believes that as an influential brand involved in professional football sponsorship, particularly in women's football, they have a responsibility to also assist with the development of the grassroots game.

That's why, in partnership with The Football Association, Barclays has been working to provide girls with equal access to play football in schools.

The Barclays Girls' Football School Partnerships (BGFSP)

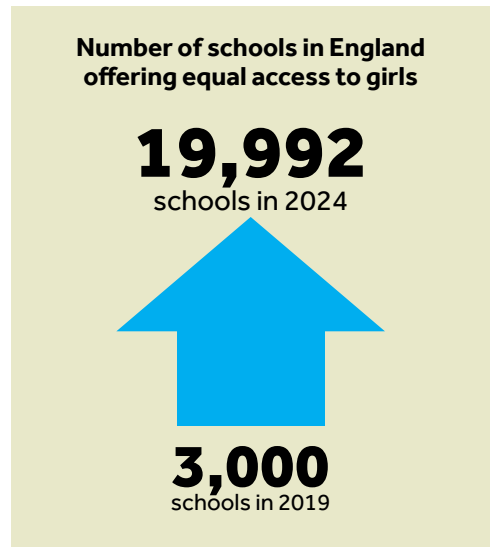
Football can have such a strong positive impact on young people and that's why we're dedicated to giving girls the same opportunities as boys to play football at school. School is often the first exposure girls have to playing football, which is why it's so important that they have the same equal access opportunities to play it.

The BGFSP kicked-off with a committed network of 100 specialist hubs, each delivering girls' football programmes in PE or Games lessons, supporting teachers in primary schools with training and resources. We've grown from 3,000 schools in 2019, to 19,992 schools in 2024.

"Women's football needs continued investment and support, that's why I'm so happy that Barclays is always there to deliver on what they promise. Football is our national game and it should be accessible to everyone, not just so we can support the girls who want to play professionally, but because football teaches us so many amazing skills that we need for everything in life, from making friends to being a good leader."

Ian Wright, Former Professional Footballer & Barclays Football Ambassador

The Barclays Game On programme also provides training and support for secondary school teachers to engage girls in physical education through football, and in addition aims to support and develop young female leaders through its leadership training module.



Creating sisterhoods through The Barclays Community Football Fund

We also know that this increased demand for participation means it's more important than ever to also increase opportunities for young girls to play outside of school. The Barclays Community Football Fund, delivered by Sported, has a specific arm of funding for clubs who are striving to make their club more accessible to girls.

Since we launched the fund in 2022, a huge 84% of our beneficiary community groups have been awarded funds to support their goals of increasing access to football for women and girls. We're proud to help create more safe spaces for girls to get involved in football and excel in their newfound sisterhoods.



The benefits of growing the game at the professional level

This section presents the findings of a literature review to outline the growth of the professional game over recent years, and the significance of role models in the development of women's and girls' football overall.

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Benefits of growing the professional game

Women's football has seen significant, exponential growth across the world, in terms of professionalisation, media coverage and fan support ^[13].

Women's Sport Trust research found that in 2023, 74% of the total women's sport viewing time was for women's football ^[14]. 29.2million people watched the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup (WWC), where 12.1m of these viewers had not watched the men's 2022 FIFA World Cup ^[14].

Back on home turf, since the 2019/20 season, average attendances at Barclays Women's Super League games are up by 230%. The average viewership figures for BWSL have been consistently growing during the same timeframe, with the current average for 2023/24 representing a huge increase of 577% ^[15]. On digital channels there was significant growth, including BWSL TikTok video views reaching 150 million in 2023, an increase of 268% from the previous year ^[14].

Increased coverage provides opportunities to reach new, diverse audiences, and 43% of new viewers of the WWC watched women's sport afterwards ^[14]. Attendance at BWSL matches has grown by 200% since the Lionesses became European Champions in 2022 ^[16]. This trend has continued into 2024 whereby the league attendance record was

broken in February 2024 when Arsenal hosted Manchester United at a sold-out Emirates Stadium. The cultural significance of the sport also grows as highlighted by the first ever launch of Panini's domestic women's football sticker book for 2023/24, with the stickers selling in their millions ^[18].

Visibility leads to victory

Football plays a key role in the visibility of women's sport, and the significant growth in BWSL attendances and viewing figures in the last 5 years, alongside international success, has provided an opportunity to reach new audiences and create fans of the women's game. Women's football is important to people and its popularity is on a strong upward trajectory. This positive trend is documented by record-breaking attendances, heightened fan engagement on digital media, and BWSL stickers selling out.



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Benefits of growing the professional game: showcasing more relatable role models

It is important that women and girls have female sporting role models, which enables a vision of success, personifies possible future selves, challenges stereotypes^[19], and can contribute to continued participation in male-dominated sports^[12].

More girls can now see footballing role models to aspire to due to the increased visibility of the women's game.

Players themselves have welcomed this position of responsibility in encouraging more girls to play football^[20]. Beyond playing, research has shown the significance of female role models across the sporting landscape. The presence of female coaches as role models can enhance feelings of social inclusion for girls in sport^[21].

Even more so, there is now evidence that female football coaches have been inspired to pursue a coaching career by fellow female coaches in the game^[22]. A historic lack of visibility, however, in both media coverage and in women working in the sport, has denied women and girls access to role models, giving them fewer examples of attainable success in sport^[19].

The relatable role model effect

“She needs to see it to be it” is paramount for women and girls in football. The power of female role models across the football landscape cannot be underestimated. This is enabled by inspirational female grassroots coaches, watching the world's best players on TV, and seeing women take on leadership positions at the highest levels of the game. The women's football trailblazers – such as Baroness Sue Campbell at the FA, Sarina Weigman as England's trophy winning head coach, Chelsea's Emma Hayes in the Barclays Women's Super League and Alex Scott in front of the camera – help to show us a future of possibilities for women in the game. Despite these advancements, there is still work to be done on gender parity and visibility of women in football across roles.



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Barclays' involvement in professional football sponsorship

In 2019, Barclays made a record-breaking commitment to women's and girls' football when the bank became the first ever title sponsor of the Barclays Women's Super League (WWSL).

Find out more about the WWSL [here](#).



Five years after Barclays became the title sponsor of the Barclays Women's Super League, it remains the biggest commercial investment into women's sport in the UK to date.

In 2021, Barclays went on to become the title partner of the second-tier women's domestic league, the Barclays Women's Championship.

This investment not only signalled confidence in the game's growth but also underscored Barclays' commitment to promoting equity throughout the sport.

"From grassroots to the top tiers of women's football, at the FA we are extremely proud of the work we have achieved through our partnership with Barclays over the past five years. Having more women and girls playing, watching and working in football not only benefits our beautiful game, it will have a positive impact on society."

Baroness Sue Campbell, The FA

The Second Half In partnership with

Visa's The Second Half programme, in partnership with Barclays, offers skills, training, and support for professional female footballers as they consider their careers beyond the football pitch following their retirement.

Developed in collaboration with Karen Carney MBE (former England international) and Kim Little MBE (Arsenal Captain and former Scotland international), the programme helps players to see new future career pathways and how to transition the skills they have learnt as professional footballers, ready for when they hang up their boots.

To date 100 players have benefitted from the programme, which is currently in its third year of running. Find out more about The Second Half [here](#).

"For the women's game to continue to succeed, creating long-term career paths for players is a must. That's why teaming up with Visa on The Second Half programme, in partnership with Barclays, to help athletes recognise their potential off the pitch continues to be a source of pride for me."

Karen Carney MBE



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Barclays' involvement in professional football sponsorship: empowering role models

We know the growth and influence of the women's professional game extends beyond the pitch. Barclays is proud to be the Lead Partner of Women in Football (WiF), the professional women's network helping to upskill, empower and connect more women working in and around football.



In partnership with
 BARCLAYS

As lead partner of Women in Football, Barclays believes in creating opportunities for women to develop careers at every level in the football industry. Barclays work with WiF on the following activity:

Be Inspired Conference

A forum for career progression which brings together WiF members at Wembley Stadium for two days of networking, expert panels and inspirational keynote speakers. Since its launch in 2022, the conference has already empowered 700 women with knowledge, insights and connections.

Leadership Course

To date nearly 600 women have benefitted from the opportunity to develop their potential as individuals, enhance personal skills and learn new ones in a positive, supportive environment. Levels 1-4 of the course are open exclusively to women who are already working, or aspire to work, in the football industry.

#Getonside

Launched in 2021, which continues to attract pledges of action from organisations and individuals in both professional and grassroots football – and all points in between – to level the playing field for women and girls, on and off the pitch.

The partnership with Women in Football is a vitally important aspect of the work Barclays do in supporting equality and inclusion across the game. Find out more about WiF [here](#).

" We have a long-standing working relationship with Barclays, who have been unwavering in their support of the work of Women in Football. This commitment presents us with a fantastic opportunity to push forward with great momentum, offering opportunities, training and support for girls and women in and around the football industry."

Yvonne Harrison, CEO Women in Football

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Barclays' involvement in professional football sponsorship

Creating role models through
the Barclays Community
Football Fund.

Recognising that increasing the number of high-quality female coaches in the girls' game is crucial to improving standards and creating role models for young girls, we launched the Female Coaches for Girls fund with our Barclays Football Ambassador, Ian Wright.

Since its inception, this specific fund has helped 422 women from 240 clubs obtain funding for FA-standard coaching qualifications, diversifying the workforce and meeting demand for girls' football.



Community Football Fund





The challenges

Whilst the growth of women's and girls' football is significant, there is still work to be done to make the future we desire a reality.

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The challenges still in place

There exists a long history of formal, cultural and symbolic exclusion of women in football. Despite this, women have been playing football for centuries^[24]. Even to this day, women and girls have to navigate inequality and discrimination, rooted in gender stereotypes and misogyny, to play.

For girls now entering sport, detrimental messages around their appropriateness to participate, and simultaneous gaps in opportunity to play compared to boys, lead many to think sport is not for girls^[25].

The government's 'Raising the Bar' report (known as the 'Carney Review') cites gender stereotypes, a male-dominated culture and insufficient grassroots facilities as barriers to girls' participation^[26]. A need for greater diversity in roles across the football landscape is also referenced in the Carney Review which corresponds to research highlighting intersectional inequalities in football^[27].

Research shows continued challenges to women's and girls' acceptance in football, such as experiencing teasing and bullying for playing^[10] and sustained under-representation in both coaching^[22] and leadership roles^[28]. Furthermore, despite the success of the women's national team, Football Beyond Borders found that a quarter of teenage girls had not seen any women's football before, and 63% could not recall the names of any Lioness players^[29].

Although there have been positive changes in media coverage, women's sport still operates in a minority position, and sportswomen feel that they must achieve success to be seen as worthy of mainstream media coverage^[30].

Facing the challenges head on

Undeniably, the landscape of women's and girls' football is changing, and it is in a much better position than ever before – we are moving from exclusion to inclusion.

That said, this long history of inequality means there is still work to do to ensure girls and women feel like they both belong and can succeed in football. The Barclays Girls' Football School Partnerships recognises these barriers and aims to provide wider access to football, seeking to normalise girls' participation in football from a young age, understanding the need to establish this early on. It is also clear that continued investment at the top level of the game is vital for future growth, to build on the Lionesses' on-pitch success. This investment, however, must come alongside addressing cultural change, such as increased opportunity for, and visibility of, women in coaching and leadership positions.





The future

The future is looking bright.

Continuing to grow the women's and girls' game at both the grassroots and professional level has the potential to create an exciting future, both in football and in general for the lives of girls today.

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Looking to a positive future thanks to football

The incredible work and growth at both the professional and grassroots level of women's and girls' football is setting us up for a brighter future, and our review has made it clear just how significant the benefits could be with the continuation of this growth.





Access and participation

The future of football is bright with more women and girls accessing the sport than ever before, buoyed by the increased visibility and success of the professional women's game.

How can we ensure this valuable progress will be continued in the future?

Simultaneous efforts at both the grassroots and professional levels of the game to ensure appropriate pathways are in place for girls and women of all abilities to play and excel are essential. Through the Barclays Girls' Football School Partnerships and the Barclays Women's Super League, opportunities are available for girls and women to engage in football.

Just how big can the game get, and in what way will this growth benefit the future of the game in terms of commercial appeal, visibility and reputation?

If more people see girls playing football, and women working in the sport, the chances are higher for it to become normalised. Continued investment, appropriate resourcing, significant media coverage and education is required to ensure this becomes a reality.



2

Life skills

There are many girls that truly love football, and we know that football not only brings players joy and pleasure, but also contributes to life skill development and confidence building. Football research shows that playing can positively influence the way girls feel about themselves.

How will current players be able to apply these life skills to their future careers?

We don't know for sure, but the research we have explored indicates a correlation between previous sports participation and future business leadership, and senior executives welcome transferable skills such as teamwork, communication and confidence that sport instils.

Beyond this, the impact of role models is so powerful in sport, and seeing women occupy prominent positions across the football landscape could positively contribute to the aspirations of younger players, alongside their developed life skills.

So, will we see more women in leadership positions going forward due to childhood football participation?

We are certainly hopeful that the opportunities afforded through football, along with social capital building and life skill development, will position girls of today with the best possible chance for success in the future.



3

Societal

Whilst significant gains have been made in women's and girls' football to be celebrated, unfortunately some very real barriers to women and girls in football remain.

These are complex and are formed in a web of interconnecting issues linked to a male-dominated football culture, a lack of resources, imbalanced media coverage, and misogyny.

How can we tackle these problems to make effective change in the future?

Key to this will be normalising girls' involvement in the sport, through investing in opportunities for all girls to access football locally in appropriate facilities as we are doing with the Barclays Community Football Fund. In turn, resourcing the professional game, providing impactful media coverage and increasing the number of women in prominent roles across football will help.

How can we challenge persistent misogyny in the male-dominated environment of football?

Misogyny and sexism have long histories, but their futures will be shorter if all people work together to be advocates for gender equity and allies for social change. It is important that we call out sexism and stand-up for equality to make sure the future of football is inclusive.



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Looking to a positive future thanks to football

A 13-year-old girl today has only ever lived in a time where professional women's football exists.

Based on all the incredible benefits that growing women's and girls' football provides – just imagine what that 13-year-old girl's future could look like thanks to the game...



I'm a 13-year-old girl - I've only ever known professional women's football.

I can see women talking about football on TV, I'm watching women's football on TikTok, I can buy women's domestic football stickers, and I play football at my school.

I can wear kits and boots made just for girls, with women's names on the back.

I could be a Barclays Women's Super League captain, an England manager, or a CEO thanks to the skills I've learned through football.

No matter what my life goal ends up being, football will help me get there.

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