

| Fan Insights |

SEASON 2018/2019

FAN ENGAGEMENT INDEX //2019

THE STATE OF FAN ENGAGEMENT
IN ENGLISH FOOTBALL

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people who have helped or inspired me in some way throughout the life of this project that I don't have the space to name most of you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, all of you: your help has been invaluable.

Special thanks goes to Oliver Holtaway for his help with the statistical modelling & scoring. He helped me make sense of my idea. A special thanks to Paul Simpson for all his wise advice.

I am also indebted to a number of brilliant photographers who made their work available for free via Unsplash. Thanks to Nathan Rogers, Waldemar Brandt, Richard Boyle and Mika Korhonen. Go to unsplash.com if you want stunning images for free.

Thanks finally to my other half and son for putting up with me whilst I compiled this labour of love. I couldn't have done it without you.



4. FOREWORD

Why does football need the Fan Engagement Index? First of all, the relationship between clubs and their fans - their primary stakeholder - is ill-defined, and described in so many different ways with varying terminology.

We've failed to settle on phrases and shared definitions that we can all work to. Common phrases and shared definitions matter, because then we speak the same language, and can understand and share experiences.

Secondly, leadership and best practice in Fan Engagement isn't visible enough. As an industry, we need to be able to see in practical terms what works across the game, and at clubs of every type.

With all this, we will be able to make changes and improvements that will benefit us all.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach, but there are things that work that can be measured, and leaders in the game and good examples of Fan Engagement that need to receive more attention so that others can copy and learn from them.

Each club's Fan Engagement story is unique, and no index could capture each and every dimension of it. However, we believe that to tackle the first issue of shared definitions, there is value in creating a standard scoring system that captures essential elements of best practice and allows for comparison between clubs over time.



We have created a series of measurements in three areas: Dialogue (the process of engagement), Governance (how engagement is underpinned or reinforced internally and externally through rules & regulations), and Transparency (how that engagement is shared & made public). We analyse the scores from page 6 to page 20. There's also a breakdown of how the scoring works on page 35.

The second part - showing best practice and leadership in Fan Engagement - starts on page 22. It showcases best practice and ideas for fan engagement compiled from our own experience and other practitioners and experts.

Finally, a note about Bury FC: we have lost one of the 92 clubs that make up professional football in England, and an institution representing its community. The actual event may have been anticipated for some time, but its immediate loss is no less keenly felt. We share that loss with all those striving to revive it.

We have learned much over the years about the relationship between clubs & fans. We know the value of clubs is greater than their balance sheets & their roots deeper than the foundations of their stadiums. As the Inspirational Brian Lomax said, fans care for more than just 90 minutes. Fans are not mere consumers or users of a service.

The aim of the Fan Engagement Index is to provide a positive way to help ensure that understanding is demonstrated in practice.

Kevin Rye
**Founder and Director
Fan Insights**

6. FAN ENGAGEMENT: THE BIG PICTURE

Whilst it's tempting to bunch fans together under what unites them (being a fan) like any set of stakeholders, they don't all come in one shape and size.

Dialogue

Despite technology, the principal way for dialogue with fans is still face-to-face, and the most common three methods we've found are:

1. 'Fans forums' (any fan can attend)
2. One-to-one relationships with supporters' trusts/independent fan groups (usually between the trust board/committee and senior management/club board)
3. Fans parliaments/liaison groups (where senior management meets representatives of fans from different parts of the stadium or fanbase)

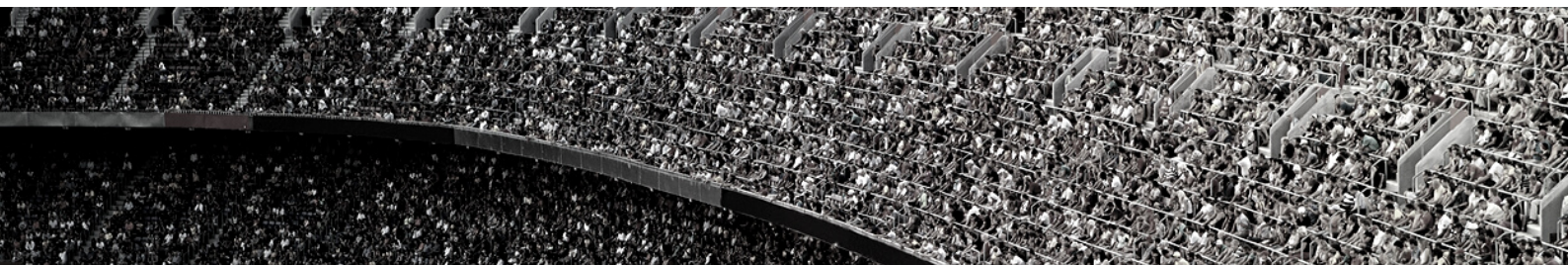
The Government Expert Working Group (EWG) classified these all as 'Structured Dialogue', but we tend to refer to these in the report with the more general 'dialogue' term, as our scoring in this area also includes Twitter as a tool for dialogue with fans.

'Whilst it's tempting to bunch fans together, they don't all come in one shape and size.'

Fans forums are the 'traditional' form of dialogue with fans, and many clubs still use them. They provide a way of communicating with a wide group of fans, and also be excellent at demonstrating transparency. Brighton & Hove Albion have successfully done these over a number of years, and others like Southampton, Northampton Town and Blackburn Rovers use them alongside other methods. Access to these needs to be as open as possible.

Direct relationships with supporters' trusts/independent groups have a very important role to play, as they are a more strategic relationship. Many clubs use them to gain a deeper insight into issues in the fanbase.

Too few clubs have them, but a few Premier League clubs including Tottenham Hotspur, Crystal Palace



FAN ENGAGEMENT: THE BIG PICTURE

and Fulham (now in the Championship) do. These clubs have had them with supporters' trusts for some years, some during times of significant upheaval, clearly benefiting from them. Some clubs like Nottingham Forest and Rochdale (and including Fulham) also have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) or similar agreement, to reinforce the relationship (see right).

Fans parliaments/liaison groups have become very popular with clubs, providing access to a more focused, but wider group of fans, helpful for consultation on pricing or stadium changes for example. Stoke City and Leicester City are two who have had them for some time.

In terms of online/social media, Twitter is the tool we have sought to measure and understand as a tool of dialogue (see page 25 & 26). It's vastly underused, and two-thirds of clubs don't operate 'Help' channels as we recommend (e.g.: Reading).

Governance

Governance is measured via

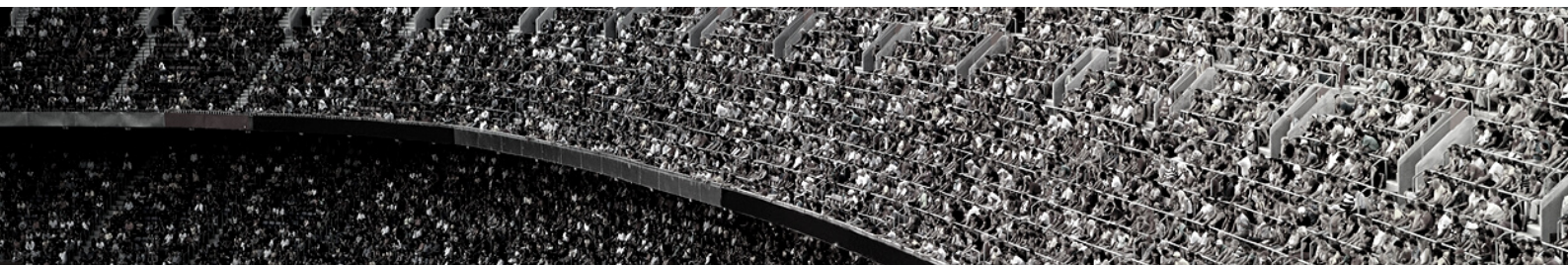
'MOUs tie-in clubs and trusts to certain obligations, reinforcing the boundaries of the relationship'

internal (club) and external (league) forms:

1. MOUs
2. Customer Charters
3. Supporter Liaison Officers
4. Fan Directors/Representatives

MOUs tie-in clubs and trusts to certain obligations, enabling information sharing in an agreed manner, whilst reinforcing the boundaries of the relationship. They provide guidance as to what is acceptable and what is not.

Customer Charters (also known as 'Club' or 'Supporter' Charters), explain what fans can expect from a club, whether a first-time matchgoer or regular supporter. SLOs must submit them before the start of the season to the EFL



FAN ENGAGEMENT: THE BIG PICTURE

or Premier League. There are some good examples, though in some cases are very difficult or impossible to find.

SLOs (Supporter Liaison Officers) are similarly under-exploited. The role is very progressive, providing someone dedicated to ensure the views of fans can be heard throughout the club - a kind of 'fan advocate', at both strategic and practical levels.

Portsmouth have used the role in a very rounded, strategic way over the years, whilst Cardiff City have used the role to help as part of a very effective de-escalation of violence & trouble by their fans.

Transparency

We have measured transparency through:

1. Reporting of all face-to-face dialogue meetings (both agendas and written reports/video/audio)
2. Reporting of the proceedings of club board meetings

Transparency across the game is patchy, and there is some work to do

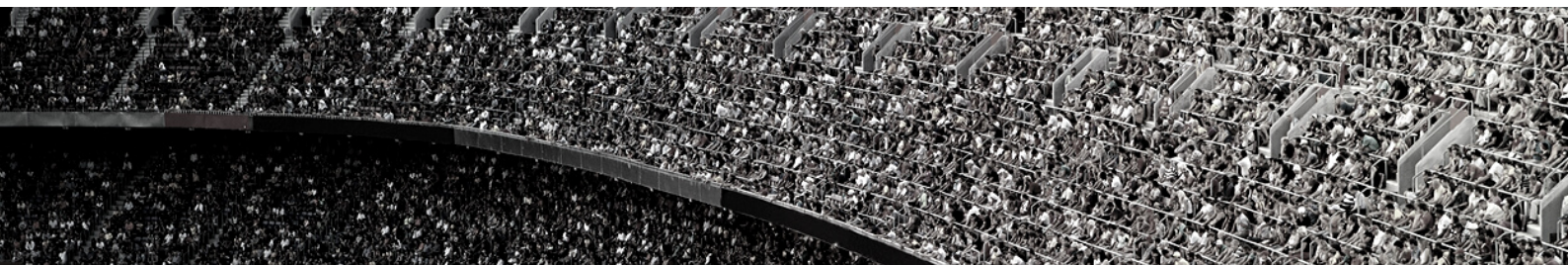
'We believe that clubs being more open about what they do at board level is important'

to ensure that Fan Engagement programmes are known about in the fanbase, and opportunities to be involved, clearly advertised/promoted.

There are some clubs who do it well. e.g.: AFC Wimbledon, Plymouth Argyle, Fulham and Grimsby Town.

We also believe that clubs being more open about what they do at board level is important, even if it just entails a regular outline of progress on certain issues.

A handful of clubs do it, whilst some do allow certain information out via their dialogue meetings as well, through minutes and reports. Derby County put video of their supporters' charter group meetings online where some of these issues are covered.



FAN ENGAGEMENT: THE BIG PICTURE

Many clubs are getting to grips with the fact that one-on-one dialogue with a representative group is increasingly expected - and desirable. There are however signs that some clubs are still intentionally excluding certain legitimate groups they don't want to hear from, in some cases appearing to use other dialogue to justify it.

One of the most often cited reasons is that such groups can be 'unrepresentative', but that is often a very subjective view, and where an organisation also actively ensures it is structured properly (e.g.: a supporters' trust) - we do think that charge is difficult if not impossible to justify.

From a very practical perspective, active exclusion of a group or type of supporter very often creates problems down the line, and for this reason we would encourage all clubs to give this issue careful, further thought.

Fan Engagement can seem at times an all-consuming part of running a football club. It requires patience,

'Active exclusion of a group or type of supporter very often creates problems further down the line'

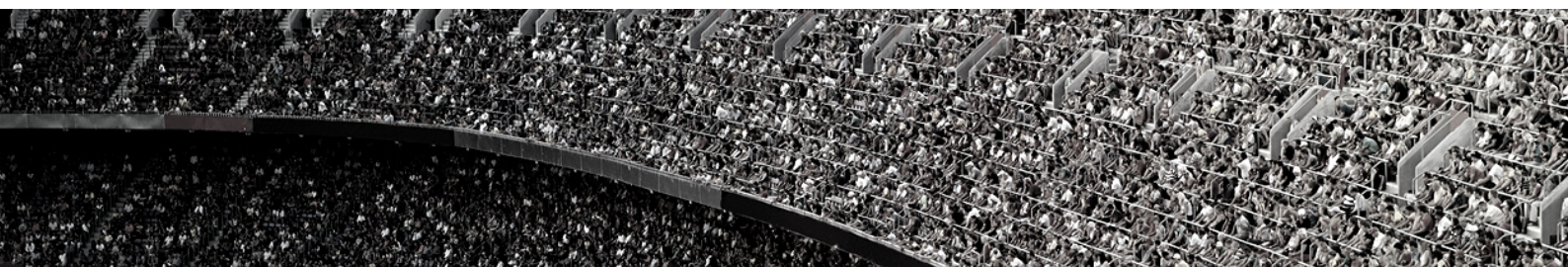
time and resources.

Sometimes it can be argued that such resources might be better spent elsewhere, on infrastructure, playing matters or on marketing/sales output.

But Fan Engagement is at the heart of a club's purpose and identity, and many of those who excel at Fan Engagement are often the ones we hold up as the best or most balanced clubs overall.

They know how to manage the demands of fans with the reality of running the business itself. They also do well because they dedicate time and resources to it.

We hope the following pages provide food for thought.



8

The number of clubs who regularly do the three types of face-to-face dialogue: Carlisle United, Cambridge United, Doncaster Rovers, Exeter City, Lincoln City, Northampton Town, Norwich City, Plymouth Argyle

3

The number of clubs who don't carry out any form of regular dialogue with their fans (this covers all forms of dialogue, including Twitter), according to our research.

5

The number of club chairs/CEOs carrying out regular Q&As (twitter, YouTube/streaming & local radio): Accrington Stanley, Norwich City, Oxford United, Peterborough United, Portsmouth

13

The number of clubs in the top four divisions in English football who don't currently have a supporters' trust or independent supporters group

11. THE FAN ENGAGEMENT LEAGUE TABLE: 1-92*

We know that anyone who's picked up the Fan Engagement Index is going to do one thing above all first: look for the results.

After all, one of the aims of the Index is to standardise the way in which Fan Engagement is measured, and clubs will want to know where they finished.

Without a table of results and the research behind it, we would just be expressing an opinion about what is or isn't effective Fan Engagement - precisely the reason we've created the Index.

We also expect that clubs will want to improve their position over time, and that's important. We want the Index to drive improvements and benefits to all.

We have a set of data behind all of this that explains the various scores for each club, and how each of these scores is reached, and we are happy to talk about these individually with clubs.

If you are a club wanting to discuss

'We believe that better understanding of fans and Fan Engagement can bring benefits to everyone'

your score, or where you can improve on what you do, we'd be happy to speak with you.

We also believe that better understanding of fans and their relationship with clubs can bring benefits to everyone, so if you're a company or organisation who wants to know more about Fan Engagement and how to make it work for you, we'd be delighted to speak with you.

Finally, if you're from a fan organisation, you're an academic, researcher, Fan Engagement or Stakeholder Engagement practitioner in football or any other sport or sector, drop us a line. We'd love to talk about the Index, and how it might be able to help you in what you do.

*Includes results for Bury FC



POSITION	CLUB	DIVISION	D	G	T	PTS
1	EXETER CITY	LEAGUE TWO	55	65	50	170
2	AFC WIMBLEDON	LEAGUE ONE	45	65	60	170
3	DONCASTER ROVERS	LEAGUE ONE	70	65	30	165
4	CARLISLE UNITED	LEAGUE TWO	60	65	35	160
5	WYCOMBE WANDERERS	LEAGUE ONE	45	65	50	160
6	LINCOLN CITY	LEAGUE TWO	60	50	40	150
7	NORWICH CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP	60	45	30	135
8	READING	CHAMPIONSHIP	70	25	30	125
9	PORTSMOUTH	LEAGUE ONE	55	45	25	125
10	CAMBRIDGE UNITED	LEAGUE TWO	55	50	20	125
11	GRIMSBY TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	45	65	15	125
12	ROCHDALE	LEAGUE ONE	40	45	35	120
13	NEWPORT COUNTY	LEAGUE TWO	40	65	15	120
14	PLYMOUTH ARGYLE	LEAGUE ONE	55	20	40	115
15	LEICESTER CITY	PREMIER LEAGUE	45	25	35	105
16	CRAWLEY TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	40	20	30	90
17	DERBY COUNTY	CHAMPIONSHIP	40	20	30	90
18	BRENTFORD	CHAMPIONSHIP	35	40	15	90
19	FULHAM	PREMIER LEAGUE	30	45	15	90
20	TRANMERE ROVERS	LEAGUE TWO	55	30	0	85
21	MILTON KEYNES DONS	LEAGUE TWO	50	20	15	85
22	MORECAMBE	LEAGUE TWO	35	20	30	85
23	QUEENS PARK RANGERS	CHAMPIONSHIP	25	20	40	85
24	NORTHAMPTON TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	55	15	10	80
25	OLDHAM ATHLETIC	LEAGUE TWO	45	35	0	80
26	SOUTHEND UNITED	LEAGUE ONE	40	20	20	80
27	EVERTON	PREMIER LEAGUE	40	25	15	80
28	WEST HAM UNITED	PREMIER LEAGUE	40	25	15	80
29	CRYSTAL PALACE	PREMIER LEAGUE	35	30	15	80
30	SOUTHAMPTON	PREMIER LEAGUE	30	15	35	80
31	BLACKBURN ROVERS	CHAMPIONSHIP	30	20	30	80
32	SWANSEA CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP	30	50	0	80
33	WATFORD	PREMIER LEAGUE	50	25	0	75

POSITION	CLUB	DIVISION	D	G	T	PTS
34	MILLWALL	CHAMPIONSHIP	35	25	15	75
35	PETERBOROUGH UNITED	LEAGUE ONE	35	35	5	75
36	BRISTOL CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP	25	35	15	75
37	MANCHESTER CITY	PREMIER LEAGUE	40	15	15	70
38	IPSWICH TOWN	CHAMPIONSHIP	35	35	0	70
39	LIVERPOOL	PREMIER LEAGUE	35	35	0	70
40	BARNSELY	LEAGUE ONE	30	35	5	70
41	STOKE CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP	20	20	30	70
42	HUDDERSFIELD TOWN	PREMIER LEAGUE	20	35	15	70
43	BRIGHTON & HOVE ALBION	PREMIER LEAGUE	15	35	20	70
44	SUNDERLAND	LEAGUE ONE	55	5	5	65
45	NOTTINGHAM FOREST	CHAMPIONSHIP	45	20	0	65
46	LUTON TOWN	LEAGUE ONE	30	35	0	65
47	ARSENAL	PREMIER LEAGUE	15	35	15	65
48	HULL CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP	15	35	15	65
49	MANCHESTER UNITED	PREMIER LEAGUE	15	35	15	65
50	CHELTENHAM TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	10	50	5	65
51	TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR	PREMIER LEAGUE	30	15	15	60
52	WALSALL	LEAGUE ONE	25	10	25	60
53	SHREWSBURY TOWN	LEAGUE ONE	20	20	20	60
54	LEEDS UNITED	CHAMPIONSHIP	20	25	15	60
55	WEST BROMWICH ALBION	CHAMPIONSHIP	20	20	15	55
56	BURTON ALBION	LEAGUE ONE	15	25	15	55
57	CHARLTON ATHLETIC	LEAGUE ONE	15	25	15	55
58	ASTON VILLA	CHAMPIONSHIP	35	0	15	50
59	BLACKPOOL	LEAGUE ONE	30	20	0	50
60	COVENTRY CITY	LEAGUE ONE	15	20	15	50
61	WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS	PREMIER LEAGUE	15	20	15	50
62	YEOVIL TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	15	20	15	50
63	STEVENAGE	LEAGUE TWO	15	35	0	50
64	SCUNTHORPE UNITED	LEAGUE ONE	10	20	20	50
65	WIGAN ATHLETIC	CHAMPIONSHIP	0	35	15	50
66	AFC BOURNEMOUTH	PREMIER LEAGUE	35	10	0	45

POSITION	CLUB	DIVISION	D	G	T	PTS
67	COLCHESTER UNITED	LEAGUE TWO	35	10	0	45
68	ROTHERHAM UNITED	CHAMPIONSHIP	30	15	0	45
69	MIDDLESBROUGH	CHAMPIONSHIP	15	10	20	45
70	BIRMINGHAM CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP	15	15	15	45
71	CREWE ALEXANDRA	LEAGUE TWO	10	35	0	45
72	ACCRINGTON STANLEY	LEAGUE ONE	25	15	0	40
73	CHELSEA	PREMIER LEAGUE	20	5	15	40
74	BURY	LEAGUE TWO	20	20	0	40
75	NEWCASTLE UNITED	PREMIER LEAGUE	15	10	15	40
76	NOTTS COUNTY	LEAGUE TWO	5	35	0	40
77	BURNLEY	PREMIER LEAGUE	20	15	0	35
78	MANSFIELD TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	15	20	0	35
79	FLEETWOOD TOWN	LEAGUE ONE	10	20	5	35
80	OXFORD UNITED	LEAGUE ONE	10	20	5	35
81	PRESTON NORTH-END	CHAMPIONSHIP	10	20	5	35
82	SHEFFIELD UNITED	CHAMPIONSHIP	5	25	5	35
83	BRISTOL ROVERS	LEAGUE ONE	15	15	0	30
84	CARDIFF CITY	PREMIER LEAGUE	15	15	0	30
85	BOLTON WANDERERS	CHAMPIONSHIP	15	10	0	25
86	BRADFORD CITY	LEAGUE ONE	15	10	0	25
87	FOREST GREEN ROVERS	LEAGUE TWO	10	0	15	25
88	SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY	CHAMPIONSHIP	10	10	5	25
89	PORT VALE	LEAGUE TWO	0	25	0	25
90	GILLINGHAM	LEAGUE ONE	0	20	0	20
91	MACCLESFIELD TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	5	10	0	15
92	SWINDON TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	0	10	0	10

Key: D - Dialogue; G - Governance; T - Transparency

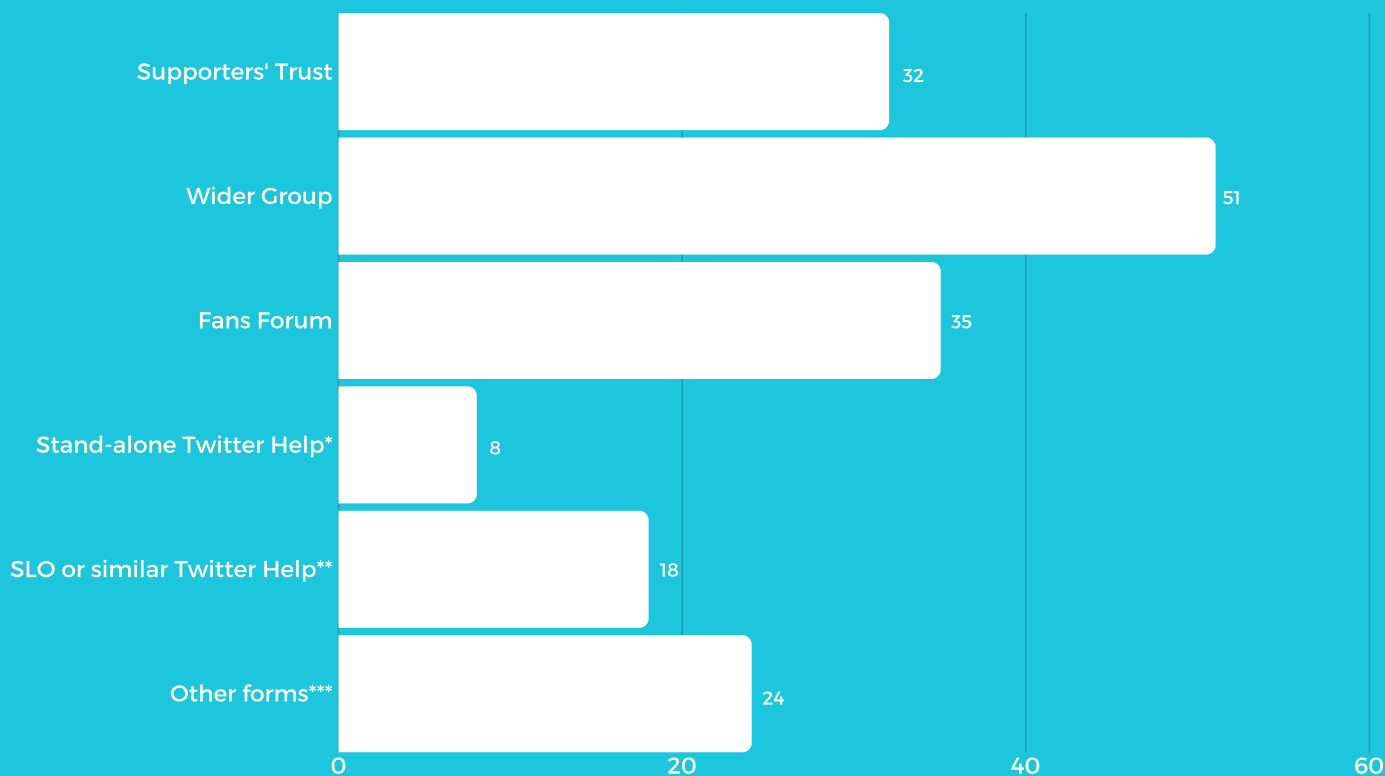
From a potential total score of 240 points, with 80 points available per-section

Where scores are equal, the highest Dialogue score determines the club's final position in the table

Please see page 35 for a more detailed explanation of the scoring

***Includes Bury FC**

Types of dialogue undertaken by clubs



*Includes two unused Twitter channels

**Includes seven Twitter channels where no actual dialogue takes place

***Other forms. See page 31 for more.

15. DIALOGUE

- 'Dialogue creates equals of publics in relation to the organisation communicating' (**Michael Kent & Maureen Taylor**)
- Dialogue isn't just a conversation, nor is it a negotiation, nor one side listening and the other talking. It doesn't mean only listening to those you already agree with
- In football, the term is now widely used, particularly since the 2015 Government Expert Working Group (EWG)
- There are a range of different expectations and demands from fans where dialogue is concerned
- Some want to just be able to ask the club about a match, ticketing or merchandise issue
- Others might attend fans forums, or watch the live or recorded stream online.
- Others are activists who take a greater interest. They are often elected to represent the views of other fans. They all require different forms of dialogue

POSITION	CLUB	DIVISION	DIALOGUE (PTS)
1	DONCASTER ROVERS	LEAGUE ONE	70
2	READING	CHAMPIONSHIP	70
3	CARLISLE UNITED	LEAGUE TWO	60
4	LINCOLN CITY	LEAGUE TWO	60
5	NORWICH CITY	CHAMPIONSHIP	60
6	CAMBRIDGE UNITED	LEAGUE TWO	55
7	EXETER CITY	LEAGUE TWO	55
8	NORTHAMPTON TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	55
9	PLYMOUTH ARGYLE	LEAGUE ONE	55
10	PORTSMOUTH	LEAGUE ONE	55

80 points available

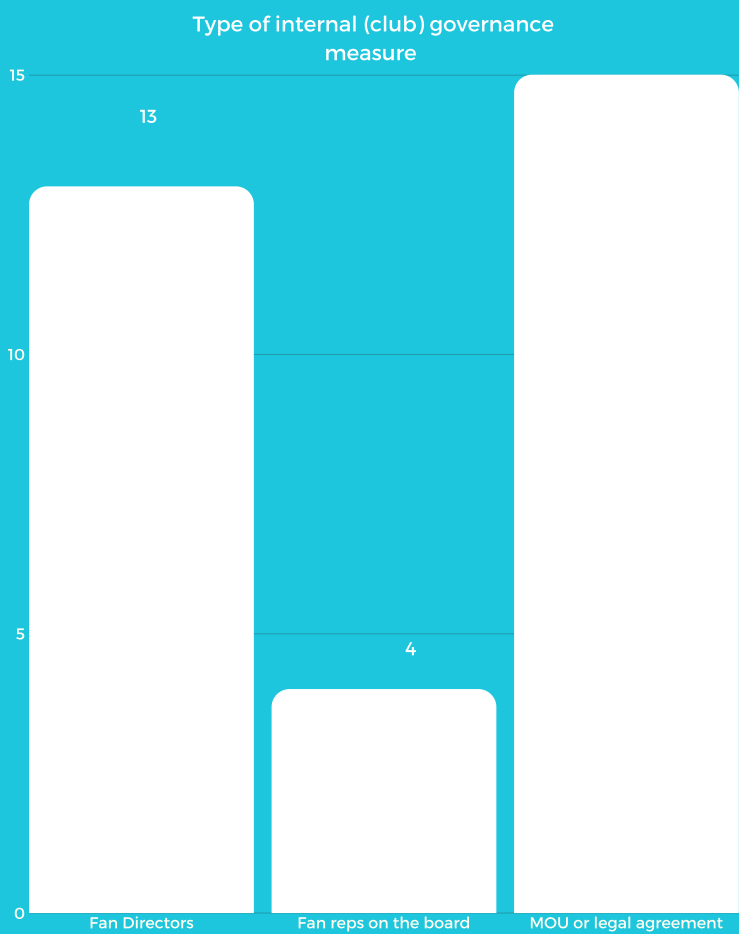
The finishing position of clubs equal on points is determined by their position in the overall table

DIALOGUE

- In the final top-ten in dialogue, all the clubs in it have demonstrated evidence of using all three forms of face-to-face dialogue (though some score fewer points because they didn't do more than one fans forum over the season)
- Seven clubs in the top-ten have either supporter directors (or in Exeter's case are fan owned), MOUs or some form of governance measure underpinning their dialogue.
- Championship Reading and Norwich City are both top-ten, Leicester City the only Premier League club in the top-twenty, but Fulham, Crystal Palace and Tottenham Hotspur should be recognised for the dialogue they've maintained with their supporters' trusts over a number of years
- Anecdotal evidence points to a number of clubs continuing to avoid direct, formal dialogue with fan representatives. We believe they could benefit greatly from it.

15
 Number of clubs who have either an MOU or a form of legal agreement with their supporters' trust (includes fan-owned clubs)

5
 Clubs whose Customer Charters could either not be found or whose links were broken on their websites



GOVERNANCE

- (Corporate) governance is the system of rules, practices and processes by which a company is directed and controlled (**Chartered Governance Institute**)
- Governance is about how decisions are made, fans voices listened to, and their interests taken into account and managed
- Governance helps underpin relationships, and is advisable as it means greater certainty and clarity for both club & fans
- Fan organisations (supporters' trusts particularly) now make greater demands of clubs to ensure their position is more secure
- MOUs or legal agreements are becoming more popular, and can reinforce the position held by a fan director, or a collective shareholding held on behalf of fans
- EFL and Premier League external regulations i.e.: Customer Charters and SLOs are also important, and are part of the scoring in this section

POSITION**CLUB****DIVISION****GOVERNANCE (PTS)**

1	AFC WIMBLEDON	LEAGUE ONE	65
2	CARLISLE UNITED	LEAGUE TWO	65
3	DONCASTER ROVERS	LEAGUE ONE	65
4	EXETER CITY	LEAGUE TWO	65
5	GRIMSBY TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	65
6	NEWPORT COUNTY	LEAGUE TWO	65
7	WYCOMBE WANDERERS	LEAGUE ONE	65
8	CAMBRIDGE UNITED	LEAGUE TWO	50
9	CHELTENHAM TOWN	LEAGUE TWO	50
10	LINCOLN CITY	LEAGUE TWO	50

80 points available

The finishing position of clubs equal on points is determined by their position in the overall table

GOVERNANCE

- All clubs in the top-ten for Governance are in League One and Two. All of them have at least one fan-director, and an accompanying shareholding
- Fan-owned clubs perform well on the basis that their model is focused heavily on governance and accountability
- Fulham, Norwich City and Portsmouth are just outside the top-ten (12th, 13th, 14th) but also have strong governance measures
- Many clubs have not performed well because of an absence of clear information about their SLOs - particularly on the process of appointment, but also because it is unclear as to whether they are independent roles, as recommended by UEFA/SD Europe and the FSA
- Plenty of clubs have good Customer Charters, but greater consistency is needed across the board, as there remains a great deal of variation on their content

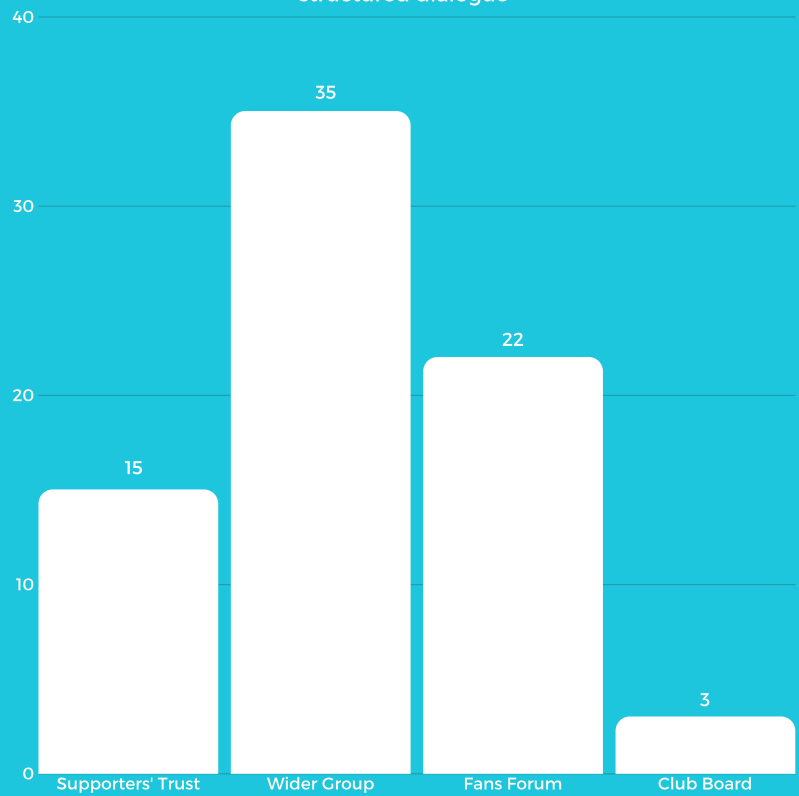
15/34

The proportion of clubs publishing reports/minutes of structured dialogue meetings with supporters' trusts/independent groups (inc. where the group publishes)

3

The number of clubs who report regularly about their board meetings. In all cases, important financial or operational information is redacted.

Minutes published for each type of structured dialogue



TRANSPARENCY

- Transparency is the extent to which information is 'complete and 'findable'', and 'the degree to which it is disaggregated, verified and simplified' (**G. Michenera and K. Bersch, Brazilian School of Public & Business Administration, Brazil**)
- Transparency is about how much of what a club does is exposed to the fans/stakeholders
- It's a difficult challenge for clubs, being community assets, though almost always privately owned
- Our research shows that more clubs need to publish information about meetings involving fans. This applies to all clubs in all circumstances and ownership models
- Much of the failure to publish is we believe, down to oversight, and can be easily rectified
- We also believe that some form of regular reporting from club board meetings would greatly enhance the understanding of process and decision making at clubs

POSITION	CLUB	DIVISION	GOVERNANCE (PTS)
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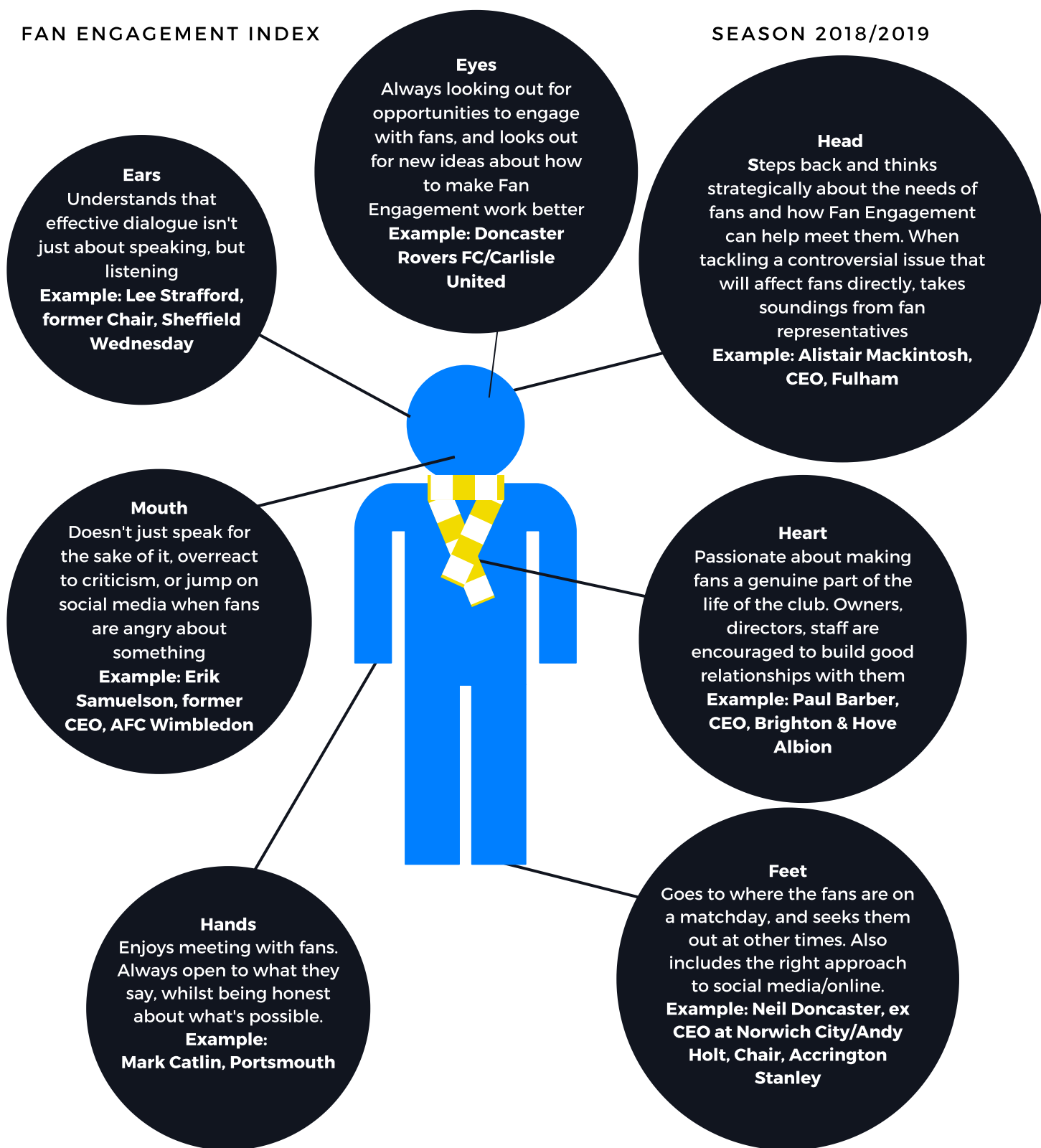
1	AFC WIMBLEDON	LEAGUE ONE	60
2	EXETER CITY	LEAGUE TWO	50
3	WYCOMBE WANDERERS	LEAGUE ONE	50
4	LINCOLN CITY	LEAGUE TWO	40
5	PLYMOUTH ARGYLE	LEAGUE ONE	40
6	QUEENS PARK RANGERS	CHAMPIONSHIP	40
7	CARLISLE UNITED	LEAGUE TWO	35
8	LEICESTER CITY	PREMIER LEAGUE	35
9	ROCHDALE	LEAGUE ONE	35
10	SOUTHAMPTON	PREMIER LEAGUE	35

80 points available

The finishing position of clubs equal on points is determined by their position in the overall table

TRANSPARENCY

- Transparency is overall the lowest scoring of the three areas, which illustrates the general lack of transparency in football
- In terms of Fan Engagement, clubs can demonstrate openness that can help to build trust with the fanbase
- Two Premier League clubs and one Championship club are in the top-ten: Leicester City and Southampton & QPR. This shows that openness is not determined by business model
- However, even some of those clubs performing well overall in the Index are not publishing agendas, and a significant minority aren't publishing minutes or reports
- This can be a particular problem with one-to-one meetings with supporters' trusts/independent groups. Quite a few clubs are content however to allow the supporters' group to do this
- We have also scored on clubs reporting on their board meetings in some form - though not in full, or without redaction



21. THE ANATOMY OF AN ENGAGED FOOTBALL CLUB

Ever wondered what good Fan Engagement looks like? Look no further.

We've created the Anatomy of an Engaged Football Club to show you. We've even provided examples of the best clubs & leaders in those areas!

22. BEST PRACTICE IN FAN ENGAGEMENT

The Fan Engagement Index isn't just about numbers, and neither is Fan Engagement.

We all know that football - like any industry - can sometimes operate in silos. Clubs spend a lot of time focusing on their own issues and problems. It's hard to find time and space to be able to think of new approaches or ideas that can change or improve on what we do.

Looking at what others do is how we often learn the most, and sharing good ideas is rarely anything but a positive step.

That's what this section of the Index is about. We're going to take a look at some of the best practice in the English game, as well as some ideas from outside.

We look at how to put together a strategic Fan Engagement plan on page 23 & 24, and on page 25 we look at how to make the right social media choices.

On page 27 we take a look at the Supporter Liaison Officer role, and

'Football can sometimes operate in silos, and it's hard to find time and space to think of new approaches or ideas'

see how we can make the role effective for the needs of English clubs.

On page 29 we take a look at Customer Charters, and their Fan Engagement potential. Finally, on page 31, we look at some of the different ideas for dialogue that our research found. Maybe there's something for your club to try?

We hope you find this section useful, and that you get to try out some new ideas.

If you do, let us know how they work out, and if you want to talk about any of this further, drop us a line.



23. CREATING A STRATEGIC FAN ENGAGEMENT PLAN

In football it's easy to take your eye off the big strategy - and we're not talking on-the-pitch! Taking time to think about the big issues that affect your business can be difficult to schedule into the busy life of a football club.

It's perfectly normal to find yourself focused on 'delivery' - what you're doing day-to-day, but it's also important that you stay on top of the issues that concern fans, and know how individuals or groups might react to a particular issue. That's where a strategic Fan Engagement plan can help.

A Fan Engagement plan, led by the board and senior management, means that the way you set out to meet the needs of fans will be less driven by the outputs and functions you already have (selling tickets, running matches, signing players, etc), and instead work from a deeper understanding of your relationship with fans.

Remember, even when they might be playing the role of a customer they're always stakeholders.

'Like all strategies, you need to avoid it ending up on the shelf, gathering dust'

Don't just hand responsibility for a plan to whoever heads up your Fan Engagement day-to-day. Owners, board, senior staff and department managers, should have an interest in this issue- the people fans look to when things aren't working.

You should also incorporate the plan into your broader business planning and PR/Marketing work.

Here's what you need to consider:

- Analyse your fans and groups
 - What organised fans groups do you have, and what type are they (supporters' trust, ultras, etc)? What blogs, podcasts, fan or unofficial websites and media are there? How about individual fans? Do you have a membership scheme? Do you carry out an annual survey of your fans (you could start doing one)?

- **Identify the issues**

- What are the sort of issues that concern your fans, and what demands do they tend to make? Are they about transparency, finances, structure and governance? Or are they more about matchday issues like policing, stewarding, ticketing or crowd safety?
- Is there any 'low-hanging fruit' or 'quick wins' that might be worth focusing on in the short-term, and which could help build trust, and show that you're listening?

- **Identify the resources available**

- What resources do you have - both to ensure a thorough review and to deliver the plan you

create? Can you free up or combine other resources if needed: e.g.: within your communications, marketing, or supporter/customer services team?

- **Get buy-in**

- Ensure your board/CEO support it. Are those responsible for your day-to-day Fan Engagement part of the process, providing their expertise and insight?
- Are your fan-representatives willing and able to be part of the process? What sort of insight and skills might they be able to bring? Is there any groundwork/preparation that they might be help you with?

WHAT TO CONSIDER

All groups are not the same

Clubs have become quite sophisticated at analysing their fans as individuals, but the groups matter as much, if not more. Do you know for example what a supporters' trust is, and what they stand for? Do you know that they originally came about because of failures by owners/regulators?

Resources can come from anywhere

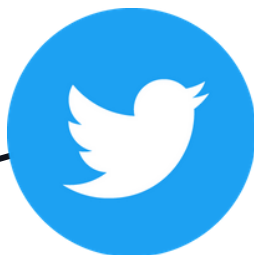
Collaborating with with fan groups could identify some nifty short-cuts.

For example, how about convening a group to feed into what the charter should look like? You can also use your fans parliament, or even convene a focus group to take soundings from a wider group of fans

Leadership is key

If you're a leader yourself, looking for ideas, then take our word for it: the best CEOs, Chairs, and heads of department are already doing a lot of what a good plan should contain, so go and speak with them

TWITTER



Dialogue first, ideal for Fan Engagement. Set up a dedicated help channel to prevent the pull created by marketing communications output on the main club channel, and don't sell or market to followers (except where directly relevant to queries). Beware: Twitter can be a noisy place, with a lot of opinions, and not always reliable

Increasingly effective for low-cost broadcasting via Facebook live (fans forums, video content etc). Most versatile channel: some dialogue, sharing content, competitions etc

FACEBOOK



Broadcast. Stream fans forums, match content/interviews, Q&As with senior staff, officials or owners

Primarily messaging, some news providers use it to alert people to new content

PINTEREST



Largely broadcast, image-led, aspirational: content first. Not a news channel for content from your website, but good for new kit, training sessions, interviews etc. Live-stream fans forums/events

Good at generating referrals to other sites, e.g.: club website. Pinterest claimed in 2018 that the online pinboard 'reaches 83% of all women 25-54 in the US' (more than Instagram, SnapChat & Twitter)



WHATSAPP

SNAPCHAT



The original social network, few clubs now use these for content or for dialogue. Use wisely



INSTAGRAM

Is it a social channel? CEO, Evan Spiegel, calls it a 'camera company.' Some use it to show match or player-related content



MESSAGEBOARDS/FORUMS

25. SOCIAL MEDIA FOR FOOTBALL CLUBS

Clubs might feel a bit overwhelmed when it comes to choosing the right social media, so here's a guide to each major channel and how you could use it.

For more best practice in social media, go to the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR): <https://bit.ly/2lhTema>

CLUBS WITH TWITTER HELP CHANNELS (RECOMMENDED)

*Channel unused

Aston Villa @AVFCsupport
Everton @efc_fanservices
Hull City @HullCityHelp*
Leicester City @lfchelp
Manchester City @ManCityHelp
Reading @RFCsupport
West Ham United @WestHamHelp
Wolverhampton Wanderers @WolvesHelp*

CLUBS WITH TWITTER SLO CHANNELS (OR SIMILAR)

**Indicates channel is mainly used for broadcast

***Channel operated by Millwall's 'Fan on the Board'

Bristol City @mattparsonsbfcf
Bristol Rovers @brfcslo
Cardiff City @CardiffCitySLO
Carlisle United @CUFCSLO**
Derby County @dcfc_slo
Doncaster Rovers @SLO_DRFC
Grimsby Town @GTFC_SLO**
Huddersfield Town @htafcslo**
Ipswich Town @itfc_slo
Liverpool @tonybarrett
Millwall @millwallfotb***
Notts County @slonottscounty**
Oldham Athletic @sloafc
Peterborough United @theposhSLO
Stevenage @stevenagefc_slo
Sunderland @cwaters_safc
Tranmere Rovers @trfcslo
Watford @davem2612**

27. DELIVERING THE SLO ROLE EFFECTIVELY

Clubs need to ensure that their resources can be deployed most efficiently to ensure effective Fan Engagement.

The role of Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) is no different. Clubs need to be able to think creatively about how to use the role to meet their needs, whilst ensuring that the purpose and spirit of the role is observed as closely as possible.

Our research suggests that many clubs haven't yet embraced its intended purpose - or seized on its potential.

In one respect, the origins of the role from Germany, where clubs are minimum 50%+1 member owned is partly where the difficulty lies. English clubs are mostly controlled privately and the culture defined by the 'shareholder' model.

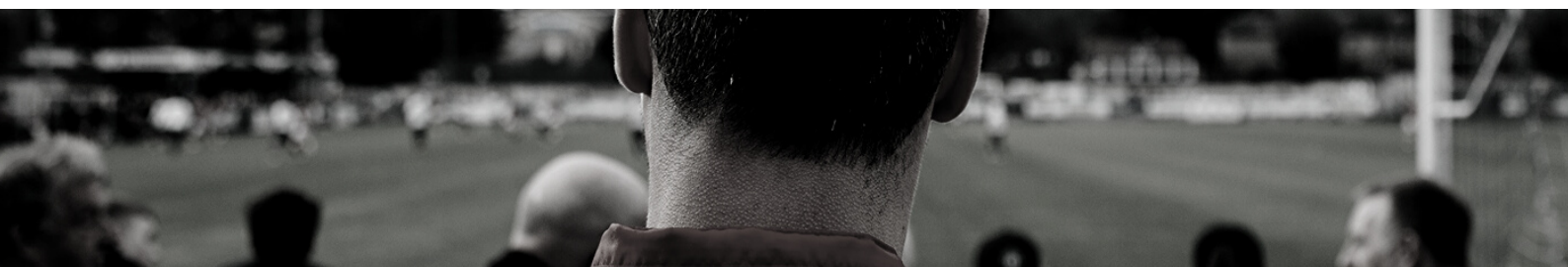
However, we believe a lot of this can be overcome. The role offers a useful route to building cooperation with organised fan groups, including the possibility of co-delivering the role, or via a team of SLOs.

'We also believe that the SLO role offers a potentially useful route to building cooperation with organised fan groups'

All the evidence points to the most effective SLOs being those who carry very high levels of legitimacy with their fanbase. In this regard, SLOs can play a key role as intermediaries (we could call them 'translators' - in that they speak the language both of fans and of clubs) between fans and the club.

In practical terms, as the security challenges for crowded places such as football matches evolve, the need for effective communication and cooperation becomes greater.

At some clubs, SLOs are already playing a crucial role in reducing conflicts and issues between fans and the police, or helping to coordinate travel logistics.



SLOs can offer a consistent and trusted go-between and therefore also enhance opportunities for police and stewards to act in a more proportionate and informed manner towards fans.

Appointment is often key. Clubs often appoint an existing senior member of staff to the role, for example from the marketing or communications team, or combine SLO duties with a customer service officer, or someone from the ticketing or merchandising team.

It is more desirable to fill the role with a volunteer or paid staff member who is a genuine supporter, providing a

credible link to the fan base, as UEFA/SD Europe and Football Supporters Association says.

It also helps to have a transparent appointments process as some clubs do. The type of appointment and the process behind it are both important in making the role work.

There are plenty of ways to ensure the role delivers for fans and clubs, whilst being cost effective.

It must however be acknowledged that there are often competing demands from club & fans, which need to be managed carefully and respectfully.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

Make your appointment transparent

Arsenal followed a formal appointment and interview process for their current SLO. Notts County fans elected one of the three who fill the role for them

Ensure your appointment is credible

You need people who provide credibility with other clubs, police and stewards, as well as your own club. Don't overlook skills within your own fanbase - you'll be surprised what you find!

Collaborate with your fans

Ensure the role description fits the needs of fans too. Talk with your organised fans groups about the issues to focus on (refer back to your Fan Engagement Plan)

If in doubt, refer to the guidance

'An SLO is responsible for building bridges between club & fans. SLOs might communicate fans' opinions to a club's board or senior staff, and should also liaise with stewards, police & counterparts at opposition clubs.' **(FSA guidance)**

29. CUSTOMER CHARTERS: A STRATEGIC FAN ENGAGEMENT TOOL

The Customer/Club or Supporter Charter should in theory at least, already form the backbone of how clubs communicate their Fan Engagement work, but in practice it is rarely used as effectively as it could be.

However it is a document that we believe has real potential to act as a crucial Fan Engagement tool for all clubs.

Customer Charters have been around for some time, emerging in the 1990s. They provide some commitment as to what fans should expect from their clubs in terms of ticketing, safety and complaints procedures.

Some have very detailed information, whilst others seem to focus on just one or two areas, such as ticketing or supporter/customer services.

Some have detail about the processes of engagement, whilst others refer the reader to a department/team - another hurdle to accessing information.

'Charters have real potential as a Fan Engagement tool for all clubs'

As Fan Engagement, dialogue and consultation have become more recognised and grown in importance, clubs have begun to add supporter services, communication, consultation and engagement to their Charters. With many however, the problem remains a lack of information.

Although Charters are meant to follow a similar format, some are very different, in at least one case providing only a statement of club 'values', with no practical information.

Charters must be lodged with the EFL or Premier League each year, and are usually completed by the SLO.

We've identified that charters could become the go-to reference point when trying to find out what a club's Fan Engagement programme is, and which club officials are responsible



for it on a practical level. Having the relevant information laid out in this way in a purpose-specific document is ideal in a world where we're saturated with content.

Our research also shows that charters are also quite difficult (even impossible) to find at times. In some cases, club websites provide 'dead'/broken links. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that Charters are not something that many fans are even particularly aware of.

There is a real variation in design too. Some are 'corporate': well designed, and branded, whilst others are, more-or-less, a word or text document.

Examples of thorough Charters including information about fan engagement programmes include Fulham, Tranmere Rovers, Cheltenham, Brighton and Hove Albion and Huddersfield Town,

Accessibility is also very important. Many clubs situate Charters under the 'Club' section of the website, but there are plenty who put them in much less obvious places - at the foot of a website in two instances.

There is certainly a need for clubs to display their Fan Engagement programme clearly on their website, and it seems logical to use the Customer Charter for that purpose.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

What should a good Customer Charter contain?

Like all those mentioned above, any effective charter should not just contain information about the club's ticketing or matchday rules and policies, but Fan Engagement. Knowing the who, what, why, when, where and how is important for all fans, and having it in one place helps to cut down time searching for answers when someone's only got a few minutes to check

Accessibility

Put it in a place where fans can find it, don't move it. If you do, post a news item saying where it's moved to

Readability

If you can make it look nice, do, But above all it needs to explain all the things that a fan will find useful (see left), in a format that works

Finally

Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good: What matters is that it's got the right information, and is accessible and readable to all

**Shrewsbury Town,
Supporters' Parliament
open meetings**

These are held in advance of separate meetings between Parliament reps and club to source views and opinions. A good example of how to devolve Fan Engagement

Lincoln City, Imps on the Road

Fans forums held around Lincolnshire. For clubs with more dispersed fanbases, this is a good initiative. Also, some clubs with big regional 'exiles' groups do similar events

**Brighton & Hove Albion,
Away Fans Forum**

Serving a distinct group who often need to be better valued, as the Football Supporters Association's (FSA) 'Twenty's Plenty' campaign showed.

Portsmouth club officials formally meet exile groups on away trips

Liverpool, annual Fans Summit

The club recently introduced a series of changes including annual summits, attended by senior management, owners & directors. Good for clubs with overseas owners like Liverpool's, providing a regular form of access to & dialogue between owners, club officials and fan reps.

**West Bromwich Albion,
separate Junior Supporters
Board forums**

Provides a pathway for junior members to become part of the adult Supporters Board when they reach the right age

**Newport County/AFC
Wimbledon, open 'SGMs'
(Special General Meetings)**

Both clubs are owned by their supporters' trusts and hold these regular meetings which any supporters can attend

**Portsmouth, monthly online
Q&A**

Chief Executive Mark Catlin runs an online Q&A, which he started in summer 2017. Fans are asked to send in questions, which Catlin answers via video on Facebook and YouTube

**Norwich
City/Cheltenham
Town, Fans Forums
at company AGMs**
At Cheltenham Town, shareholders get priority, but everyone can ask questions

31. IDEAS FOR DIALOGUE

Even if you have already established a strategic Fan Engagement Plan (see page 23) you should still consider new ideas.

Here are some interesting ideas from other clubs that you might want to consider

32. INDEX OF KEY TERMS

A

Agenda

Documents giving those attending meetings prior notice of what is being discussed. Agendas also give all the relevant details of when and where the meetings take place and who attends.

C

CIPR (Chartered Institute of Public Relations)

The professional body for Public Relations practitioners in the UK.

Customer

A party that receives or consumes products/goods/services and has the ability to choose between different products and suppliers.

Customer Charter

A document published every season by Premier League/EFL clubs showing how they deal with fans in a number of areas, e.g.: ticketing, complaints and in some cases, Fan Engagement.

Customer Services

Individuals, teams or departments who deal with fans regularly. Often used interchangeably with 'Supporter Services'

F

Fan/community ownership

A minimum of 50% +1 of the voting rights of a club controlled collectively by a democratic entity which has an open and inclusive membership.

Fans Forums

Large gatherings of fans attending organised meetings with owners, representatives of owners, and club senior management. Sometimes also include football and playing/management staff. These meetings are usually open to all supporters, although they may sometimes be limited to season ticket holders or club members for venue capacity reasons.

Football Supporters Association (FSA)

The name of the new organisation following the merger of Supporters Direct and The Football Supporters Federation (see also 'FSF' and 'Supporters Direct')

Football Supporters Federation

Along with Supporters Direct, one of the two organisations that merged in the Summer of 2018 to create the FSA (see also Supporters Direct). Concerned with representing the interests of individual fans and a variety of fan organisations.

G

Government Expert Working Group

The Government Expert Working Group (also known as EWG) on Football Supporter Ownership and Engagement was an informal working group made up of Supporters Direct (SD) and the Football Supporters' Federation (FSF). The FA, Premier League, EFL and National League who were also represented. The government Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) organised the group. It investigated the barriers to greater supporter ownership of football clubs, and explored how supporter

INDEX OF KEY TERMS

engagement and involvement in the governance and running of clubs could be increased and improved. It was appointed in October 2014, and reported in November 2015.

Independent supporters' group/organisation

Groups of supporters, usually with a formalised constitution or set of rules which seek to represent supporters to the club. In many cases, they refer to a supporters' trust, but sometimes are groups in slightly different forms. See also 'Supporters' Trust' and 'Ultras'

M

Minutes (i.e.: of a meeting)

The official record of a meeting that has taken place, detailing who was present and what was discussed and decided. In some cases, particularly where there is a contentious issue being discussed, two separate minute-takers will be present to ensure that nothing is misinterpreted.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

A 'non-binding agreement which outlines an intention to promote collaboration between partner institutions' (**Glasgow University**). In Fan Engagement terms, they are usually between a football club and a supporters' trust.

P

Public Relations

'The discipline which looks after

reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics [often referred to as stakeholders].' **(Chartered Institute of Public Relations).**

Publics

'Publics' are audiences that are important to the organisation. They include customers - existing and potential; employees and management; investors; media; government; suppliers; opinion-formers' **(CIPR)**. See also 'Stakeholder'

S

Stakeholder

An individual who has an interest in a company or organisation, and can affect or be affected by what it does, beyond simply being a customer or client.

Shareholders' Agreements

Shareholders' agreements can exist between all shareholders, or only some - for example, the holders of a particular class of share. They exist to protect the shareholders' investment in the company, and establish a fair relationship between the shareholders, and governs how the company is run. The agreement will typically set out the shareholders' rights and obligations; regulate the sale of shares in the company; describe how the company is going to be run; provide an element of

INDEX OF KEY TERMS

protection for minority shareholders in the company; and define how important decisions are to be made. This can be beneficial both to minority and majority shareholders.

Structured

Dialogue/Engagement/Relationships

Used interchangeably in football to describe regularised relationships between clubs and fans. Range from fans forums, to fans parliaments, or meetings with a single organisation representing fans (e.g.: a supporters' trust). 'Structured' sometimes refers to the precise form of agreement, usually written - for example an MOU or a shareholders' agreement - that governs the relationship.

Supporter Director

A legally appointed director of a UK registered company who is appointed or elected (usually by a supporters' trust) to represent the views of the supporters. Typically, a supporter director's legitimacy derives from a supporters' trust and its underlying relationship with the club. Either directly elected by members of the trust, or appointed by the trust's board. See also 'Supporter Representative'.

Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO)

A club official who acts 'as a bridge between football clubs and supporters by providing a two-way flow of information around key topical issues (**SD Europe**). The role is mandatory for all clubs in the top four divisions of English football.

Supporter (board) Representative

An individual who is not a legally appointed director of a UK registered company, but appointed/elected (usually by a supporters' trust) to represent the views of the supporters. A representative's legitimacy typically derives from a supporters' trust and its underlying relationship with the club. Either directly elected by members of the trust, or appointed by the trust's board. See also 'Supporter Director'.

Supporters' Trust

A supporters' trust is a not-for-profit, democratic group of supporters, established in the UK as an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) or Community Benefit Society (CBS), to represent fans of a particular club. Recognised in the 2015 Government Expert Working Group report as the ideal vehicle for structured dialogue. Established across Europe with similar governing structures. Largely superseded other forms of club-focused representation for fans. See also 'Independent Supporters' Organisation' & 'Supporters Direct'.

U

Ultras

Large, often well organised groups of fans creating an atmosphere to support their team. In England they have emerged, particularly in the top-flight, because of the view that the atmosphere at matches has degraded. Examples are the Spion Kop 1906 (Liverpool) and Homesdale Fanatics (Crystal Palace).

35. HOW THE SCORING WORKS

The Fan Engagement Index awards up to 240 points to clubs overall based on the quality of their Fan Engagement. It comprises three categories, each offering up to 80 points. Final figures correct as of 31/05/2019.

Each category is broken down into a number of areas making up the total score for the category. As follows:

Dialogue (the meetings and processes in place to practice two-way communication with their fanbase and its representatives)

- Structured Dialogue with supporters' trust/independent supporters group
- Structured Dialogue with wider group of representatives
- Fans Forums
- Social Media (does the club have a Twitter Help Channel or a Twitter SLO Channel)
- Any other Dialogue initiatives/innovations

Governance (what underpins, or reinforces these relationships)

- Are there supporter directors on the board of the club?
- Customer/Club/Supporter Charter: rating based on whether it's easy to find, and contains information about the SLO, fan consultation, and supporter/customer services
- Whether or not the SLO is clearly a 'stand alone' role at the club
- Is there a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or other legal agreement with supporters' trust or other independent group governing their relationship?

Transparency (what they publish in relation to this dialogue)

- Are reports or minutes published of structured dialogue meetings with supporters' trust/independent group and/or its structured dialogue with a wider group of representatives?
- Are agendas published in advance of any of these meetings?
- Are reports or minutes published of fans forums? Are agendas published in advance of fans forums?
- Does the club report on its board meetings? Does the club publish an agenda in advance of its board meetings?

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Resources used include the following (including various video and audio content): club official websites, supporters' trust and supporters' group websites, local news websites, BBC (various), online fans forums, Twitter, Facebook and other social media (official and unofficial), Leagues (The EFL and Premier League Official websites), The FA Official Website, Supporters Direct & FSF official websites, UEFA official website, SD Europe official website, SD Scotland official website.

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Published November 2019
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