



FIFA
Research Scholarship

**“Stronger Together? The Legacies of the
1993 merger of the Football Association
and the Women’s Football Association”**

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Executive Summary

Aim

The overall aim of the research was to explore the 1993 WFA-FA merger and its legacies, using the lessons of this merger to inform future best practice governance for football in the UK (1.2).

Research Design

The research involved:

1. Analysing archival material from the WFA archive, the National Football Museum and the Sports Council archive (3.1).
2. Oral histories with seven people who were involved in the WFA at the time of the merger (3.2).
3. Interviews with people currently involved in the governance of five different English clubs at different levels of the pyramid (3.3).
4. Interviews with five current female FA employees (3.4).

Results – The Merger Process

1. The WFA did not enter into a merger willingly (4.1).
2. The 1993 “merger” of the WFA and FA was in fact a takeover, and should be referred to as such (4.2).
3. The merger was a moment of disempowerment for women’s football, not a moment of progress (4.3).
4. The 1993 “moment” was not a panacea for equity in football, and there were few improvements for women’s football in the immediate aftermath (4.4).
5. The merger made it harder for women to progress as football coaches, not easier (4.5).
6. The merger decreased women’s voice in football governance (4.6).
7. The merger continues to evoke strong emotions, despite the fact that it took place thirty years ago (4.7).
8. The FA takeover needs to be reframed: it was not a positive or even a neutral process but a disempowering one, and the grief of those who went through it needs to be acknowledged (4.8).

Results – Legacies of the Merger: The Place of Women’s Football within the FA

1. Women’s football is increasingly embedded within the structures of the FA (5.1).
2. Merged governance offers some advantages for the women’s game (5.2).
3. However, there are risks to alignment, as well as rewards (5.3). For example, progress under alignment depends on specific personnel (5.3.1); women’s football is now fighting for resources as a small fish in a big pond (5.3.2); and this means that the voice of women’s football is sometimes not heard within the FA (5.3.4).
4. The FA is currently unsure whether to position women’s football as distinct from or the same as men’s football (5.4).
5. There is confusion about the role and purpose of NewCo – is it just about running competitions, or is it the beginning of a move towards greater independence for the women’s game (5.5)?

6. The merger made it harder to be a woman working in football, but this is slowly changing (5.6).
7. We need to more carefully weigh up the benefits and disadvantages of merged governance, and to consider whether a return to separatism might benefit women's football (5.7).

Results – Legacies of the Merger: The Place of Women's Football within English Clubs

1. Women's clubs have increasingly felt pressured to embrace alignment with men's teams since the FA takeover in 1993 (6.1).
2. The FA's ideal football club is a yin-yang: an interconnected and complementary model, with men and women represented equally (6.2).
3. There are advantages to club alignment (6.3). However, the realities of alignment with a men's club are complicated and difficult (6.4): women within joint clubs feel a sense of powerlessness (6.4.1); in aligned clubs, women's football is last in the pecking order (6.4.2); resources are not allocated equitably at aligned clubs, and women do not feel like they belong (6.4.3); and alignment threatens the distinctive history and identity of women's football (6.4.4).
4. There are significant advantages to independence for clubs (6.5).
5. Aligned club funding models are not working. The current funding model is perceived by interviewees to disadvantage women's clubs, especially independent ones (6.6).
6. Club-level mergers are usually trade-offs, and the FA's yin-yang model does not reflect the reality of the situation on the ground for women within clubs (6.7).

Conclusions

The merger was in some ways a backward step for the women's game, undermining female autonomy and decreasing the number of women involved in football governance (7.1).

The impacts of the WFA-FA merger were similar to other sporting mergers which took place at the same time (in cricket, hockey, lacrosse, athletics and squash). Specifically in relation to the WFA: a merger was not entered into willingly; there was a lack of consultation with WFA members, and in reality the 1993 process more closely resembled a takeover than a merger (7.2).

Many women who had previously been involved in football governance disappeared in the wake of the FA's takeover. Those who remained involved in governance were often subject to sexism, endured exclusion, were treated as "tokens", and were often not listened to by their male colleagues (7.5).

The contemporary male dominance of governance and coaching roles is actually a specific legacy of the 1993 merger. It is important to recognise this because it demonstrates the harm which was done to women in sport and to women's football as a result of the merger (7.4).

Given that women's football is now having to fight for resources as a small fish in a big pond, this research calls into question the effectiveness of merged governance as a way to bring about true equity between women's and men's sport (7.2). It is not always the best vehicle to grow women's football (7.6).

The FA continue to promote a one-size-fits-all model at club level, yet my findings suggest that alignment does not work for everyone, and in fact there are significant disadvantages to this model (7.3).

Women's football perhaps needs to ask itself whether it prefers to pursue a path of colossal, potentially unsustainable growth due to subsidisation from men's football, or whether it would be more sustainable and empowering to regain the ability to make its own decisions, with purely the women's game in mind (7.6).

Recommendations for the FA

1. Publicly acknowledge the hurt caused by the merger (8.1).
2. Continue to have dedicated committees devoted to women's football (8.2).
3. Promote diversity in club models (8.3).
4. Do more to celebrate independent women's clubs (8.4).
5. Encourage and help women to take control of their own facilities, via a dedicated grant scheme (8.5).
6. Work with organisations which offer grassroots funding to ensure independent women's clubs can apply in their own right (8.6).
7. Use NewCo as a vehicle to support the growth of the rest of the pyramid, including independent clubs (8.7).
8. Set up an independent clubs group, encouraging clubs who choose this path to support each other (8.8).

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

In 1993 the Women's Football Association (WFA), the organisation which had run women's football in England for twenty-four years, ceded control of the sport to the (male-run) Football Association. In the years since the FA took over, women's football in England has grown beyond recognition, with a fully professional national team and domestic tournament (the Women's Super League) and most recently a triumph in the 2022 UEFA Women's Euros final, watched by a record crowd of 87,192 at Wembley Stadium. However, the trade-off is that since 1993 much of this growth has been presided over by men. Women remain systematically underrepresented within football governance, both in the UK and globally (Bryan et al 2021).

Internationally, studies of amalgamations between men's and women's sporting organisations like the one which occurred between the FA and the WFA in 1993 have found that such processes are fundamental in shaping the way in which women's sport is governed (Cox & Thompson 2003, Lovett & Lowry 1995, Stronach & Adair 2009). However, although our knowledge of women's football history is expanding, we still know little about the 1993 "merger" of the WFA with the FA specifically. This project has explored that merger. Why did it come about? What was the process by which the WFA handed over to the FA? And, crucially, what are the legacies of the 1993 FA takeover within English football?

The context for the study is my existing work on the sporting mergers which took place in the UK between 1989 and 2000. In 1993 a new UK government policy document (issued by the UK Sports Council), *Women and Sport*, recommended that all national governing bodies of sport "establish a single governing body". Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, almost all women's sports that were administered separately to their male counterparts therefore "merged" with the men's governing body: squash in 1989, athletics in 1992, football in 1993, lacrosse and hockey in 1996, and cricket in 1998. In my oral history interviews with women involved in the mergers of these different sports, four themes have emerged:

- Disempowerment - a feeling that the mergers were forced upon them as a *fait accompli*;
- Inequitable negotiation processes, dominated by the male organisation;
- Grief about the loss of a shared space and community; and emotional detachment from the new, merged organisations, leading to an exodus of women from governance roles;
- The difficulties of imposing a top-down merger on grassroots clubs and other organisations.

This project has extended this research to football, examining the extent to which these themes also emerge from the story of the 1993 WFA-FA merger.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

The overall aim of the research was to explore the 1993 WFA-FA merger and its legacies, using the lessons of this merger to inform future best practice governance for football in the UK, particularly women's football. Specifically, the research questions I explored were:

1. How has the policy of forced integration of women's and men's football in the UK since 1993 impacted on the sport (for good and bad)?
2. How similar was the experience of the WFA-FA to that of other sporting mergers which took place at the same time (in cricket, hockey, lacrosse, athletics and squash), and what lessons can be drawn about the effectiveness or otherwise of merged governance within British sport?
3. How did the national WFA-FA merger filter down to individual football clubs? Why did some women's clubs choose to work closely with men's clubs, whereas others did not? Which approach has been more successful?
4. What inequities were created when women's football was absorbed into men's football, and how can the FA and individual football clubs within the UK learn from the experience and ensure more equitable treatment for women's football going forward?
5. Why did so many women leave football governance in the period after the WFA-FA merger? How can the lessons from this inform attempts to encourage more women to become involved in football governance today?
6. Is a return to separate governance desirable for women's football, at national and / or club level? What would be the issues with this approach (for example, would it be financially sustainable)?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Assessments of the WFA-FA merger

Current interpretations present the merger largely in a favourable light, and as something which has been positive for the development and growth of English women's football. Williams describes the WFA as "ultimately a failure" (2003: 121), a view with which Sue Lopez concurred in her history of women's football: "The WFA had to turn to the FA to rescue women's football from its problems" (1997: 56). There is also a suggestion that the WFA went into the process willingly, as they felt ill-equipped to deal with the growth of women's football. For example, Williams labels the merger "a hand-over rather than a take-over" (2003: 121), while the FA's own website presents the merger as having been a voluntary undertaking on behalf of the WFA, stating that the WFA "voted to pass over its activities to The FA" ([thefa.com](https://www.thefa.com), 2023). A 2006 report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport celebrated the FA's assumption of control as "of enormous benefit for women's football" (2006: paragraph 7).

These interpretations are interesting partly because they are at odds with the broader literature on organizational mergers in sport. Internationally, studies of amalgamations between men's and women's sporting organizations have found that such processes increase male control at the expense of female autonomy (Cox & Thompson 2003, Stronach & Adair 2009). Across English sport as a whole, recent research has demonstrated that the transition from separate to merged governance which took place in the 1990s was profoundly disempowering for women in many sports, including squash and cricket (Nicholson 2022). Was the WFA-FA merger really such an outlier?

2.2 Women's Experiences in Football Governance and Coaching

Scholars have long recognised that sport organisations are institutions which remain heavily male-dominated (Velija & Piggott 2022), and which reproduce traditional gender roles and reinforce male privilege (Claringbould & Knoppers 2007, Shaw & Hoeber 2003). Within the UK context, football clubs have been shown to be "extremely gendered" organisations which preserve and naturalise male dominance (Bryan et al 2021). The FA has certainly improved in this respect in recent years, appointing its first female Chair in June 2021. However, this move may have been partly a result of the mandatory 30% gender diversity targets introduced in 2017 by Sport England and UK Sport. Prior to this, only one woman had ever held a board position at the FA (Women in Sport 2017).

Despite the introduction of the FA's Football Leadership Diversity Code in 2021, there is a continuing problem with female representation at club level. Research from the Fair Game group carried out in 2022 found that two-thirds of England and Wales' leading clubs had all-male boards, and that just 11% of board members at Premier League clubs were women (Cripps 2022). This is a problem for football organisations not just for ethical reasons, but because gender diversity provides competitive advantage (Clarkson & Philippou 2022).

Qualitative studies indicate that the mere presence of women within a traditionally male-dominated organisation like the FA does not necessarily change its culture. Interviews by Welford with twelve women working within football organisations in the UK demonstrated that their work was "frequently devalued" (2011: 378), while a recent study by Preston and

Velija which involved interviews with women at the FA argued that in order for women to become accepted, they had to adopt “masculinising strategies” such as speaking more forcefully in meetings (2022: 158).

Similar problems exist within football coaching, a profession in which women continue to be underrepresented and to suffer structural discrimination (Norman 2008, Norman & Simpson 2022). Fielding-Lloyd and Mean point out that the FA-WFA merger should have led to an increase in the number of female coaches, due to the influx of women players into the main FA set-up; the fact that this has not occurred suggests that “active resistance and gate-keeping practices” were prevalent within English football over a decade after the merger (2008: 4). A more recent study amongst Black women coaches actually demonstrates that they believe sexism to be more of a barrier in career progression than racism (Clarkson et al 2022). Again, this leads to women adopting “masculine behaviours” such as aggression and shouting, in order to be accepted and to pass the required coaching qualifications (Welford 2011: 371-2). Might the lack of women progressing in governance and coaching in the two decades since the FA-WFA merger be somehow linked to or even considered a legacy of the merger?

2.3 Women’s Football: Sameness vs Difference

Feminist scholars are split over the question of whether women’s sport should be seen as the same or different to men’s sport, and thus as to the best way to govern it. Liberal feminists promote the integration of women within existing sporting structures, and argue that women-only environments preserve inferiority (Pronger 1990). Both Williams (2006) and Cauldwell (2011) have questioned the logic of any kind of separation of men and women within competitive football, arguing that the ideal would be for women to be “treated without reference to gender” (Williams 2006: 162). By contrast, radical feminists see equality within existing structures as an impossible goal due to the deep-rootedness of masculine hegemony within these structures (Birrell and Richter 1987). Instead, radical feminists argue that difference in women’s sport should be valued over sameness, noting that many women-only sporting organizations promote alternative, progressive values such as an ethic of non-competitiveness and care (Lenskyj 1994, Hargreaves 1994).

Arguments have been advanced both for and against separatism in the specific context of football. In Karen Fraser’s recent history of women’s football in Scotland, she shows that the continued separation of Scottish Women’s Football “comes at a [literal] price”: that is, a lack of available funds, due to UEFA and FIFA’s failure to recognize it as a primary football organisation (2021: 245). Yet merged governance has also arguably constrained the ability of women’s football to assert itself during times of crisis. This was notably seen during the recent Covid-19 pandemic, as observed by Clarkson et al:

In England and the USA, where most fixtures were unplayed, two different responses emerged. In England, there was a two-month delay between the pandemic and communication about how the 2019–2020 season would be resolved, whereas in the USA, within this timeframe a new competition was launched with COVID-19 measures in place, commercial partners and a new broadcasting deal. (2022: 470)

They conclude that the ability of the National Women’s Soccer League to act independently was a strength, in contrast to the situation in England (and Australia) whereby women’s football was constrained by the FA’s decision to prioritise the resumption of the men’s game (2022: 472). This case study is an important one because it

suggests that there is an important debate to be had about the extent to which women's football can and should be run in the same way as and by the same people and organisations who are responsible for the men's game.

2.4 Models of Club Governance: Independence vs Alignment

The existing literature suggests that since their 1993 takeover of women's football, the FA (whether consciously or unconsciously) have pursued policies which make it increasingly difficult for independent women's football clubs to survive (Welford 2008, Williams 2017, Woodhouse et al 2019). Williams mentions an early policy (c.2003) pursued by the FA which prevented clubs based outside Football League and Premiership grounds from receiving an equivalent subsidy to those who were integrated (2003: 119). More recently, the launch of the Women's Super League in 2011 was effectively predicated on club-level mergers: clubs who wanted to enter and then (in 2013/14) stay in the top flight were asked to find enormous amounts of money and to meet stringent minimum facility standards, which in the majority of cases meant joining up with an existing Premier League club (Dunn & Welford 2015, Woodhouse et al 2019).

It is obvious why the FA has gone down this route. It is the quickest way to grow women's football, as money from the men's game can be used to cross-subsidise women's teams and make them sustainable over the longer term (Clarkson et al 2023). However, there are also significant downsides to this model of integration. In a seminal study published in 2008, Welford explored different types of club model, from "independent" to "linked" right through to "partnered". She found that women's teams linked to men's clubs were at risk of financial exploitation and often had little voice within club committees which contained one "token woman" (2008: 175).

The more recent work of Culvin has echoed this concern, showing how the integration of women within men's clubs in order to bring about professionalism in women's football has actually increased precarity, because players perceive that their status depends on a) showcasing gratitude and b) success on the pitch (2023: 7-9). This precarity was especially evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, whereby elite women's footballers were shown to be "particularly vulnerable to occupational fragility" due to the single-minded focus of clubs on restarting the Premier League (Clarkson et al 2022: 56).

By contrast, Welford shows how independent clubs:

created their own space to take control over their own club development and ethos. The women at the club move into leadership and decision-making roles, without relying on men... providing female role models, particularly in coaching... [All-female clubs] created an alternative environment where [gender] norms could be challenged (2008: 375-376).

Welford's study is now almost two decades old and an update is long overdue. How are independent clubs faring in a post-Covid world, and are women in aligned clubs now less subject to precarity given the recent commercial growth of women's football and the huge success of the Lionesses?

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review has highlighted some of the key questions which remain to be explored in relation to the 1993 FA-WFA merger. In particular, there is a need to more fully

understand the merger as a process, and its impacts in relation to women’s involvement in governance and women’s experiences at club level across the past three decades.

3. Research Design

In order to answer the questions outlined in section 1.2, I carried out four different strands of research, which are described in this section.

3.1 Analysis of archival material

For the historical element of the study, I located relevant collections relating to women's football in England, and visited these collections in order to identify and analyse records relating to the merger.

3.1.1 The Women's Football Association Archive

The British Library in London contains the archive of the Women's Football Association. I analysed the following documents:

1. WFA meeting minutes, 1988 to 1993.
2. David Marlowe (WFA secretary) correspondence.
3. Annual reports of WFA officers.
4. WFA accounts.
5. Women's Football Alliance minutes, 1993 to 1995.
6. FA Joint Consultative Committee minutes, 1970 to 1975.

3.1.2 National Football Museum

I also consulted the following documents from the National Football Museum in Manchester:

1. FA minutes from the 1990s.
2. England programmes, 1980s-1990s.
3. She Kicks magazine.
4. WFA Cup Final programmes.
5. FA Yearbooks.

I included a sample of FA material to allow me to develop my understanding of the broader context in which the 1993 merger took place.

3.1.3 Sports Council Archive

The Sports Council were the government quango responsible for providing funding to the WFA, and were also influential in the WFA-FA merger, providing a policy context whereby women NGBs were strongly encouraged to join up with their male counterparts for efficiency reasons (Nicholson 2022). I therefore consulted the following documents in the Sports Council archive at the University of Birmingham, dating from c.1990 to 1997:

1. Grant Assessment Panel minutes.
2. Sports Council meeting minutes.
3. Sport Case Profiles.
4. Funding Reviews.
5. Policy papers relating to National Governing Body grant aid.

6. Lottery Awards Panel minutes.
7. Women and Sport Advisory Group minutes.

While there are a raft of documents within the Sports Council archive, very few of them relate directly to football (and as such, few are cited within this report). These silences within the archive add to the importance of supplementing this material with oral history interviews.

3.2 Oral History Interviews

I conducted oral histories with seven people who were involved in the WFA at the time of and immediately after the merger, exploring their memories of the process:

1. Patricia Gregory (WFA Vice Chair).
2. June Jaycocks (WFA International Officer).
3. Tony Blair (WFA Disciplinary Officer).
4. Sheila Rollinson (Midlands Rep on the WFA Committee).
5. Sue Foulkes (Midlands WFA committee member).
6. Julie Hemsley (FA Council member).
7. Clare Taylor (England player).

Six interviews were carried out in person, and one took place over the phone.

I explored the following questions:

1. When was a merger first discussed, and what was your reaction?
2. Why was a merger suggested? Who suggested it?
3. What were the reasons for merging?
4. What did the discussions look like - what meetings were had, who attended them, and what was discussed? Did you feel that women's football was fairly represented?
5. What were you promised at the time of the merger, and did this happen?
6. How did the merger play out in practice? Was it a smooth transition?
7. Did those who had been involved in running the women's association remain involved in the sport after the merger?
8. What happened at local level?
9. Was anything lost at the point of merger?
10. What do you feel are the key lessons of the merger for contemporary football governance (men's and women's)?

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and I then carried out thematic analysis of the transcripts, drawing out key themes. The oral histories have been read intertextually with the archival material, to provide a richer and more in-depth understanding of the merger process.

3.3 Club Case Studies

A key aspect of the study is understanding the extent to which the norm of merged governance as expressed in the national WFA-FA merger filtered downwards to individual clubs. In order to do this, I initially selected two case studies of clubs which have undergone opposing journeys in relation to independence from men's football: Arsenal Ladies and Doncaster Belles.

3.3.1 Arsenal Ladies

I interviewed Gill Sayell, who was one of the original members of Arsenal Ladies when they first set up in 1987. I hoped to gain access to the Arsenal club archives to expand this case study, but unfortunately permission was not granted.

3.3.2 Doncaster Belles

I interviewed Sheila Edmunds, founder of the Belles, and her husband Paul Edmunds, long-time former manager of the club. I also interviewed two Belles supporters to gain a fan perspective on the club's relationship with Doncaster Rovers. Finally, I interviewed the current CEO of Club Doncaster, Gavin Baldwin, to provide a male perspective on their recent decision to bring the Belles into what he describes as the Club Doncaster "family".

I also visited the City of Doncaster Archives and viewed their holdings relating to the Belles, including press cuttings, business reports and photographs. This was to gain an understanding of how and why they remained independent for so long, and why this independence has recently been surrendered in favour of a closer relationship with a male club.

3.3.3 Additional Club Case Studies

Because of the difficulties in finding further interviewees from Arsenal Ladies, I widened out my research to explore three further club case studies. Firstly, I spoke to Sheila Rollinson, who founded the Derby County women's team back in 1990 and is now part of the Women's Executive Team, after the women's section were officially integrated into the men's club in 2023. Secondly, I interviewed Sue Foulkes from Leicester City Ladies, a club which chose not to pursue a merger with Leicester City FC due to a fierce desire to maintain their autonomy. Thirdly, I interviewed Nicole Allison, who in 2021 set up Worcester City Women as an independent women's club.

These case studies have demonstrated the advantages and disadvantages of closer relationships with men's clubs – a key theme explored in the analysis below.

3.3.4 Equity in Women's Club Football Event

Additional insights into the views of those working within club football were gleaned via an event held at Fulham FC in April 2024, "Equity in Women's Club Football". This was attended by twenty-five women and men involved in women's clubs in various capacities, including:

1. Club founders / chairs
2. Club coaches / managers
3. Club development officers
4. Club volunteer coordinators
5. Members of female supporters' groups.

The research to date was discussed and initial findings presented. The afternoon session was then dedicated to a group discussion, centred around the following questions:

Running women's clubs:

- 1. How is women's football currently represented within your club (committees etc)? Could the voice of women's football be heard more effectively?*
- 2. Do you feel that there is equitable access to resources within your club? If not, what is preventing this?*

Autonomy & self-determination:

- 1. For those of you whose club is already independent: Why do you believe independence is important for women's football at this level?*
- 2. For those of you whose club is aligned with a men's club: Do you see greater autonomy as desirable for your club / for women's football clubs more broadly?*
- 3. What do you think is the ideal model for football clubs and why? (Full alignment with men's club, full independence, or something else? If something else what would that look like?)*

FA support:

- 1. What do the FA currently do to support equity and autonomy for women's clubs?*
- 2. What more could the FA do in future to support equity and autonomy for women's football?*
- 3. How could the FA more effectively support different club models, in cases where alignment is not working?*

The results of this discussion are summarized in Appendix 1. These views were in turn used to inform the analysis presented in chapter 6 (below).

3.4 FA Interviews

I carried out semi-structured interviews with five women who currently work for the FA, via Teams or over the phone. The identities of these interviewees have been withheld, to encourage them to speak freely during our conversations. However, in all five cases their job role either wholly or partially encompassed women's football. In the interviews, I explored the following questions:

1. Why did you decide to start working at the FA?
2. Do you feel you have been able to make your voice (and the voice of women's football) heard since you joined the FA?
3. In what ways has the environment for women working within the FA changed in the last five to ten years, and why?
4. How is women's football currently represented within the FA structures (i.e. integration vs separate committees)? How has this changed since you began working at the FA?
5. What do you think are the advantages of women's football (both within the FA and at club level) being run so closely with men's football? What do you think are the disadvantages?
6. Does women's football need to be run differently to men's football? If so, in what ways?

The main aim of these interviews was to compare contemporary experiences with those of the women who ran the WFA, to understand how the merger has impacted on the day-to-day experiences of women involved in football governance.

4. Results – The Merger Process

In this chapter, I reflect on the 1993 merger between the FA and the WFA, drawing out key information and themes which have emerged from my analysis of archival material and my oral history interviews with seven people (six women and one man) who were directly involved in the process, either as part of the WFA Committee, as a player, or as part of the FA's successor committee to the WFA, the Women's Football Alliance.

4.1 The WFA did not enter into a merger willingly

In contrast with existing popular accounts, a detailed examination of the archival material surrounding the merger makes it clear that the WFA did not enter into a merger with the FA willingly. In fact, the WFA were forced into the merger due to financial problems - caused in part by a lack of help from the FA.

The context for the merger dates back to 1971, when UEFA passed a motion which stated that member countries needed to take control of the development of women's football. Most European countries chose to run women's and men's football jointly under the same organisation, but in England, the FA decided to meet UEFA's requirements in a different way. At a meeting in February 1972, they adopted the following resolution:

That all Clubs be affiliated to a WFA which shall be supervised and controlled within the National Association... The FA would have no control over the finances of the WFA and would not give financial assistance (FA minutes, 1972).

Pat Gregory, one of the WFA founders in 1969 and Vice Chair at the time of the merger, recalled that in the years between 1972 and 1993, the FA's help had been extremely limited:

They, okay, grudgingly lifted the 1921 ban... we had an official channel and we could talk to them and there was never a question that they were going to do any more than that. There was no money. We had no money from them for several years... we couldn't even from the FA get kit out of them, to go back. I used to write to whoever was in charge and say, "Can your kit sponsors not give us a set of kit?" ... "No".

The WFA minutes show that the WFA did ask the FA for money several times, and were initially refused financial assistance.

From 1983, the FA did give the WFA a small grant to assist with running women's football. By the late 1980s, the WFA were also in receipt of grants from the Sports Council and the Football Trust. However, by this point, the growth of women's football was such that the WFA were struggling financially to remain afloat. Pat Gregory recalled:

By the time we had run out of money in 1992, or really 1991, and we were talking seriously to the FA from 1990/1991 onwards about them taking us on because we knew that we could not afford to invest... by the time we folded in the end of '93 we were £28,000 in debt... We were not generating enough income to follow through with the aspirations that we had or we wanted to see. We weren't getting the level of sponsorship that they [the FA] ultimately got.

Archival documents bear out Pat's assessment that by 1992, the WFA had accumulated significant debt (Women's Football Alliance minutes, 13 November 1993). The WFA's own accounts show an annual of £3,619 for 1989, which had increased to £10,842 by 1990. In the period between July 1991 and June 1992, the WFA received a grant of £70,000 from the Sports Council and £45,000 from the Football Trust, yet still operated at a loss of £4,896 (WFA Accounts, 30 June 1992). Clearly, this financial situation was not sustainable over the longer term.

The real pinch point appears to have come after Richard Faulkner (who was Deputy Chairman of the Football Trust) resigned from his role as WFA Chair in October 1991, creating concerns that both the Trust and the Sports Council would withdraw funding from the WFA. According to newspaper reports, Faulkner's resignation came about because WFA officers "refused to back his plans to give the FA greater say over the administration and finances of the WFA" ('Whistle blower', *The Times*, 3 November 1991). Tony Blair, the WFA's Disciplinary Officer, recalled:

Richard Faulkner was the Chairman of the Women's FA during that period... And he actually resigned because, because the clubs wouldn't go over to the FA... And at that point we thought, "Well, if that's the case, how are we going to get any further grant from the - being in the position that we were in, how are we going to get any more grants from the Sports Council?" ... if we were going to carry on as we were carrying on, where was the money going to come from?... We just didn't have it.

Far from using its own professional clout and experience to assist the WFA in its administration efforts, the FA instead appears to have chosen to place pressure on an already overstretched team of volunteers to simply give up and accept that the WFA could not afford to continue overseeing women's football.

There was also a feeling amongst interviewees that a lack of support from the FA for women to gain roles within coaching or refereeing helped persuade players (seeking future careers in these fields) that a merger with the FA was necessary. June Jaycocks, the WFA's International Officer, recalled:

A lot of them, they wanted to do things that they couldn't do. Coaching boys and girls and all of this. And I think they were all quite waiting for it to happen... And I think all they thought was, "Well, let's hope that they let us do what we're doing now and not sort of put too many spokes in", you know... But a lot of the girls, I mean they were sort of taking exams and things like that, and they wanted to go into all sorts of things, which they needed the FA for as well. Because if you want an FA badge, you've got to have the FA behind you, haven't you.

Similarly, Sue Foulkes – who was part of the Midlands WFA Committee – said that the lack of facilities made available to the WFA by those in the men's game convinced her that a closer relationship with the FA was necessary:

All the doors were slammed in our faces basically... unless someone opened some doors and let us get into clubs and get grounds, there just wasn't enough future to grow your clubs really... You can't forever change in a car or on the car park.

Oral history interviews make clear that the WFA did not want or envisage a merger with the FA, but by 1992 felt their financial situation was so dire, and their lack of clout within the football community so apparent, that there was no alternative but to fold completely. Jaycocks said:

I suppose in my own mind, I thought we couldn't have carried on as we were, so something had to happen. And better to be taken over by an association which is the Football Association which can, you know, carry on forever. Because that was never going to fold. That was never going to fold. So you know, sometimes you've just got to take a little bit of bad with the good, haven't you?

The financial issues faced by the WFA were therefore exacerbated by barriers put in place by the FA and the wider men's football community. Taken together, it was these issues which forced the WFA to seek a merger – it was not a free and autonomous choice.

4.2 The 1993 “merger” of the WFA and FA was a takeover

Within the management literature, a distinction is often made between a “merger” of equal partners and a “takeover”, which involves the purchase of a smaller company by a larger one. It is interesting, therefore, that all my interviewees viewed the 1993 “merger” as having been more of a takeover:

I think of it as a takeover. They took it over.

But merger - no, we couldn't - a merger would mean that they welcomed us with open arms, wouldn't it?... Which I couldn't honestly say that. No, I couldn't honestly say that... I felt that it was more like a business venture. Because we needed help, they were taking us over.

It wasn't a merger of any sort; it was a complete takeover.

Language matters. The evidence from this research suggests that it is more appropriate to refer to the events of 1993 as a takeover than as a merger.

4.3 The merger was a moment of disempowerment for women's football, not a moment of progress

WFA minutes from the merger period suggest that their members were not properly consulted about the FA takeover. Initial talks between WFA Chairman Tim Stearn and the FA were kept private (Chairman's Report, February 1992); and when the WFA's Officers did finally meet with the FA Vice Chairman in January 1992, they were “informed the FA had overall responsibility for the game and its development” - the opposite to a genuine consultation process. At the end of 1992, the FA decided to appoint a new Co-ordinator for Women's Football to work out of the FA's own offices in Potters Bar, without discussing the appointment with the WFA.

WFA members were initially told that the WFA would not “lose its identity and independence” (Faulkner, 23 April 1990) and that the FA would only seek involvement with certain aspects of women's football administration - namely coaching, international fixtures, and running the national WFA Cup (FA Women's Football Sub-Committee meeting minutes, 23 November 1992). In a questionnaire circulated to all WFA member clubs in June 1991, the WFA Officers sought to initiate a consultation process, stating:

“We hope... a consensus view will emerge which will form the basis of a paper which can be discussed with the FA” (‘The Future of Women’s Football’, 14 June 1991). In this questionnaire they asked members about whether and how they felt the FA should be involved in running the England national team, administering the WFA Cup, administering the National League, and whether the WFA should retain its own administrative staff.

Responses were received from only 30 clubs (out of 240 circulated), suggesting a degree of apathy amongst the membership – although admittedly they may not have realised that the entire future of the WFA was at stake. The overall feeling amongst members was that while help from the FA would be welcomed, the preference was to retain some form of independent WFA (‘WFA Questionnaire Results’, undated). Jaycocks recalled:

I think they all thought that we were - you know, just going to be our own Women’s Football Association but abiding by the FA rules. Which we were quite happy to do.

The unhappiness of the WFA membership was evident at the 5 December 1992 AGM, which had to be adjourned after representatives from the East Midlands, and the Transatlantic Ladies and Oxford United clubs, sought to suspend the meeting amidst heated discussions about the FA takeover (WFA AGM minutes, 5 December 1992).

Following this meeting, in correspondence between David Marlowe (WFA Secretary) and other WFA Officers in late 1992, Marlowe stated that he had spoken directly to Pat Smith at the FA and summarised the situation as follows:

Putting the whole thing in a nutshell we will either disappear altogether or AT BEST function as a County in respect of our own Leagues (Marlowe, 11 December 1992).

Despite the feeling of members, the FA had evidently decided that it was time to assume direct control of the WFA.

This is borne out by the FA’s own Executive Committee minutes. On 13 February 1991, the FA Executive agreed that it would administer “some of” the activities of the WFA only, and that “the WFA should retain a full-time Secretariat if the proposals should proceed”. But a year later, at their 11 February 1992 meeting, the FA Executive had become concerned about the WFA’s failure to file its Annual Accounts to Companies House in timely fashion, and authorised its Chairman to “investigate this further apparent failure in the WFA administration and take appropriate action at the earliest opportunity” (FA minutes, National Football Museum).

The FA may have lost patience at this point partly due to the broader challenges facing English football. The small amount of space allotted to women’s football in the FA Executive Committee minutes from 1990 to 1993 can be seen as evidence that it was seen by the FA as a relatively minor concern, certainly in relation to issues like the Taylor Report and the broader aftermath of Hillsborough, which consumed a great deal of bandwidth in the early 1990s (Rookwood and Hughson 2017). It was therefore in the FA’s interests to ensure any financial issues facing women’s football were dealt with swiftly and efficiently, rather than involving itself in protracted negotiations with the WFA Committee. Additionally, the FA may have had an added incentive to bring the WFA back into more direct control, due to their growing concern about the potential breakaway of the new men’s Premier League.

The FA were also operating in a policy environment whereby the Sports Council were increasingly putting pressure on governing bodies to “rationalise” their activities via mergers between men’s and women’s associations (Nicholson 2022). As one Sports Council policy document from 1992 stated:

The arguments for the integration of separate men's and women's associations in such sports as hockey, golf, lacrosse, cricket, football, rugby and bowls rest on the basis of efficiency, effectiveness, avoidance of duplication and the overall promotion and development of the sport ('Review of Grant Aid to Governing Bodies of Sport', Sports Council, 2 July 1992).

In September 1991, Joe Patton from the Sports Council actually wrote to David Hunt (the WFA Treasurer), stating that he was “increasingly concerned about the administration and development of women’s football” and concluding that “women’s football could be considerably strengthened by developing a much closer working relationship with the FA” (Joe Patton, 24 September 1991). No doubt the FA will have been aware of this and perhaps even spurred to action by it.

At the last ever WFA AGM in February 1993, David Marlowe informed the assembled WFA members of the reality of the situation:

...in the 1970s FIFA issued a directive which stated that all Football Association's should control women's football. The Football Association at that time decided to allow the Women's FA to have control of its own sport, however, at any time they could have taken back this control, they did not, but now they have decided to do so (WFA minutes, February 1993).

Trying to oppose the FA’s decision to take over the WFA was therefore never viewed as a viable option:

If we wanted to play international matches we had to do it under the aegis of the National Association, and the National Association member of FIFA was the FA... we weren't going to succeed on our own; we had to have a relationship. (Pat Gregory)

They ultimately are the arbiter of football in this country, and what they say goes. So it was kind of a finality to it, and just an acceptance. (Sheila Rollinson – WFA Midlands Representative)

For WFA member clubs, it was simply a case of being informed that the WFA would cease to exist and that they would need to affiliate to their local County FAs, as Sheila Edmunds (founder of the Doncaster Belles) recalled:

I don't think we ever discussed it as such, you just get informed that it's happening. ... but I don't ever recall as a club discussing whether that's what we want. You didn't really have an option. That's where it's going, and if you don't want to be part of it, well... find another league then.

This is in direct contrast with the equivalent merger of English hockey, which took place in 1995-96 and involved a full member consultation on the proposed merger and the establishment of a Working Party with an equal number of representatives from both associations (Nicholson 2024).

Those who attended the final WFA meeting at Highbury in February 1993 remember it as a sombre affair. Although a vote to accept the merger did take place, it was not felt to be a genuine choice:

Where in the past other meetings had been a bit boisterous, this one particularly wasn't, because I think everybody knew that the writing was on the wall... Even if they'd have voted against it, then it would have been a case of, "Well, I'm sorry, but that's the way it is... the Women's FA now is defunct... so how you're going to carry on playing football, we don't know" ... But it was carried by the majority... after that meeting, the following week, then we went into our office in Manchester and just cleared it out. And the rest, as they say, is history. (Tony Blair)

Some of us went to the pub round to the corner from Arsenal and drowned our sorrows when we went – because again, we had to kind of go there. And it was like Hobson's choice, you know, we got a vote on it, but actually if we didn't vote we were going to be kind of thrown out of the FA again. We'd got no real choice. (Sheila Rollinson)

This reinforces the sense of the merger having been a takeover which was not wanted by many within the women's football community. Ultimately, therefore, it needs to be seen as a moment of disempowerment.

4.4 The 1993 “moment” was not a panacea for women's football

Clare Taylor provided a crucial player perspective on the WFA-FA merger in our interview. Most players, even in the early 1990s, do not seem to have engaged directly in governance (for example, they did not attend WFA meetings). Therefore, their experience of the FA takeover seems to have been a more positive one than those who directly ran the WFA. Taylor compared the resources which were available to England players before and after the merger:

I remember going to one training session [pre-merger] and I'd bought a Scotland football shirt. It was when they were like really jazzy and it was cheap because obviously because I'm in Yorkshire and I'm training for an England football match with a Scotland shirt on... And you're like, "hang on a minute!" And there's one session where Martin [the coach] forgot the balls, so we had a virtual football session... Pretending there was a ball and moving it around...

When the FA took over it changed overnight, absolutely... You'd gone from, the night before the Women's World Cup Final sewing a badge on your own shirt, to going up to the manager's room like with an armful of kit and whatever else and it's like Christmas for me, you know... And it was like, you can claim your mileage, and for us that was like, "wow we get our money back!"... I don't think it changed your "professionalism" in inverted commas because we were still amateur, but it gave you a sense of belonging more.

Julie Hemsley, who became Assistant Manager to the England team, described the new influx of resources as “Aladdin's Cave”.

However, at local level it was a different story. It took four years after the merger for the FA to introduce a national development plan for women's football, and another seventeen

years before the launch of the Women's Super League. Sue Foulkes from Leicester City Ladies said that progress still depended on the attitude of local clubs:

We still carried on playing on council pitches and still didn't really have the best of facilities. But at least, clubs could let us in. And... the bigger, better, stronger clubs didn't really want us at that point. And obviously, the professional clubs didn't want us particularly at that point... But it was a transition over years. It wasn't an immediately, wow, this is wonderful, we've suddenly got everything. And I think it was very localised.

The impact of the merger on those working within clubs was, therefore, something of a postcode lottery.

This accords with the situation Pete Davies discovered in 1995 when he carried out interviews for his book on the Doncaster Belles. He quotes Linda Whitehead, who had worked for the WFA up until the merger as their paid Secretary, saying:

They [the FA] just rode roughshod all over us. They wanted to do it in their own time, in their own manner, and the grassroots feel they've been left to one side - that the FA's only interested in the national side, and that otherwise the women are way down the heap (1996: 92).

Vic Akers at Arsenal told Davies that the FA's takeover had been a "steamroller job", with those already working within women's football completely ignored (1996: 93). Similarly, in my interview with June Jaycocks she suggested that the FA had simply abandoned the grassroots:

They wanted the cream, they didn't want the rest of it, did they. No... I think they probably thought, "Well, why spoil it by letting the women come in? ... Well, we don't want blinking women, do we? We don't want them knuckling in on it and causing trouble and having tantrums and things."

Evidently, the WFA-FA merger was slow to bring about genuine cultural change within footballing organisations, demonstrating that mergers are not a panacea for gender equity within sport.

4.5 The merger made it harder for women to progress as football coaches, not easier

As noted above in 4.1, some women believed the merger with the FA would make it easier for women to progress within coaching. However, even in 2024, the professional landscape of football coaching the UK remains overwhelmingly male, suggesting that this hope never came to fruition in reality.

In fact, there is evidence that in the immediate post-merger period, existing women's football coaches were treated badly by the FA. Julie Hemsley, for example, was appointed as the Assistant Manager of England immediately after the 1993 FA takeover. At the same time, she was elected as the first woman to sit on the FA Council. However, after four years in the role, she described in our interview how she was manoeuvred out of the coaching role:

JH: I got my role of Assistant Manager taken away because the two roles weren't - it was hard to be a Council member and - which was a question that was asked at the meeting in '93 when I got voted in, "Well she's the Assistant Manager of the national team. Can she do both?" "Yes she can." And then in 1997 or whatever it was, "No she can't." But instead of asking which one I wanted, I just got sidestepped... I said, "Whatever is best for the game because the game's bigger than any of us."

RN: Who would that have been that made that decision then by that point in '97?

JH: Well I would have thought it was the [FA] women's committee... And they, very gracious and very gentlemanly but didn't understand women's football or why women wanted to play football... I mean I'll never really know the real story... It was a shock. But you know, and then I think it was, "Well you'll go to the games." I'm like, "Well that's not what it's about. I thought we were developing women to become coaches."... But yes, did it hurt? Yes. Big time.

It is interesting that Julie describes the FA Women's Committee as consisting largely of men with no experience of women's football. This is a good illustration of one of the key issues with the move to merged governance: decisions were now being made by those with no experience of the discrete needs of the women's game (see section 4.6 below).

The merger also brought about a change in coach education. By contrast with the supportive all-female environment which had prevailed prior to the mergers, the new coach education under the FA tended to be undertaken in predominantly or exclusively male environments. Julie Hemsley reported:

I did my FA prelim. Got that. All men, you know. Didn't bother me. I thought well - But it did get tough because fortunately I could play and I was fit. But I did get, you know, I got a couple of bad knocks because six foot four guys and you're going in, it wasn't really appropriate but it was, there was nothing else.

These uncomfortable experiences may help to explain why by 2000 (seven years after the FA's takeover of women's football), only seven women in the entire country had gained the FA's A Licence, compared to 1,105 men (Owen 2005: 128).

Of course, the current male dominance of football coaching is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. However, it needs to be viewed at least partly as a legacy of the 1993 merger, which did nothing to increase coaching opportunity for women and in some ways actually created a more hostile environment for those who wanted to progress within coaching that the one which had prevailed in the WFA years.

When assessing the impact of the merger, it is important not to conflate **women's football** and **women within football** (i.e. women holding governance and coaching positions). In the case of coaching, the merger did not just impact on women coaches but on both male and female coaches working within the women's game, due to the FA's seeming preference for its own coaching candidates.

An example of this can be seen in the handling of the England manager role prior to and after the merger. For several years before the FA takeover of women's football, the role of England manager had been held by John Bilton, who was an experienced coach within the women's game. However, in January 1993 the WFA wrote to Bilton to inform him that they

had “no option other than to release you from your present responsibilities as Manager of our International Team” due to the FA’s assumption of responsibility for women’s football. They added, however, that Bilton should offer his services to the FA (Hunt 1993). The FA’s response was to parachute in Ted Copeland as Bilton’s replacement, despite the fact that Copeland had never coached in women’s football before.

In his book on the Doncaster Belles, published in 1996, journalist Pete Davies also relayed the disquiet which Copeland’s appointment caused within women’s football, which was then a relatively small world:

... he [Copeland] saw himself as trying to raise standards - standards of preparation, of diet and nutrition, of behaviour, as much as standards of play - but the way he went about this struck the players as ineptly draconian, and more and more of them came to view England duty as a chore, not a pleasure... Belles players used to love going away to play for England; now... they came back from Copeland's sessions 'demoralised'... Joanne [Broadhurst] had played for England eighteen times; the words she used to describe Copeland's training sessions were 'disheartening' and depressing. At another club, the manager told me of a young player who went to her first England training weekend - and rang home in tears from the hotel on the Saturday night, saying she wanted to come home (Davies 1996: 95-7).

The imposition of coaches within women’s sport who had no prior experience or knowledge in the post-merger period was evidently not a wholly successful strategy.

4.6 The merger decreased women’s voice in football governance

In the years prior to the FA takeover of women’s football, the Women’s FA was a female-dominated organization (judging by the names of those in the minutes from clubs who attended meetings). At committee level the picture is slightly more nuanced: for example, the WFA was always chaired by a man. However, for 13 of its 24 years, it had a female vice-chair. In fact, between 1972 and 1993 the gender split of the WFA officers was remarkably even, with either a fifty-fifty 3:3 ratio of male to female office-holders, or (in years where there were seven officers) a 3:4 or 4:3 split (see Appendix 2).

After the merger, this changed. In 1993, the FA established their own Women’s Football Committee. Linda Whitehead, amongst others, was pushed out of her existing role; instead, the FA chose to appoint their own men as the Committee Chair (Ray Kiddell) and Vice-Chair (Peter Hough). In all, six men and three women sat on the FA’s new Women’s Committee in its first year, while the FA Management Committee of the Women’s Premier League was entirely male (see Appendix 3). Again, while it is important not to automatically conflate **women’s football** and **women within football**, and while we should recognize the important role which many men played in the governance of the WFA, the transfer of power from the WFA to the FA does appear to have reduced the number of women at the top levels of administration within football. (It is harder to reach conclusions about grassroots level; this would require a more extensive analysis than was possible in the lifetime of this project.)

How was the situation which prevailed in football similar or different to other sports? Clare Taylor offers a unique perspective on this, due to her status as a dual football-cricket international in the 1990s. In our interview, she described her perceptions of the

similarities and differences between the WFA-FA merger, and the merger of the Women's Cricket Association with the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in 1993:

I think I'm almost like cynical about it. I think both governing bodies had to do it. They were forced to do it because they needed a women's, women's arm...

But you need, you need the people fighting the women's corner to be good people. And within the cricket BB [Barbara Daniels] was, and then I think Connie [Clare Connor] has continued it on. The FA I don't, I don't know that changeover, I don't know if Linda [Whitehead] was involved with the changeover. I think it was a complete cut, wasn't it? So at least with the ECB they incorporated... while there was that transition, they used people who knew what was going on...

There's nothing, there's no continuity there with the FA is there?... The FA put a lot of men in charge who didn't really know much about the game and I think because of that, I think that's why cricket has advanced a little bit quicker, because they understood. It was almost like, "we'll give you the money, you've got the expertise, crack on with it". Whereas the football a little bit, you know, "we know best", and I feel that's why it's taken them a while to catch up or to get to the level that the England Women are at the moment.

For Taylor, while both the ECB and the FA were reluctant to assume responsibility for the women's organisations, the ECB handled the post-merger period more effectively. Their decision to retain key personnel who were involved before the merger (in this case Barbara Daniels, who had been the Chief Executive of the WCA) meant institutional knowledge carried over. By contrast, the FA's decision to replace the entire WFA Committee with men who lacked knowledge of women's football has (in Taylor's view) held back the development of women's football.

Many interviewees felt that the merger took away their sense of having a voice in the governance of women's football. For example, Sheila Rollinson reflected:

Once they took over that meant that we all affiliated to our local County FAs, and there was quite a lot of FA blazers still around at a lot of County FAs... And it just felt like you'd been abandoned almost... they did things like although they kept the FA Cup going, it became the FA Women's Cup, not the WFA Cup... It was trying to wipe out everything that we'd done, really, because they wanted nothing to do with us.

We'd got the WFA sort of, like I say, we knew everybody in our own league. But also when we went down to the WFA you'd meet people from teams and think - you'd see the same faces because it was the same people running them. And you knew that you were pulling together against difficulties. And we kind of lost that overall feeling, and it was a bit fragmented.

As a result of this emotional disconnect, some women left football governance altogether in the period after the merger (Patricia Gregory and Linda Whitehead are perhaps the two most high-profile examples). By 1997, the FA Council recognised the underrepresentation of women as a serious issue, reporting at one Sports Council seminar that:

Currently the Technical Department of the FA are looking at setting and revising specific targets for the women's game including women's committees on County Associations, female representation on full committees, fast tracking of female

coaches and mentoring support to women in these positions (Women's Sports Development Seminar, 21 November 1997).

For women who did remain involved in governance, it could be a very isolating place. Sue Foulkes recalled her own experience within the Leicester County FA:

I went to a lot of the conferences. You know, you always felt that when you put your hand up to say anything, there was a loud intake of breath, like a [gasps] like the woman is there to speak sort of moment. So, I'm not sure it was always a willingly accepted voice... But if you'd got some men involved with positions in the club or in your league, their voice had a little bit more impact than your voice did at some of the national meetings... it just felt that they were listened to better.

Sue felt that male-dominated committees failed to listen to women like her, even though she had many years of experience working within women's football.

Another high-profile example is Julie Hemsley, who in 1993 was voted in as the first ever female FA Council member to represent women's football - a position she held for ten years. Julie relayed a telling anecdote which occurred near the start of her term of office:

There was a final at Birmingham... So half time, councillors go in the board room, get their little tea and coffee. "Julie's not allowed. No women." Right? The doorman doing his job. So I go, "Okay, I'll find the wives." So I go round to the next room like, "What's going on?" And they're like, "Oh let them do what they do. Come and sit with us." I'm like, "Okay." So we're chatting and then suddenly the Vice-Chairman comes in and says, "We're looking for you." I'm like, "Well I'm here." "Why aren't you in there?" I said, "I was not allowed in."... But they weren't ready for it because that's how it's always done.

Julie therefore endured both symbolic and physical, spatial exclusion from important footballing spaces, purely by virtue of being a woman. She was also forced to endure being treated as the FA's "token woman":

JH: It was a learning process and curve. And I enjoyed it to be honest. I enjoyed chatting football. Especially when we were away in different countries. And they want to show you off. That was the funny thing, it was like, you know, "we want you with us."

RN: Because, "here's our woman"?

JH: Yes. Kind of. Not in so many words but that's how it felt. Like, oh I'm like a little toy you bring out of the cupboard every now and then, you know... Like, "there's a lady", you know what I mean?...

RN: Some might, from a feminist perspective, critique that as you were sort of the FA Council's token woman.

JH: Well I was the token woman, because I was the only one. But it wasn't meant in that way. It was, I'm just doing a job... But there's more women on there now. So it paved the way.

Julie's view is that her early experiences of sexism and tokenism in the FA paved the way for other women to become involved in football governance. However, the statistics do not support her view: in fact, women remain systematically underrepresented within football governance in the UK (Bryan et al 2021). Again, we need to see this type of discrimination as a direct legacy of the 1993 merger which forced women's football to join up with men's football - to the detriment of having a significant voice in governance.

It is interesting, though, that Julie's experiences mirror those of Monica Pickersgill within the post-merged hockey association, the English Hockey Association (EHA), despite the fact that the EHA constitution adopted gender quotas for all committees (Nicholson 2024). Yet Pickersgill, elected as the EHA's first President, also experienced tokenism:

I know it took a long time to feel that we were equal even after we agreed that the trust was there ... That even though we had the appropriate numbers on the committees, the weight and value of those members was not accepted as, totally as equal because they didn't think we'd been there and done it.

And I remember after I was, after we'd come together and I was then elected the first President of the Association in Europe, I sensed every time I appeared at any event in the early days and they were talking about or I was introduced as the new President of England [spoken quietly] 'she's, it's a woman!' (Nicholson 2024).

The experience of the EHA bears out the findings of contemporary management scholars, who have concluded that the mere presence of women at the top levels of an organisation is not a sufficient condition to advance gender equality in sport governance (Adriaanse & Schofield 2014). The lack of quotas introduced by the FA into the governance of women's football may not therefore have been the issue in and of itself; rather, we might question the extent to which a takeover of women's football could have advanced gender equity within football leadership under any circumstances. Or, to put it another way, the issue of ongoing gender inequality in sport is one inherent to merged governance, rather than specific to the FA.

4.7 The merger continues to evoke strong emotions, despite the fact that it took place thirty years ago

It was striking that in interviews, numerous participants used the language of death to recall the FA takeover. Pat Gregory described the final WFA meeting as "the death knell" for the WFA, while Sheila Rollinson said:

It was quite a funereal sort of feel. We all kind of felt that we were coming to the end of something rather than looking forward to the start of it.

Pat - a woman who had devoted half her life to the development of women's football - felt "a sense of failure" in the period after the merger:

We didn't see it through, did we. I felt it to be somewhat of a failure that we were handing it over but realistically we knew that this was what had to happen, otherwise we wouldn't progress, so what we felt about what we'd built up didn't matter.

Tony Blair, meanwhile, despite expressing support for the merger as a process, still felt sad at the prospect of the end of the WFA:

I mean after you've been there so long there's obviously going to be some sadness, you know, you'd lose friends and there'd be people you wouldn't see again. And I mean there's even people now, that I can think about now, and they're actually no longer with us. And when you think of - what we did, with the money we had, would get the game going. But that's all we did, kept it going. We were unpaid servants of the WFA. So all we did was kept it going until the FA took over.

These feelings of failure and sorrow are presumably compounded by the popular narrative of the merger as the point at which women's football really, truly began to develop - ignoring the WFA's achievements in advancing the sport during a period when the FA were completely uninterested.

4.8 Conclusion

Despite the fact that the merger took place three decades ago, its legacies are still potent within English football. It is important to stress that at the time of the FA takeover, the WFA had accumulated significant debt and that, had the FA not stepped in, the WFA may in any case have gone bankrupt – which would have been far from ideal for the future development of women's football.

However, the evidence presented above provides a counterpoint to previous interpretations of the merger as an unproblematically positive process. The merger was not a neutral process, or something desired by those running women's football: it was a moment of disempowerment.

5. Results – Legacies of the Merger: The Place of Women's Football within the FA

In this chapter, I reflect on the place of women's football within the current FA structures, drawing on data from my interviews with five female FA employees.

5.1 Women's football is increasingly embedded within the structures of the FA

While women's football was initially run by a separate FA Women's Committee (see section 4.6 above), this has evolved over time, as one interviewee explained:

When I started women's and girls' football wasn't anything, it wasn't really a focus. We had no one who did it as a job... Whereas now it's just normal business, it is part of what we do and everybody does it, it's embedded.

Instead of being hived off into separate areas of the FA, most departments now focus on both women's and men's football. The exceptions are the FA's technical and professional game divisions, which continue to be separated into women's and men's.

This is partly a result of the vision of Baroness Sue Campbell. Baroness Campbell was hired in 2016 by FA CEO Martin Glenn to head up women's football, and refused his offer to establish a separate Women's Football Division:

I said no, which he was a bit surprised at. I said no because then everybody will just say it's their job. I want a woman in every division of the FA... who has two jobs. One is to deliver the women's strategy that we will all write together as a team. And two is to effect real change in their colleagues about why this matters and why it's important. And that team has done an incredible job.

For the moment, there continues to be a Women's Football Board, but at the time this research was being conducted, the FA were in the middle of a governance review which would see even this small remaining corner of separatism abolished. This is an indication of the extent to which the FA see merged governance as having been a success story for the women's game.

5.2 Merged governance offers some advantages for the women's game

The majority of my interviewees felt that the integration of women's football within the FA was advantageous, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was a sense that being integrated had helped women's football move towards parity with the men's game:

It just makes it equal, doesn't it? You are no longer having to bang a drum.

It just becomes part of your core business... And it should, why shouldn't it be part of the core business?

Secondly, interviewees argued that it helped ensure women's football was being discussed by key decision-makers, who were forced to engage with it in a way which they were not under the old WFA model:

You should be able to be at the table for certain conversations... it gives women's football an opportunity to go and fight for its place at that table, or, you know, whether its budgets or whatever it may be... everyone's in it together.

If you want to effect societal change, you have to affect the way men think as well as the ways that women think. And you can hive it off into the Women's Football Association, [but] men will stop looking, why would they need to take an interest?... I can give you examples of people whose mindset over the last seven years has gone from, "this is a joke, this is a bit of a joke", to actually being a fan. And that has taken a long time, but had we sat over there, it would have carried on being a bit of a joke. They wouldn't have had to interface with it, wouldn't have to have dealt with it, wouldn't have to pass me in a corridor on a regular basis and go, "there's that bloody woman again".

Finally, interviewees made an economic efficiency argument – in short, running one structure was cheaper than trying to run two:

In an ideal world... it would be run by one business, because there's then more money to go into the game. The more you have to run separate structures, the more money that costs. And the more time it takes, and the more it can feel like a drain.

If you just had a female-only specialist approach to staffing and governance, I'm not sure you'd get the same efficiencies that you could potentially with an integrated approach.

It is interesting to note that this economic efficiency argument is the same one which was advanced by the Sports Council in the 1990s when the policy of merged governance was originally being rolled out across sport in the UK (Nicholson 2022).

5.3 There are risks to alignment, as well as rewards

While recognizing the benefits to women's football outlined above, my interviews also highlighted several risks which alignment poses to the women's game. These are discussed below.

5.3.1 Progress depends on specific personnel

The FA has been fortunate to have two male allies as its most recent CEOs – Martin Glenn (2015-19) and Mark Bullingham (2019-present). It has been this leadership above all else which has driven cultural change within the organization (see section 5.6 below). However, this also leaves women's football potentially vulnerable to personnel change, as one interviewee explained:

I think the success depends on the individuals in the role if I'm honest. As long as we actively recruit with the women's game in mind, the integrated approach will work. Speaking candidly, I think we could potentially be one appointment away from going backwards if you don't get the right person in the role.

This is clearly a concern for the long-term sustainable growth of women's football, and leaves it potentially vulnerable in future, should a less progressive CEO take charge of the FA.

5.3.2 Women's football is fighting for resources as a small fish in a big pond

The FA takeover of women's football in 1993 brought with it a substantial increase in resources, but it also meant that the women's game transitioned from being run by people who would and did prioritise it, to being run by people who were unable to dedicate all their time to it. As one interviewee put it:

Without having that dedicated resource and focus, does it get the skill and time, or does it just get sucked into this big engine that, you know, won't give it the, I suppose the sunshine to really allow it to flourish?

Several interviewees mentioned that women's football still lags far behind the men's game when it comes to FA resourcing. While my interviewees expressed a determination to close this investment gap, they recognize that their power within the FA structures is limited:

There are still a lot of things that I can't unlock that I am trying to unlock... I can't force the FA to give me money and I can't force my colleagues to work extra time... you can't force people.

There are echoes here of the feelings of disempowerment expressed by those who went through the original 1993 takeover (see section 4.6 above). Merged governance means those whose remit involves the women's game are continually having to use their energy to make the case for investment in women's football, instead of being able to use their time more productively elsewhere.

5.3.4 The voice of women's football is sometimes not heard within the FA

Relatedly, several interviewees recalled having struggled to make their voices and the voice of women's football heard within male-dominated boardrooms, especially when they first joined the FA:

I was the only female at the time. That was, at times it could be challenging in terms of... I think if I hadn't been around that table... I do wonder whether women and girls back then... would have been top of mind, front of mind, if that makes sense... But often an afterthought, if that makes sense, women's football was... Those early years were quite... quite tough to be honest. Just, you know, saying the same thing lots of times.

Another interviewee who does not work for the national FA but is involved in committee-level at her local County FA had a similar experience:

It started really well when we had a women and girls' committee, and I became chair... And I was a bit stubborn about digging my heels in and saying, well, where's our funding, whatever? And then they reorganised it and got rid of the women and girls' committee and it all came into development and then, the women and girls' game got... pushed aside, mingled in... now, I sit in meetings and women and girls' doesn't come on the agenda. Whereas, it had to be on the agenda [before] because it had a group.

To this interviewee, women's and girls' football needs a dedicated committee in order to ensure it is actually given due consideration. This echoes a recent finding by Preston and Velija that "agenda-setting power" within the FA still belongs to the men's game (2022: 162). There is a concern that the plans by the FA outlined in 5.1 above to move towards greater alignment will merely exacerbate this issue and lead to less dedicated time for discussions about the women's game.

5.4 The FA is unsure whether to position women's football as distinct from or the same as men's football

There continues to be a tension at the highest levels of the FA between plans for further strategic alignment of women's and men's football, and celebrating the distinctiveness of women's football. This was evident in the interviews with FA employees. Many were keen to stress that women's football was "just football played by women". Yet, they simultaneously expressed a desire for the FA to recognize the distinctiveness of the women's game. One senior FA employee reflected on her experience of working on the FA's new women's football strategy:

It's thinking... "how do we retain the distinctiveness of this game while at the same time transforming these systems that we operate within?" I want to grow something that's right for women and girls and that feels like it represents the best of us. Not something that is a mirror image of something that has been going on for a hundred years and was designed for men's football.

Several interviewees mentioned that it was important to take into account the different stages of development of the men's and women's games:

The men's game is your oak tree isn't it? It's the custodian that's big and tall and has grown into almost a beast in itself, and that has pros and cons in the way that that is delivered due to the size and scale of the game. What you have is an opportunity... do we want the women and girls getting to become another oak tree or something else that it can be?... we don't need to be an oak tree, we can be an apple tree if we want, or a strawberry plant.

There are also clearly commercial benefits to continuing to position women's football as separate from the men's game. Firstly, several interviewees suggested that the women's game could benefit from future separate sponsorship deals, partnering with female-specific brands (e.g. Tampax). Secondly, there is a recognition that women's football represents an opportunity to bring in a different audience of fans:

There's a very family-orientated feel about the followership of women's football versus a very tribal-orientated feel about men's, the followership of men's football. Because effectively you've got a completely different audience. It's new, it's different, it's fresh. A massive commercial opportunity there.

I think it's our superpower. I think it's absolutely is our unlocked potential... 75% of the people who attend women's football don't go to the men's games.

It's important that it [women's football] retains the things that make it special. So for example the fact that it's not a tribal game to go and watch, that it's a game that families can enjoy together, it's got a really safe and family feel to it. Whilst still watching hopefully a great product.

To what extent is it possible to position women's football as a unique product when it is marketed and governed by the same organization who also run men's football? Is the long-term vision to eliminate or to celebrate gender difference within football? The FA appears to be unclear as to the answer to these questions.

5.5 There is confusion about the role and purpose of NewCo

Ahead of the 2024-25 season, an independent body – NewCo – will take over running the Women's Super league and Championship. One clear message from my research is the level of confusion which currently exists in relation to the purpose of and future vision for NewCo. Compare these two statements by interviewees:

All we're doing, what we're doing with NewCo is setting up an independent entity to run that competition so that we can focus on growing and developing and regulating the game as a governing body, and doing what we should be doing as a governing body. And a governing body isn't set up in any sport to run competitions for the long term.

The national governing body has been a great incubator for the women's professional game. It's nurtured it... However, I think now that it's got that success... [we're] allowing that product... to stand on its own two feet, make its own decisions, have some independence, come out of a quite conservative organisation into an independent company... to really unlock its growth potential... It's probably now time for the clubs to be able to have a bit more control over their own destinies. And so there is a kind of philosophical drive of independence behind it, independence of women's football.

Is NewCo simply a vehicle to run the WSL and Championship, to allow the FA to focus on governance, or is it a path towards the eventual independence of women's football? Time will tell, but the fact that the answer to this question is currently unclear again reflects the tension between alignment and distinctiveness outlined in 5.4 above.

5.6 The merger made it harder to be a woman working in football, but this is slowly changing

Overnight following the 1993 FA takeover, women's football transitioned from being run by a WFA committee with a fifty-fifty gender split, to being run by a largely male workforce (see section 4.6 above). Several of my interviewees shared examples of the shocking sexism which they had faced when they originally joined the FA:

When I started I was told that I would never move through the hierarchy of business. There were six of us that were employed that were female and that was it, we were the token gestures... We were sat down together as a group of six and told... "don't have aspirations to move into a full time role in the FA because it just won't happen. We have had to do this, we have had to have women." And we just all looked at each other and were like, "okay?"

A common experience shared by most interviewees was that of being the only woman in meetings, and encountering male resistance to any conversations about the need to develop women's football:

I did feel people thought, “crikey there’s that pain in the backside”... And I remember going to my first board meeting at the time... and it was all male, and I walked in and I was introduced and was about to present and realised everybody had disengaged already. And I thought “oh Lord”... Everybody kind of looked up and went, “who is this strange bird in the room?” Because I don’t think they listened to who I was, and didn’t care really.

You would have a very, very small window in a meeting to state your case. And if you didn’t state that case with data, facts, numbers, people would just switch off. So you’d then have to spend time outside of the meeting to try and then sort of do the hearts and minds work.

This second excerpt speaks to the extra, unpaid labour required of women within male-dominated businesses, just to be treated with the same respect accorded to their male counterparts.

It is important not to suggest that only women can advance the cause of women’s football, or to equate women’s football with women *in* football. However, the evidence of these interviews suggests that women in governance play an important role in advancing the cause of women’s football – purely because they are often more cognizant of gender inequality within the sport. This is one of the reasons why this research has focused on the extent to which the 1993 merger can be seen to have impacted on the number of women at the top levels of football governance.

Thanks to the work of Baroness Campbell, amongst others, there are now many more women working at all levels within the FA, including a female Chair (Debbie Hewitt) and a Board made up of 30% women. All interviewees were keen to stress that the FA was now a far more inclusive organization than when they joined:

It was a very masculine culture and it’s just not like that anymore. The culture is respectful of all of the people that are within the business and you are encouraged to thrive as the person that you are with the skills that you offer, and that’s really refreshing.

The organisation is unrecognisable to the one that I joined.

Culturally things have changed and I think the FA has been on a journey to change its culture... There is a genuine desire within the governing body to be for all, for everyone. And I have certainly felt that in the last four years.

The journey I have been on for the last five years is overwhelmingly positive. And they have done everything in their power to build my confidence, build my competence and provided me with every opportunity to grow and shine.

However, a recent survey by Women in Football suggested that the culture of football governance in the UK still has a long way to go before we see anything approaching gender equality. The survey, which was carried out in 2023, indicated that 82% of women in football have experienced discrimination at work (an increase from the previous figure of 66% in 2020), while 93% feel they have faced an obstacle in their football career because of their gender (again, an increase from 82% in 2020) (WIF 2023).

There is a clear contrast to be drawn between the experiences of those women who sat on the WFA Committee, who never felt that it was strange for women to speak up in meetings, and the women currently working for the FA, who have had to fight for that privilege. This points to another issue with governance mergers – they rob women of all the advantages of female networks and instead thrust them into arenas which we know from the literature are difficult spaces for women to navigate (Shaw & Hoerber 2003).

5.7 Conclusion

The recent Carney Review raised concerns about the extent to which the women's game is effectively represented within current FA structures, and called for the FA to “undertake a review of the representation of the women's game at all levels of its governance (including whether a 'special share' is appropriate in respect of it), in order to ensure that: a) it is properly represented throughout the FA's governance structures, and b) those structures enable decisions to be made in the best interests of the women's game as a whole” (Carney 2023).

My findings echo these concerns. Merged governance has come to be a taken-for-granted norm, but is it really the best model for the women's game? Any future review of governance needs to weigh up the benefits and disadvantages of merged governance, and to consider whether a return to some form of separatism might actually benefit women's football.

6. Results – Legacies of the Merger: The Place of Women’s Football within English Clubs

In this chapter, I examine the current place of women’s football within the wider English club structure – from grassroots through to the WSL. The themes below emerged from my interviews with women from a number of different clubs around England, as well as a dissemination event held in London in April 2024 which brought together twenty-five people working within club football (a full summary of the discussion at this event can be found in Appendix 1).

6.1 Women’s clubs have increasingly felt pressured to embrace alignment with men since the FA takeover in 1993

Historically, the majority of women’s football clubs in England were independent due to the FA’s 1921-71 ban, which meant that women were forced to take the lead in setting up and running their own teams (Williams 2003). However, since their 1993 takeover of women’s football, the FA have pursued policies which make it increasingly difficult for independent women’s football clubs to survive. Since 2011, the onset of professionalisation via the WSL has only sped up this direction of travel (Dunn & Welford 2015). The original eight WSL clubs included three independent clubs - Doncaster Belles, Bristol Academy and Lincoln Ladies – but by the end of the 2023/24 season all twelve of the clubs in the League were aligned with men’s teams.

The example of Doncaster Belles illustrates the impact of these FA policies. Happily independent since their formation in 1969, the Belles’ archive shows that by 1998 – five years after the FA takeover – they were already beginning to experience pressure to join up with a men’s club:

To avoid stagnation and ultimate decline, and to meet the challenges being set by the Football Association, a more professional approach must be taken to the organization and management of women's clubs. This particularly applies to the “Belles”, if they wish to remain independent of reliance on the men's game, and maintain their current position in women's football (Doncaster Belles Business Plan, 1998).

A partial merger with Doncaster Rovers took place in 2003, due to the need to secure regular access to a pitch (‘Women’s Football’, *The Guardian*, January 2003). When the Belles became a founder member of the WSL in 2011, they were again functioning independently due to disappointment at a lack of access to the Rovers ground; but having been relegated into the Championship and forced to drop even further down the pyramid due to a lack of funds, they have once again had to seek a renewed link with the men (see section 6.3 below). This is a far cry from their history as by far the most successful English club in the pre-merger days.

Although the FA has never explicitly said publicly that they do not wish for independent women’s clubs to compete in the top flight, a widespread perception exists amongst clubs that this is the reality. In a recent interview discussing the expansion of the Championship, Baroness Campbell is quoted as saying: “*There might be some casualties, but that’s going to be the reality*” (‘Women’s football in England enters NewCo era’, *The Guardian*, 10 April

2024). This reflects the prevailing feeling within the FA (described in section 5.1 above) that the future for women's football is one of increased alignment with the men's game.

6.2 The FA's ideal football club is integrated

Extrapolating from the interviews I carried out with both FA employees and those involved in women's club football, I propose that the FA's ideal football club is a yin-yang: an interconnected and complementary model. Within this, men and women's teams embrace a two teams / one club mantra. Men and women are represented equally; finances, grounds and facilities are shared; and the teams can be marketed as one, because they share a fanbase. This is felt by the FA to be the most efficient use of everyone's resources.

The rest of this chapter explores whether this ideal yin-yang model reflects reality.

6.3 There are advantages to club alignment

The main advantage for women's clubs of aligning with men's teams is the same as ever: access to facilities. There is not a single football ground in the UK owned solely by a women's team: women's clubs are therefore always, without exception, dependent on male-owned facilities. The closer the relationship, the more likely the men are to permit the women to play on "their" ground.

In interviews, those who are involved in independent clubs spoke with envy of the resources available to their aligned counterparts. Here is Paul Edmunds, who was manager of the Doncaster Belles from 1987 to 1995, reflecting on the differences between his own offering and that of Vic Akers at Arsenal:

I remember ringing Julie Fleeting up, who was a teacher in Scotland, asking if she wanted to come and play for the Belles... She said, "What you offering?" I went, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well Vic Akers has been in touch, he's offered me a job at this shop at Highbury, somewhere to live and a certain amount of money." And I went, "No, I can't compete with that"... Arsenal were the first team that I'm aware of who had the men's benefits, if I can say benefits in that they had training facilities and they had the offer of, "we can get you a job in the shop" or something, whatever it was. And no, we couldn't compete with that.

Paul labelled the Belles' constant struggle to find a home base where they could play and train "exhausting".

Similarly, Leicester City Ladies – formed in 1966 and believed to be the oldest women's club in the country – spent many years hiring public parks with no changing rooms. Sue Foulkes felt that this had probably cost the club opportunities for growth:

It takes your power when you're always letting out for money... doors that were half open and we haven't gone through them because just for money and power, we didn't want to lose the identity of the club... We're always battling with money... It's just so hard... We've always wanted a place to call our own.

Belles have finally found a "home" of their own, of sorts, having joined up with the Rovers in 2019 to become part of Club Doncaster. In our interview, Club Doncaster CEO Gavin Baldwin explained how this has benefitted Belles players:

They are an equal partner within the club... we want to have the same kit suppliers, we want to, you know, give them access to medical care etc... We've got a deal now with people who do cryo chambers in Doncaster town centre [and] that negotiation wasn't just for the Rovers, it allows the Belles access to the cryo chambers as well... For the first year ever, the players have been paid expenses...

We've just negotiated a few commercial deals... And my understanding is on their own the Belles wouldn't have got that degree of money. But equally on its own Doncaster Rovers wouldn't have got that degree of money. The clubs coming together means that we have both benefited through having the same sponsor paying more money.

Yet despite these advantages, some at the Belles still view their merger with Club Doncaster as having been difficult to come to terms with (see 6.4.1 below).

6.4 The realities of alignment with a men's club are complicated and difficult

Given the above advantages, why would any club choose to remain independent when offered the chance to "merge" with a men's club? Below, I outline some of the realities of alignment with a men's club.

6.4.1 Women within joint clubs feel a sense of powerlessness

Similarly to the WFA-FA merger, club-level mergers are often not free choices. In the case of the Belles, their decision in 2019 to join up with Club Doncaster was driven by financial necessity, as Sheila Edmunds explained:

We would have gone out of business a few years ago because financially we couldn't survive [on our own]... We reached a point where did we draw a line, call it a day, or do we package up what we've got and come and speak here with the powers that be... we couldn't see anywhere else we could go to get the money to allow us to function.

Clare Taylor similarly explained the decision of her club Knowsley Ladies to join up with Liverpool in 1994, becoming Liverpool Ladies:

CT: Unfortunately money makes the world go round... the National League was progressing and it was just easier to... again it was almost like a survival thing. You know, you can't just keep paying your twenty quid subs each year and that covers everything because it was just easier for Liverpool to fund us as well.

RN: Did it get better for you as a player when you made that transition? Did it change things?

CT: No not really. Again, you just got better kit. We didn't have to worry about it. We still, we still went down to Southampton, we still had to pay for our hotels. They might provide the coach but we still had to pay for the hotels so slowly but surely you're just chipping away at it and I still, I got £10 petrol when I went to training and stuff like that but no it didn't really change... It wasn't about, "oh we love Liverpool", it was just, "they'll take us on so let's go with it".

As these examples suggest, decisions to “join up” with the men are often made for pragmatic reasons, rather than any sense of affinity or natural alignment.

Even for a club like Arsenal, who are considered a model example of a men’s club who embraced women’s football from the earliest days, it transpires that the story is more complex than most people realise. In my interview with Gill Sayell, who was present at the “birth” of Arsenal Ladies in 1987, she explained that the origins were actually an independent club called Aylesbury United Ladies, coached by Gill’s father. It was only when her parents chose to move abroad that Vic Akers - in conversation with an Aylesbury player who worked at Arsenal - was alerted to the opportunity of “taking over” the Aylesbury side:

He was talking one day and he said he would like to start up a women’s team. So, Ali said, “well Aylesbury have got a team now and their manager’s moving abroad so you know, there’s a whole team there ready sort of to go”. Basically that was the conversation, because you know, it’s gonna take a while to get a team together and he wanted to start things off more or less straightaway. So, he was interested in that... And basically that’s how it was formed and went on from there.

Not all the girls came over to Arsenal. A lot of them went off elsewhere, but I think the nucleus of the team went to Arsenal... A few didn’t carry on, so Aylesbury disbanded then... It was kind of taken out of their hands I suppose.

The origin story of Arsenal Ladies is therefore a takeover of an existing club by men – in much the same way as the WFA was taken over by the male FA.

Because mergers are often not freely chosen by women’s clubs, the women involved can end up feeling pushed out, and even grieving for what they have lost. One Belles fan described their merger with Club Doncaster as “heartbreaking”, while Sheila Edmunds has also found it difficult to come to terms with:

I didn’t want to carry on. I said to Julie, “I can’t do this Julie, I can’t do it”... I would have preferred it to stop as it was but I got talked out of that... I think the reason I didn’t want to do it was because I felt like I’d lost control. I’d always had control, or a certain amount of control and suddenly... you packaged it up, pass the baton on, “there you go, you do it”... You lose the overall control that we’ve had for fifty plus years... I don’t make the decisions anymore.

Sheila remains an honorary President of the Belles, and continues to have a deep connection with club affairs. However, the merger has shifted her sense of her role in the club, due to what she sees as the loss of some of her decision-making authority.

6.4.2 In aligned clubs, women’s football is last in the pecking order

As discussed in section 5.3.2 above, without dedicated attention and personnel working on it, women’s football can easily be forgotten about. This is equally the case at individual club level. Many clubs do not have dedicated women’s football committees - they may have one women’s football representative on the club board or main club committee, but this person will be vastly outnumbered by the rest of the board or committee, who will generally be male and concerned largely with men’s football.

Several of my interviewees expressed concerns about their position within the pecking order within men's clubs:

I felt that we've been third best.

You've got to be with a men's team and take their crumbs, whatever they're prepared to give you.

There was also a feeling that by aligning themselves to a men's club, women's sides at all levels of the pyramid were tying themselves into the fortunes of that men's side.

Regardless of how successful your women's team may be, your finance will always depend on how well the men's teams do.

Should a women's side be prove to be more successful than their men's side, there is a perception that alignment could actually hold them back from progressing up the pyramid:

When you look at the Belles and you look at Doncaster Rovers, Doncaster Belles are the most successful of the two, and again if we started growing as the women's game is growing... could we then become the bigger team? But will we be allowed to be the bigger team? It certainly feels like the rings could be pulled and we could be pulled back. (Belles fan)

Recent events at Reading, who made the decision that their women's team would operate on a part-time basis after the men were relegated from the Championship in 2023, is a good demonstration of the fact that however successful a women's team might be, there is a permanent sense of precarity because the long-term survival of the club is outside of their control. This only adds to the sense of powerlessness described in section 6.4.1.

6.4.3 Resources are not allocated equitably at aligned clubs, and women do not feel like they belong

The Carney Review found that women's and girls' teams "are often treated as lower priority, resulting in men's teams having better access to adequate pitches and facilities". It was therefore unsurprising to find my interviewees reporting a lack of equal access to grounds. Sue Foulkes from Leicester City described their "partnership" with a local men's side, but questioned the extent to which pitch allocation was being carried out equitably:

We're just a tenant in a way, although we're partners. But it's their ground at the end of the day... Doesn't perhaps look like a partnership exactly!

She added that the club struggle to feel any sense of "belonging" at the ground where they train and play, because there is no public recognition of their presence there. This is again reflective of a wider problem caused by a lack of female-owned football grounds.

6.4.4 Alignment threatens the distinctive history and identity of women's football

Numerous FA employees believe that the distinctive identity of women's football is a strength (see section 5.4 above). One senior employee at the FA accepted that women needed a different recreational offer to men:

Not all women have the confidence to step into a football club, or the desire to play regular league competitive football. And commit to training twice a week and playing matches on a Saturday and Sunday, you know. The offer for women had to be shaped to fit the needs and the motivations of women and girls. And therefore we would need a more flexible fun, social, sessional based offer for women that they could turn up and dip in and dip out of.

However, the feeling of those working within grassroots football is that the FA's current model does not value women's football's different ways of working and operating on the ground. The power dynamics of club governance mean that in practice, the men's way of doing things is considered to be the standard to which women's football should aspire to:

Every time... they want us to change what we're doing and do it the boys' way. So, if we have an eleven-a-side under-tens football, it's because the boys do it, so we should do it to bring equality. But actually... we're doing what's right for girls that are under ten who are quite different to boys who are under ten, just in their whole aspect of football. But it's still there. We need to be the same, so we'll change it to what the boys want. (Sue Foulkes – Leicester City Ladies and Midlands FA)

I'd like to keep the good stuff about the women's game, the family friendly atmospheres, and the contact with people afterwards. And sometimes - sometimes when things have to be done a certain way because that's how the men do it, and you think, "Mmm, it might not necessarily be the best". (Sheila Rollinson – Derby County Women)

In fact, Leicester City Ladies actually **resisted** a move to integration with the Leicester City men's club in the early 2000s, because they viewed it as a threat to their identity and values, as Sue explained:

What they wanted us to do is dismantle our club, so finish our club, go over to them as the official Leicester City club and then get rid of all the rest of our club, you know, all our community teams and all our players and whatever, and then take our league position because we were quite high then, and run with that... And then we said, "well, but what about all the rest of all our players?" "Well, we don't need them now." So, we went, "well, that's not acceptable because we're a community club and we've always been a development club. We're all about development"... So, we had this parting of the ways basically, because we said we're not prepared to do that.

According to Sue, Leicester City Ladies also had to fight to retain their club name in the face of pressure from the men's club, who felt that they "owned" the name – despite the fact that Leicester City Ladies have been using the moniker since they were formed in 1966.

By contrast, when Doncaster Belles joined Club Doncaster in 2019, they were encouraged to relinquish their traditional blue-and-yellow colours, and instead don the red-and-white Rovers strip. Only a direct approach on behalf of the Belles to Club Doncaster's CEO Gavin Baldwin led to a change in this policy ahead of the 2023/24 season.

These may seem like minor examples, but they are reflective of a broader problem with alignment: joining up with a men's club is a threat to the distinctive history and identity of women's football. Alignment therefore threatens something which the FA claims to value.

6.5 There are significant advantages to independence

Despite the increasing pressure from the FA to align more closely with men's clubs, some women's clubs continue to cherish independence, and further independent clubs continue to be formed.

One example is Worcester City Women, formed in March 2021 by Nicole Allison. Nicole had previously worked as General Manager of Tottenham Hotspur Women, but found the experience frustrating due to being forced to align her activity with the existing men's strategy and brand. By contrast, setting up Worcester City Women allowed her to base everything around the distinctive needs and values of women's football:

I knew that we needed to have a women's team that was independent because we could do what we wanted then, we were in charge of our destiny... never have I gone, "I would like to have a partnership or an ownership structure where we're sharing the decision-making"... Because I just know how that will end, in that we wouldn't get the priority... Whereas because I don't have to worry about any of that, I can do my own negotiations, build my own relationships...

When I first started and had those negotiations with Worcester City, there wasn't a single female on the board... That's not uncommon for clubs particularly at that level. But even if I had been invited to be on the board to represent the women realistically, how much was I going to be listened to?... It would have taken a lot of strength, energy, time for me to even get a voice heard which would have been a detriment to the energy and time of growing this women's club.

Worcester City Women are the living embodiment of everything the FA claims to value about women's football: the club are building relationships with sponsors who value the opportunity to investment specifically in women's sport, and they are developing their own unique fanbase who enjoy a less tribal, more family-friendly atmosphere at WCWFC games than that provided at men's football. Within the context of this research, they also provide an excellent example of the significant advantages which independence can confer on women's football clubs.

6.6 Aligned club funding models are not working

One key problem for independent clubs is funding their activities. This problem is enhanced by the fact that a perception exists – whether rightly or wrongly – that independently-operated women's clubs cannot apply for Football Foundation funding. Sue Foulkes described her experience of attending one Football Foundation grant meeting:

What they were looking for when I went to the meeting you had to go to, to even put an application in, they were still looking for men's clubs to accept women in and make them more equal... I can't see equality will happen until at least 30% of the applications are for a women's league club to take control of the ground.

By contrast, men's clubs are actively incentivized to align with women's teams, in order to maximise their chances of success. Of course, as several interviewees highlighted, this in turn means the entire exercise risks merely becoming a "checkbox" scheme, which does nothing to change the culture of men's clubs or to shift the normative priority granted to men's football.

One interviewee had direct experience of this, having worked with a men's club to jointly apply for a Football Foundation grant:

We'd sold it to the Football Foundation as a dedicated women's and girls' ground that was going to be, if there was some space and availability, yes, obviously, men and boys whatever can use it... But then even so, the first conversation was, "well, we're going to put the boys' team in on a Wednesday and Thursday". I think, oh, here we go again"... The history always seems to end up back to, well, there's some men's group somewhere that'll make that decision.

Again, this echoes a finding from the Carney Review, which found that Football Foundation grants are not being audited properly and are therefore not necessarily benefiting women's and girls' football in the way the original grant application claimed. Overall, therefore, the current funding model is perceived by interviewees to disadvantage women's clubs, especially independent ones.

6.7 Conclusion

In her seminal study of women's football governance at club level, Welford found that women's teams linked to clubs occupy complex "outsider on the inside" positions within the male-dominated structures of football in the UK. She concluded that even in women's clubs which had strong links with men's clubs, gender integration was "limited": the men's and women's spheres and activities remained "significantly separate" (Welford 2018: 119). My research echoes these findings, revealing the problematic nature of club-level "mergers" from the 1980s to the present day.

Ultimately, the FA's yin-yang model does not reflect the reality of the situation on the ground. Alignment between women's and men's clubs does confer advantages – namely, access to resources – and it is important to recognize that alignment is sometimes connected to practical issues such as coaching voids (as in the case of Arsenal, where Akers stepped in when Sayell's father moved abroad) or financial realities (as in the case of the Belles, whose survival from 2019 has depended on the assistance of Club Doncaster). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that club-level mergers are usually trade-offs: once they join up with men's sides, women are not prioritized and often have limited voice in club affairs.

7. Conclusions

“We’ve all been told no, we’ve all been told it can’t be done, we’ve all been told the boys come first, we’ve all been told it’s a men’s game. The crap we have to put up with, year after year, has taken its toll on me this year. I’ve been fed up with it.” – Emma Hayes, 19 May 2024

This project set out to explore the 1993 WFA-FA merger and its legacies, using this to explore future best practice governance for women’s football in the UK. In this chapter, I return to the initial research questions, using the results outlined above to answer these questions.

7.1 How has the policy of forced integration of women’s and men’s football in the UK since 1993 impacted on the sport (for good and bad)?

A key finding from this research is that we need to view the 1993 merger of the WFA and the FA in a more nuanced way, rather than as a wholly positive move towards equity between women’s and men’s football. The dominant narrative in women’s football is one of linear progress, but this research suggests that the merger was in some ways a backward step for the women’s game. The merger did eventually lead to better resourcing of women’s football, and it also forced key decision-makers to engage with women’s football in a way which they did not have to under the old WFA model. However, it also undermined female autonomy and decreased the number of women involved at the top levels of football governance.

7.2 How similar was the experience of the WFA-FA to that of other sporting mergers which took place at the same time (in cricket, hockey, lacrosse, athletics and squash), and what lessons can be drawn about the effectiveness or otherwise of merged governance within British sport?

The findings presented here largely echo my previous work into other sporting mergers (Nicholson 2022), which found that these lead to disempowerment and grief amongst women about the loss of a shared space and community, and that the post-merger period is fraught with difficulties as national organisations attempt to impose a top-down merger on grassroots clubs.

Specifically in relation to the WFA: a merger was not entered into willingly; there was a lack of consultation with WFA members about the move; and in reality, the 1993 process more closely resembled a takeover than a merger. The merger failed to change the male-dominated culture of the FA for at least two decades, and the FA initially were mainly focused on the international game, rather than a proper strategy to develop women’s football at the grassroots.

Given that women’s football is now having to fight for resources as a small fish in a big pond, this research calls into question the effectiveness of merged governance as a way to bring about true equity between women’s and men’s sport.

7.3 How did the national WFA-FA merger filter down to individual football clubs? Why did some women's clubs choose to work closely with men's clubs, whereas others did not? Which approach has been more successful?

My findings echo previous studies which show that FA policies promote integration between men's and women's clubs, and demonstrates that this trend has only increased since the launch of the WSL in 2011. Women's clubs which have become integrated with men's clubs have experienced greater stability (Arsenal Ladies is the most famous example of this).

However, for many women's clubs, the reality of being aligned with a men's club is complicated and difficult. As I was writing this report, Chelsea finished the 2023/24 season as winners of the WSL; yet Emma Hayes described a situation at the club whereby throughout her twelve-year reign as club manager, the women had continually been made to feel that they were second-best to the men (see quote above). If even a successful women's team like Chelsea are being made to feel this, what must the situation be like elsewhere?

The FA continue to promote a one-size-fits-all model at club level, yet my findings suggest that alignment does not work for everyone, and that there are significant disadvantages to this model. In fact, little has changed since Welford's seminal 2008 study of women's clubs in England: women at aligned clubs are sidelined and experience feelings of powerlessness and a lack of belonging. By contrast, independent clubs like Worcester City Women are able to centre their activities around the distinctive needs and values of women's football.

7.4 What inequities were created when women's football was absorbed into men's football, and how can the FA and individual football clubs within the UK learn from the experience and ensure more equitable treatment for women's football going forward?

One key takeaway from this research is that mergers like the WFA-FA one do not bring about change quickly, and are not a panacea for gender equality. The absorption of women's football into men's football created a situation whereby the women's game was being run by a heavily male-dominated organisation with little understanding of the distinctive needs of women's football. This situation prevailed for at least two decades after the merger.

The existing literature critiques the FA and English football clubs as male-dominated organisations. The findings presented here demonstrate that contemporary male dominance of governance and coaching roles is actually a specific legacy of the 1993 merger. It is important to recognise this, because it demonstrates the harm which was done to women in sport and to women's football as a result of the merger.

7.5 Why did so many women leave football governance in the period after the WFA-FA merger? How can the lessons from this inform attempts to encourage more women to become involved in football governance today?

This research demonstrates that some of the women who had previously been involved in football governance disappeared in the wake of the FA's takeover. The FA replaced the WFA Committee with men who lacked knowledge of women's football, and the new set-up led to a number of women leaving governance because they no longer felt connected to

governance structures in the sport. Those women who did remain involved in governance were often subject to sexism, endured exclusion, were treated as “tokens”, and were often not listened to by their male colleagues.

There is a clear contrast to be drawn between the experiences of those women who sat on the WFA Committee, who never felt that it was strange for women to speak up in meetings, and the women currently working for the FA, who have had to fight for that privilege. This points to another issue with governance mergers – they rob women of all the advantages of female networks, and instead thrust them into arenas which we know from the literature are difficult spaces for women to navigate (Shaw and Hoerber 2003).

7.6 Is a return to separate governance desirable for women’s football, at national and / or club level? What would be the issues with this approach (for example, would it be financially sustainable)?

The norm of merged governance in football has long been taken for granted in Europe, with FIFA leading the way (Scruton et al 1999). It is also gradually spreading globally, due to the belief that it is the most effective method of enhancing the profile and visibility of the women’s game (Valenti et al 2021). Within the English context, this research shows that women’s football is increasingly embedded within the structures of the FA, and that the FA see merged governance as having been a success story for women’s football.

However, the findings presented here should lead us to question this norm and to understand both the national level merger and club-level mergers as trade-offs: women’s football is not prioritized and those running it often have limited voice in club affairs once they join up with men’s sides. The FA was perhaps not the best vehicle to develop women’s football during the 1990s and 2000s, given that (as shown in chapter four) there was little activity or support for those trying to develop the sport at grassroots level. On the other hand, at the time of the FA takeover of women’s football, the WFA had accumulated significant debt and had the FA not stepped in, the WFA may in any case have gone bankrupt – leaving little choice but for the FA to intervene. The merger (and indeed the other similar mergers which took place in the 1990s) can perhaps best be understood as a case of economic realities winning out over the desire for autonomy of women’s sport.

Scholars who have previously mooted independence for women’s football have generally argued that this alternative approach would mean a deceleration in the commercialisation of the sport (Valenti et al 2021: 334). However, the example of Worcester City Women is a counterpoint to this view, demonstrating that it is possible for an independent women’s club to grow itself in a sustainable way, with only very limited support from the FA.

In any case, women’s football perhaps needs to ask itself whether it prefers to pursue a path of colossal, potentially unsustainable growth due to subsidisation from men’s football, or whether it would be more sustainable and empowering to regain the ability to make its own decisions, with purely the women’s game in mind. Given the recent launch of NewCo, it seems to me that this is a particularly apposite time to explore this question.

8. Recommendations for the FA

8.1 Publicly acknowledge the hurt caused by the merger

While we cannot correct the wrongs of history, we can acknowledge them. This research demonstrates that the merger was not a neutral process, or something desired by those running women's football: it was a moment of disempowerment which led to women being pushed out of governance positions.

The FA should therefore issue a public statement acknowledging the hurt caused by their 1993 takeover.

They should also take active steps to add a more nuanced and accurate description of the "merger" to their own website.

8.2 Continue to have dedicated committees devoted to women's football

It is concerning that the FA are currently planning to abolish the current Women's Football Board, moving towards even greater alignment. The research presented here suggests that when women's and girls' football is not given dedicated time and space on its own committees, the voice of women's football is not heard.

The FA should therefore reverse this decision and continue to have dedicated spaces devoted specifically to women's and girls' football, as well as ensuring the women's game remains on the agenda of its main Board and Committee.

8.3 Promote diversity in club models

The FA currently expect all clubs to conform to a one-size-fits-all ying-yang model. However, this research shows that alignment is not working for many clubs, and that there are significant disadvantages to this model.

Additionally, joining up with a men's club can be a threat to the distinctive history and identity of men's football. Alignment therefore threatens something which the FA claims to value.

The FA should promote more diversity in club models, and publicly recognise that greater independence and autonomy may be feasible and desirable for some clubs.

8.4 Do more to celebrate independent women's clubs

Independence confers significant advantages for women's clubs, including the ability to build relationships with sponsors and fans based on the unique strengths of the women's game. Often, these clubs are run by women, promoting an important message of female empowerment within what is usually a male-dominated space.

The FA should therefore send a clear public message that they value these clubs.

8.5 Encourage and help women to take control of their own facilities via a dedicated grant scheme

Women need to feel that they belong in footballing spaces, not that they are merely “tenants” at male-owned grounds. Reliance on male-owned facilities creates a permanent sense of precarity within women’s football.

The FA should therefore encourage and help women to take control of facilities, via a dedicated grant scheme designed for this purpose.

8.6 Work with organisations which offer grassroots funding to ensure independent women’s clubs can apply in their own right

Some research participants perceived that grants like those offered by the Football Foundation are not available to independent women’s clubs. The FA should offer clarity on this point and ensure that grassroots funding is not predicated on the assumption that applicants will be men’s clubs.

8.7 Use NewCo as a vehicle to support the growth of the rest of the pyramid, including independent clubs

Independent women’s clubs have a valuable role to play within English football, but can struggle financially. The financial gains facilitated by the growth of women’s football at the WSL and Championship levels should be leveraged to ensure money trickles down to support the rest of the pyramid – including independent clubs.

8.8 Set up an independent clubs group, encouraging clubs who choose this path to support each other

Independence can be a lonely place. Some of the interviewees in this research expressed a feeling that they are currently shouting into the void, with limited support from the top. Therefore, the FA should set up an independent clubs group which encourages these clubs to provide mutual support for each other.

9. Dissemination Plan

9.1 Conference Presentations

I have already presented initial findings from the research at the International Football History conference in Glasgow (June 2023), the British Society for Sports History conference in Manchester (August 2023), and the North America Society for the Sociology of Sport conference in New Orleans, USA (November 2023).

I intend to present the final results at the British Society for Sports History conference in Chichester in August 2024, and hope to also present my findings at the International Working Group on Women and Sport Global Summit in July 2026.

9.2 Peer-reviewed journal articles

I aim to publish two journal articles:

1. An historical analysis of the merger based on the archival research and oral histories, in *Sport in History*.
2. An analysis of the interviews with FA employees, exploring the lived experiences of women in sports governance, in *Sport Management Review*.

9.3 Animated Video

Funding from the project has been used to fund Pete Nicholson Creative to produce an animated video, showcasing the research findings. With permission from FIFA, I will share this video publicly via social media, as well as sharing it directly with the FA.

9.4 Report Presentation

With permission from FIFA, I would like to make the full report public. I would also like to present the findings to the FA directly, as well as to the Women's Sport Collective. This is because there are clear policy implications (as outlined in the recommendations section) which I believe can help strengthen the future governance of women's football.

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Appendix 1

Equity in Women's Club Football Event, 3 April 2024 Summary of Group Discussion

1. Running women's clubs

How is women's football currently represented within your club (committees etc)? Could the voice of women's football be heard more effectively?

1. Currently, the community and culture of clubs still follows the template of the men's game.
2. At aligned clubs, men's and women's sides can still seem like two separate entities. Women's sides are run like they are independent despite sharing badge and kit, but they would not describe themselves as "independent".
3. "Working together" doesn't work, because the men don't listen to the women.
4. Men's clubs try to tell women's clubs how to run, e.g. want them to be focused on competition instead of fun.
5. Aligned clubs often lead to greater emotional labour for women e.g. men rely on them to organise events like awards nights.
6. Women's football is often not represented in a balanced way, due to a greater number of male teams who dominate club committees.
7. Often the women's team has only one representative on what is seen as the "men's board" - so they are outnumbered.
8. One club got around this by setting up their own committees and making a specific decision not to have men represented on it.
9. Some clubs have umbrella committees of the men and the women, but these often don't meet regularly as the men don't see the value in them.

Do you feel that there is equitable access to resources within your club? If not, what is preventing this?

1. There is a lack of coaches to run female sections.
2. Need to consider the basics when providing time slots and allocating facilities for W&G teams - e.g. will there be female toilets available? Is there menstrual provision for women players?
3. It is not just about access to club facilities, but the lack of ANY available facilities - there are wider issues with pitch shortages.
4. Lack of facilities puts people off trying to grow women's football - where would teams play if they did form?
5. Sometimes there is a lack of awareness amongst women about how to get onto club committees / what it involves.
6. Women's football needs to be represented from top to bottom of clubs, in order for it to be listened to and be seen all the way through the organisation.
7. There is a need for diversity in senior positions at clubs to bring different viewpoints.
8. Specific time should be allocated on all committee agendas for W&G football.

2. Autonomy & self-determination

For those of you whose club is already independent: Why do you believe independence is important for women's football at this level?

1. We can have our own vision and mission which is marketable and sellable.
2. We can have an independent structure and strategy, with the players at the centre.
3. Enables clubs to put themselves on the map & stand out.
4. Relationships with partners, media and sponsors can be developed based on strengths of women's game without having to consult men. This contrasts with aligned clubs where women are often not allowed to organise their own shirt sponsors, etc.
5. Different strategies for fans and fan engagement can be developed. Some fans of women's football have been "turned off" men's football.
6. Men's clubs are often focused on competition and see success as results-driven. Women should have the right to be terrible at football! Dropping a tier doesn't necessarily matter to women's clubs in the same way as their motivations are different.

For those of you whose club is aligned with a men's club: Do you see greater autonomy as desirable for your club / for women's football clubs more broadly?

1. There is a general feeling that "there's got to be a better way to run women's football than this".

What do you think is the ideal model for football clubs and why? (Full alignment with men's club, full independence, or something else? If something else what would that look like?)

1. Women's football should become its own product.
2. Difficulties of defining an "independent" club - might be good to try to nail down the definition?
3. Men should only ever "own" 49% of women's clubs, in order to prevent a loss of control & autonomy for the women.
4. Brand new teams which have alignment built in from the start is the ideal. For existing men's clubs which take on a women's team, there will always be a men-first philosophy.

3. FA support

What do the FA currently do to support equity and autonomy for women's clubs?

1. Access to Wembley.
2. Recruited more staff to support the National League.
3. Sponsors and club collaboration (e.g. free Adobe for clubs).
4. Creation of NewCo to support the commercial development of women's football.
5. Funding e.g. Pitch Access Fund.
6. Coaching schemes e.g. 100FC.

What more could the FA do in future to support equity and autonomy for women's football?

1. More transparency in relation to their agenda, which is too unknown at the moment.
2. Listening is really important. There was a strong sense throughout the event of voices of individual clubs not being heard.
3. Engage in honest, candid conversations with those who work on grassroots football and in the lower tiers.
4. We need more events focused on equity where change-makers are in the room.
5. The FA need to visit clubs and see for themselves what is working / not working - only by visiting can they understand what things look like on the ground.
6. Clearer pathway for lower league clubs.
7. Create a National Health Association to support players who are injured (free of charge).
8. Get more sponsors for lower leagues, rather than just focusing on the top two tiers.
9. More diversity in the leadership & management team, with more innovation - current set-up gatekeeps too much.
10. Be warier of teams seeing girls / women's provision as a tickbox, and try to control against this. It's important to recognise that the talent pool doesn't actually allow for every men's club to have a women's team attached, and the current funding "carrots" lead to teams being set up and folding quickly, with no thought to sustainability.
11. Allow women's clubs more space to be their own product.
12. Women's clubs should be able to take control of empty / financially struggling grounds, and be supported to do this.

How could the FA more effectively support different club models, in cases where alignment is not working?

1. There is a fear that clubs who didn't make it into the WSL / main leagues will get left behind, especially with the development of NewCo - will this continue a disproportionate focus on the top levels?
2. How much longer can teams who "do things differently" survive, e.g. Lewes and Durham in the Championship?
3. Will NewCo make a difference, given that clubs will still be attached to men's clubs?
4. The FA needs to value independence more than it does at the moment, for all the reasons outlined above.
5. Current independent clubs feel they are "shouting into the void" and are left with little practical support.
6. An independent clubs group should be set up to enable the sharing of insights and a support community.
7. The FA should provide resources to help independent clubs develop, e.g. assistance with recruiting committee members. This should go hand in hand with a greater awareness of the fact that independent clubs are often staffed by volunteers, rather than paid staff.
8. There are huge financial disparities between independent clubs and aligned clubs. The FA could introduce Financial Fair Play regulations to try to regulate spending on women's teams.
9. A slice of profits from the top tier could be used to help financially support independent clubs.
10. At local level, independent clubs should be represented on all boards / committees, as their needs will differ from aligned clubs. This could be done via a quota system.

Appendix 2

Officers of the WFA, 1969-1993

Year	Chairman	Vice-Chairman	Secretary	Assistant Secretary	Treasurer
1969	Patricia Dunn (F)	Pat Gwynne (M)	Arthur Hobbs (M)	Pat Gregory (F)	Charlie Cooke (M)
1970	Pat Gwynne (M)	Pat Gwynne (M)	Arthur Hobbs (M)	Pat Gregory (F)	Charlie Cooke (M)
1971	Pat Gwynne (M)	David Marlowe (M)	Arthur Hobbs (M)	Pat Gregory (F)	Charlie Cooke (M)
1972	David Marlowe (M)	Pat Gwynne (M)	Pat Gregory (F)	Sue Lopez (F)	David Hunt (M)
1973	David Marlowe (M)	Ron Hyde (M)	Pat Gregory (F)	Angela Foster (F)	David Hunt (M)
1974	David Marlowe (M)	Ron Hyde (M)	Pat Gregory (F)	Cathy Norton (F)	David Hunt (M)
1975	David Marlowe (M)	Ron Hyde (M)	Pat Gregory (F)	Val McIntosh (F)	David Hunt (M)
1976	David Marlowe (M)	Ron Hyde (M)	Pat Gregory (F)	Val McIntosh (F)	David Hunt (M)
1977	David Hunt (M)	Ron Hyde (M)	Pat Gregory (F)	Val McIntosh (F)	Mike Squires (M)
1978	David Hunt (M)	Jenny Bruton (F)	Pat Gregory (F)	Mary Deakin (F)	Mike Squires (M)
1979	David Hunt (M)	Sue Lopez (F)	Pat Gregory (F)	June Jaycocks (F)	Bill Bowley (M)
1980	David Hunt (M)	June Jaycocks (F)	Pat Gregory (F)	N/A	Bill Bowley (M)
1981	David Hunt (M)	June Jaycocks (F)	Pat Gregory (F)	N/A	Bill Bowley (M)
1982	Pat Gregory (F)	June Jaycocks (F)	Pat Gregory (F)	N/A	Bill Bowley (M)
1983	Peter Holden (M)	June Jaycocks (F)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	Bill Bowley (M)
1984	Tim Stearn (M)	Sandra Fleet (F)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	Bill Bowley (M)
1985	Tim Stearn (M)	Sandra Fleet (F)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	Mike Spacey (M)
1986	Tim Stearn (M)	Sandra Fleet (F)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	Mike Spacey (M)
1987	Tim Stearn (M)	Sandra Fleet (F)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	Marion Darby (M)
1988	Richard Faulkner (M)	Tim Stearn (M)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	John Hamilton (M)
1989	Richard Faulkner (M)	Tim Stearn (M)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	John Hill (M)
1990	Richard Faulkner (M)	Tim Stearn (M)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	Peter Lee (M)

1991	Tim Stearn (M)	Sandra Fleet (F)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	David Hunt (M)
1992	Tim Stearn (M)	Sandra Fleet (F)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	David Hunt (M)
1993	Tim Stearn (M)	Sandra Fleet (F)	Linda Whitehead (F)	N/A	David Hunt (M)

Year	International Officer	Disciplinary Officer	Membership Secretary	Development	Men	Women
1969	N/A	N/A			3	2
1970	N/A	N/A			4	1
1971	N/A	N/A			4	1
1972	N/A	Ron Hyde (M)	Gladys Aikin (F)		4	3
1973	N/A	Ron Hyde (M)	Gladys Aikin (F)		4	3
1974	N/A	Ron Hyde (M)	Flo Bilton (F)		4	3
1975	N/A	Ron Hyde (M)	Flo Bilton (F)		4	3
1976	N/A	Ron Hyde (M)	Flo Bilton (F)		4	3
1977	N/A	Ron Hyde (M)	Flo Bilton (F)		4	3
1978	N/A	Ron Hyde (M)	Flo Bilton (F)		3	4
1979	N/A	Pat Gywnne (M)	Flo Bilton (F)		3	4
1980	N/A	Pat Gywnne (M)	Flo Bilton (F)		3	3
1981	N/A	N/A	Flo Bilton (F)		2	3
1982	N/A	Peter Holden (M)			3	3
1983	June Jaycocks (F)	Ashley Reay (M)			3	3
1984	June Jaycocks (F)	Ernie Rigolli (M)			3	3
1985	June Jaycocks (F)	Ernie Rigolli (M)			3	3
1986	June Jaycocks (F)	Ernie Rigolli (M)			3	3
1987	June Jaycocks (F)	Tony Blair (M)		Flo Bilton (F)	3	4
1988	June Jaycocks (F)	Tony Blair (M)		Flo Bilton (F)	4	3
1989	June Jaycocks (F)	Tony Blair (M)		Kim Dipper (F)	4	3
1990	June Jaycocks (F)	Tony Blair (M)		Kim Dipper (F)	4	3
1991	Sue Lopez (F)	Tony Blair (M)		Kim Dipper (F)	3	4
1992	Sue Lopez (F)	Tony Blair (M)		Mary Hull (F)	3	4
1993	Sue Lopez (F)	David Marlowe (M)		Mary Hull (F)	3	4

Appendix 3

FA Women's Football Committees in 1993

Year	FA Women's Committee	FA Management Committee of Women's Premier League	Men	Women
1993	Ray Kiddell (Chair) Peter Hough (Vice-Chair) Ray Berridge John Davey Peter Lee Joe Patton Sue Lopez Liz Whittall Sue Thomas	Peter Hough Ray Berridge David Lewin Peter Lee	9	3

