

6.9 Learning from others: the Kick It Out campaign

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English football has evolved in many ways over the last two decades. The Premier League is a huge commercial enterprise that generates billions of pounds each year on a global scale, and managers, coaches and players are afforded the best facilities and most up-to-date technology with which to do their jobs. The upper echelons of the English game are now full of impressive all-seater stadiums, and millions of fans around the world tune in to watch their favourite teams every weekend.

The issue of discrimination in the game has changed dramatically during this time too, with new challenges constantly arising. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the most overt forms of discrimination, abuse and prejudice were on display for all to see, yet little was done to confront this. Lord Herman Ouseley, chairman of Kick It Out, first sought to change this when working for the Greater London Council in 1984, but professional clubs were not receptive then, with some even denying that problems existed.

When Lord Ouseley became the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) in 1993, he saw another opportunity to try and galvanise the football authorities and professional clubs into recognising the problems that continued to tarnish the game's reputation. Lord Ouseley and colleagues at the CRE swiftly gained the backing of over 50 per cent of professional clubs, and had secured all but two clubs within a year. There was now an acknowledgement of the seriousness of the issue.

There had been certain difficulties with the football authorities, but Gordon Taylor of the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), David Dein of the Premier League, David Davies of the national Football Association (FA) and Richard Faulkner of the Football Trust were all enthusiastic about the campaign, originally called 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football', and its intentions. This high-level leadership support was crucial in getting their own organisations to understand the problem that many maintained wasn't there.

From the outset players had said 'I hope you know what you're taking on' to Lord Ouseley, because they could see the knockbacks he was taking. Having such a figurehead, who was willing to put his head above the parapet and use his position to challenge those with the power to change things, was instrumental in putting equality high up on football's agenda. He understood the struggle and the sacrifices so many had undertaken in trying to achieve similar feats across society.

The use of striking branding also played an important part of the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign, becoming part of the structure of the English game. T-shirts were being donned by high-profile players across the Premier League, magazines were sent out to schools, grassroots clubs and community groups, and campaigning videos containing players such as Eric Cantona and Les Ferdinand were developed. The campaign was deliberately kept at the forefront of people's minds.

Fans played a huge part from the start. Many supporters' groups had been active over the years prior to 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' by initiating campaigns themselves to address the issue of racism in the game. Making these connections was very important, and there was an early realisation of how vital the role of fans would be in trying to stop others from behaving in a discriminatory manner. These fans in particular, including groups such as Foxes Against Racism of

Leicester City FC and Leeds Fans United Against Racism And Fascism of Leeds United FC, were seeing the abuse first-hand and had a powerful message to convey.

With the backing of the PFA, the Premier League, the FA and the Football Foundation, ‘Let’s Kick Racism Out of Football’ evolved into Kick It Out in 1997 as it widened its remit to tackle all forms of discrimination. This was a major development for the campaign, reflecting how well integrated within football it had become. It proved the power of partnerships – a key element of Kick It Out’s success to this day, giving the organisation greater leverage with which to push for more inclusive practices.

A gradual approach has been taken over the years to edging equality and diversity into the day-to-day operations of professional clubs and the agencies tackling their policies. Kick It Out introduced its own Equality Standard in 2003, which expects clubs to achieve graded levels by demonstrating their commitment towards making football accessible, and opening up opportunities to everybody, ensuring clubs become more representative of the communities they serve.

Hosting specific awareness-raising periods, such as the ‘Weeks of Action’, launched by Kick It Out in 2001, has proved to be a very effective way of engaging clubs in equality activity. This has been replicated by a number of initiatives and campaigns including the Football Against Racism in Europe Network – a body we work with closely on overseas matters. Kick It Out will always seek to maintain its independence while working closely with all football’s stakeholders, providing a consistent public voice on the issues that matter and giving support to those who are discriminated against and denied the chance to fully participate in a game that purports to be open to all.

Notes

¹ Richard Bates is Media and Communications Manager at Kick It Out, which is based in London. His main role is to generate awareness of the campaign's projects at all levels – local, regional, national and international.