

Culture secretary and sports minister lead roundtable discussion on future of football

The Culture Secretary and Sports Minister have led a roundtable discussion today with current and former players from the Premier League, English Football League (EFL), Women's Super League (WSL) and Women's Championship, to get the players' perspective on tackling discrimination and abuse in the game, as part of their series of discussions on the "Future of Football".

Players who shared their views included Liverpool's Jordan Henderson and Rinsola Babajide, Aston Villa's Tyrone Mings and Watford's Troy Deeney, alongside former players including Karen Carney and Anton Ferdinand.

Many of those joining the call shared their powerful experiences of the abuse they or their fellow footballers have faced, and the action they would like to see to tackle this problem. The meeting was called by Ministers ahead of them introducing new laws to hold social media companies to account for online harms, and a fan-led review of football governance.

Ministers listened to players talk about their direct experiences of discrimination in the men's and women's game, and the challenges in reporting and getting help with this. Representatives from the game also talked about the need to drive forward diversity in leadership in the game, and welcomed recent steps taken by clubs to support this.

Ministers in turn shared the plans for changing the law to tackle online harms. The Bill, due to come before Parliament in 2021, will require tech firms to take action so that what is unacceptable in the street and in stands, is unacceptable online too. The Government is taking soundings from a variety of figures in football, prior to formally launching a fan led governance review, as committed to in the 2019 manifesto which will shape reform of the national game. Ministers opened the series in November bringing together leaders from across football where they discussed financial sustainability and governance, diversity and growing the women's game. Following the meeting a financial package was agreed between the Premier League and the EFL, and the Government announced funding for National League and women's football clubs.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said: "To hear players talk about the level of abuse they have faced was humbling. Their input today has strengthened my resolve to bring in new laws to ensure there is much greater accountability from the social media platforms for dealing with such problems.

"As we shape the "Future of Football" and look towards our football governance review, we must tackle issues around discrimination and lack of equality of opportunity head on. I am grateful to this group of players for sharing their experiences and expertise to help the Government's work."

Liverpool FC player and captain Jordan Henderson said:

“The meeting was very important and I’m pleased that those with power and authority to enact change realise the seriousness of the abuse towards players.”

Aston Villa FC player Tyrone Mings said:

I was pleased that the Secretary of State wanted to engage with, and listen to, the thoughts of us as players and ex players. Hopefully this adds context when he attempts to deliver change on behalf of us.

Chair of the Football Association’s Inclusion Advisory Board Paul Elliott said:

Just like the stakeholders and clubs have shown by signing up to the diversity code the Secretary of State, DCMS and the Government has evidenced genuine appetite and leadership for change.

Notes to editors:

List of attendees: