

Karen Carney MBE to lead major review of women's football

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries has announced that former England and Great Britain footballer Karen Carney MBE is to chair an in-depth review into the future of domestic women's football.

The review will look at how to deliver bold and sustainable growth of the women's game at elite and grassroots level. This will be with a particular focus on:

- Assessing the potential audience reach and growth of the game – by considering the value and visibility of women's and girls' football in England, including the potential to grow the fanbase for women's football and whether current growth still supports home-grown talent and can be achieved without overstressing infrastructure.
- Examining the financial health of the game and its financial sustainability for the long term. This will include exploring opportunities and ways to support the commercialisation of the women's game, broadcast revenue opportunities and the sponsorship of women's football.
- Examining the structures within women's football. This includes the affiliation with men's teams, prize money, the need for women's football to adhere to the administrative requirements of the men's game; and assessing the adequacy, quality, accessibility and prevalence of the facilities available for women's and girls' football for the growth and sustainability of the game.

To kick off the review, a call for evidence will be launched by the Football Association (FA) in the coming weeks.

Carney will lead a series of group meetings with industry experts across the country. She will be supported in the evidence gathering and analysis by senior officials from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the FA. A full report is expected to be published early next year, with the Government formally responding shortly afterwards.

The news comes following Sarina Wiegman's Lionesses winning UEFA Women's EURO 2022 in July, a range of Government measures to support the women's game, and ahead of the Women's Super League season beginning on 10 September.

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries said:

The Lionesses' spectacular performance shows how far we have come at the top of the women's game. While it is right that we celebrate and reflect on that success, we need an equal emphasis on improving participation, employment opportunities, commercial investment and visibility in the media.

We want to make sure everyone can enjoy the benefits of team sport and there is a robust infrastructure to sustain women's and girls' football for the future. A thorough review of the game will help ensure it is here for the long term.

Karen Carney MBE said:

Over the last few years, the game has grown significantly and at a rapid pace. Of course, this is an exciting time, but there is an urgent need to ensure there are processes and structures in place that protect the interest of the game and the people working in it. I have always said that the sport needs to be built on solid foundations to give it long-lasting success in a sustainable way.

For me, this is a defining period for the sport and this review will be at the heart of that.

We must capitalise on these powerful moments and can look back on 2022 as a year where we made great strides forward in the growth of the game.

Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston said:

We have been clear that we are right behind growing women's and girl's sport in every aspect – from grassroots all the way up to the elite level.

Domestic women's football has made significant progress in recent years. However the pandemic highlighted the shallow resources within the elite game, which have the potential to affect its long-term growth.

This review will look in depth at how to grow the game at elite and grassroots level, as we push to level the playing field.

During her career, Carney achieved 144 caps for England and represented Team GB at the London 2012 Olympic Games. She enjoyed a club career for Arsenal, Chicago Red Stars, Birmingham City and Chelsea. She is now a respected voice on both mens and women's football and works as a broadcaster and columnist for the Guardian, ITV Sport and Sky Sports, as well as her role as a sponsorship consultant for Visa.

The women's game has made significant progress in recent years, with UEFA Women's EURO 2022 highlighting the changing attitudes to women's sport. Records were shattered, with a record global audience of more than 365 million people, 574,875 tickets sold, nearly half of all ticket holders female, and nearly 100,000 children. There were sell-out crowds wherever the Lionesses played, and the final broke the all-time record attendance for a EUROs final – in either the men's or women's game.

The launch of the Women's Super League in 2011 generated a wave of bespoke sponsorship and broadcast rights deals. The England men's and women's senior players are now being paid the same match fee for representing their country, and clubs in the top two tiers of domestic football are introducing improved contracts and employment rights.

In a further long-term boost for the visibility of women's football, [the Government recently confirmed that the FIFA Women's World Cup and Women's Euros have been added to the listed events regime, which will mean they will continue to be made available to free-to-air television broadcasters.](#)

At grassroots level it has become the most played team sport for women and girls in England, with 3 million registered players and 12,000 registered teams. The Government is putting the game at the very centre of its plans to level up access to sport for all, with a £230 million package being rolled out to build or improve up to 8,000 grassroots football and multi-sport pitches across the UK by 2025. This funding kicked off in March with an initial £25 million benefiting over 170 facilities. Following the EURO 2022 Final, [the Culture Secretary also announced that some of these facilities will be named after the 23 players in and around each of their respective hometowns or places that shaped their footballing careers, in honour of their achievements.](#) Further details will be announced in the coming weeks.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government stood by women's football. It provided £2.9 million in grant funding to the Women's Super League and FA Women's Championship to cover essential costs and allow the completion of their seasons through the Sport Survival Package, but there were still delays in the return of competition compared to the men's game, due to a lack of investment from the football authorities in COVID-19 testing for the women's game. Spectators were also slower to return, a number of sponsorship deals withdrawn and a number of clubs have experienced financial hardship.

[The fan-led review of football governance for men's professional football](#) recommended a review of the women's game. Those who gave evidence highlighted the need for women's football to be properly financed – including the commercialisation of women's football, the opportunities for the game to benefit from broadcast revenue and implementing a stronger administrative structure. Concerns were also raised that the sport had failed to keep up with its own popularity and there was a danger of demand being unmet.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The terms of reference for the review of domestic women's football are [here](#).
- The review of the women's game will not focus on elements that are shared with the fan-led review of football governance, such as club heritage, owners' and directors' tests, financial sustainability of clubs and independent regulation, as the outcomes of the fan-led review will apply to women's football in the same way.
- The [fan-led review of football governance](#) recommended that "given the many, but interconnected, issues affecting a meaningful future for women's football needing to be addressed and resolved successfully...women's football should be treated with parity and given its own dedicated review." It stated that "there is huge potential for the game to grow further, but to make this a reality there needs to be serious investment in women's football, in its finances, in its infrastructure, and in the administration of the game". The Government's full response can be found [here](#).
- The Government's Sport Survival Package has provided millions of pounds to protect the future of women's football, netball, rugby, badminton and basketball over the course of the pandemic. This is alongside clubs and sports bodies benefitting from the multi-billion pound package of Government support that has been made available to the sector. See more details on women's football [here](#) and [here](#).
- The Government put £4.6 million towards the staging of EURO 2022.
- Further details on the implementation of reforms to ensure the sustainability of men's football in the long-term will be published through a white paper in due course.
- The Women's EUROs has been one of a number of high profile sporting events being hosted in the UK in the coming months that will put women's sport centre stage. The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games was the first major multi-sport event in history to feature more women's medal events than men's. The second edition of The Hundred is now underway (following the first being the most watched women's sporting competition on television in 2021), and the World Gymnastic Championships in Liverpool, and the Rugby League World Cup in October and November (where the men's, women's and wheelchair events will be played simultaneously) will take place later this year, further boosting the UK's credentials as the destination of choice for the world's major sporting events.