

Recommendations with regard to supporter liaison officers

1. Introduction

Football supporters are often characterised by a strong sense of devotion to their club or national team. Once an allegiance has been formed, many fans will support their team through thick and thin. This loyalty, however, should not be taken for granted. Club and association officials should therefore constantly seek to better manage their supporter base.

There can be no doubt that it is in the interest of football clubs and governing bodies to maintain and develop good relationships with supporters, while at the same time striving to deliver a high quality of service. In a survey of national associations (NAs) conducted by UEFA in 2007, all the NAs responding said they believed it was important to improve the dialogue with supporter groups, with two-thirds considering it very important.

Clubs should therefore do their utmost to maintain their fan base and promote attendance. Where possible, they should also encourage supporter involvement. By empowering supporters to take collective responsibility for their actions, clubs can make an important contribution to building a positive sense of identity and integrating at-risk fans in the community.

A football stadium should be a welcoming place for everyone. Appropriate attention should therefore be directed to the needs and concerns of disabled fans. Clubs should also commit themselves to confronting and eliminating discrimination and anti-social behaviour of any kind whether by reason of sex, sexual orientation, race, nationality, ethnic origin, colour, religion or disability. A positive side-effect of this is the expected improvement in safety and security in and around football grounds on matchdays.

The deployment of supporter liaison officers (SLOs) offers clubs and national associations an opportunity to achieve a lasting improvement in their relations with supporters, with all the associated social and commercial benefits this may bring. Our recommendations are intended to raise awareness for this task and serve as a guide to working with and on behalf of supporters.

2. Regulatory

National governing bodies should seek to include a supporter liaison clause in their regulations/security guidelines. Clubs may also wish to include such a clause in their club charters, if they have one.

3. Target audience

The supporter liaison work undertaken by clubs should primarily be aimed at their core support, but should not neglect other sections of the fan base.

SLO services should also be directed at supporters who come to the attention of police and/or stewards. In this respect the work by the club should be geared to influencing these fans towards positive behaviour change, both at football matches and within wider society. Temporarily excluding fans from attending matches by the imposition of stadium bans is an option, though the supporter liaison officer should be involved in the decision-making process.

4. Objectives

Clubs should strive to:

- Maintain their core support and promote attendance
- Assist supporters to the best of their ability, both on matchdays and non-matchdays
- Ensure information on the club is widely and quickly available
- Promote transparency whenever possible, explaining the rationale behind decisions and not just the decisions themselves
- Build relationships with regular supporters and organised groups (e.g. supporters clubs)
- Influence fans in such a way that they conduct themselves in compliance with safety and security requirements

The work of the supporter liaison officer is geared towards achieving these objectives.

5. Selecting the supporter liaison officer

Responsibility for selecting the supporter liaison officer lies with the club management.

- Where possible, the supporter liaison officer should be appointed from among the fans.
- The supporter liaison officer should be in regular contact with fans and enjoy their respect and acceptance based on his or her personality and aptitude.
- Where possible, the supporter liaison officer should be given appropriate training, for example in the areas of communication, people management and conflict resolution. The provision of basic psychology and sociology skills, in particular with regard to group dynamics, is desirable.

6. Minimum responsibilities of the club

Clubs should strive to meet the following minimum requirements:

- Appoint an SLO who has attended National Association SLO courses.
- Provide adequate resources (e.g. office, equipment, accreditation, etc.).
- Stage regular meetings between the club management and the SLO.
- Make provision for regular meetings between the SLO and the various fan groups.
- Consult the SLO on matters of relevance to fans.

7. Minimum responsibilities of the SLO

Supporter liaison officers should strive to meet the following minimum requirements:

- The SLO shall be available as the main point of contact at the club for supporters.
- The SLO manages the information flow/communications/dialogue between the fans and the club
- The SLO liaises and builds relationships with the various supporter groups, other liaison officers, the football association, the league association, the police, etc.
- SLOs must be credible with fans and therefore should have experience with and contacts to the networks in the fan base at the club.

8. Minimum responsibilities of governing bodies

National governing bodies should strive to meet the following minimum requirements:

- The national governing bodies (football association, football league) should strive to develop, coordinate and promote the supporter liaison work undertaken by clubs.
- Clubs must submit contact details for their SLOs to the relevant national governing body as part of the licensing and approval procedures.
- The relevant governing body should issue club SLOs with accreditation (e.g. a pass with photo) for all national club stadiums.
- The national governing body/bodies should stage SLO training events in order to:
 - Set out best practice with regard to supporter-related issues and the supporter liaison work conducted by clubs
 - Formulate standard procedures
 - Ensure common objectives
 - Facilitate an exchange of information and experience
- Set up a coordinating committee for supporter liaison work.