



ACADEMY

FROM ACCESS TO INCLUSION?

Voicing the Consumer Experience of Disabled Football Fans in Scotland and England

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Final Report

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Scan the QR code to visit *Matchday Through Our Lens*, a photo exhibition sharing football fans' matchday experiences.



1. Executive Summary

Recent data show that almost one in four people in the UK have a disability (Kirk-Wade et al., 2024). In football, 35% of disabled fans encounter physical barriers limiting their ability to attend matches. Despite football being the most popular sport in Scotland and England, the extent to which disabled fans have equitable access to the full range of football consumption experiences remains under-researched. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of disabled fans by giving them voice. It seeks to answer the following two research questions:

What is the football consumer experience of disabled fans on match-day like?

What is the impact of football consumption on their senses of belonging and inclusion?

The research employs a theoretical framework combining the human rights model of disability with the social relational model. Using a participatory visual method, this study involved 25 participants aged 18 and over in Scotland and England who documented their match-day experiences through photographs. These images, together with semi-structured interviews, explored the themes of Accessibility, Travelling, Friendship, Atmosphere, and Independence. This approach empowers participants to share their perspectives and contribute to knowledge creation in a way that diminishes the typical power imbalance between researcher and participants by recognising them as co-researchers.

The resulting photo-narrative analysis has informed an online photo exhibition showcasing their experiences on the *Matchday Through Our Lens* website. This can help raise awareness on their consumer experience in a straightforward and accessible way to a wider public.

Moreover, the research outcomes showcase the meaning of attending live matches for disabled fans, and the challenges they may face. The study identifies barriers to equal access and provides evidence-based recommendations for football governing bodies to strengthen accessibility and inclusivity frameworks. These insights can also support clubs in moving beyond physical access to designing inclusive consumer experiences across the entire match-day journey. For UEFA, the SFA, the FA and clubs, this research offers a practical evidence base to review how existing standards are reflected in match-day delivery, to inform governance and support arrangements, and to guide club decisions across key points of the supporter experience (including travel, information, staff interactions, seating, atmosphere, and away fixtures).

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2. Use of language

There has been a long-standing debate in disability studies regarding the use of person-first language (e.g., person with disabilities) versus identity-first language (e.g., disabled person). Depending on the period and the predominance of specific disability models, standpoints, and even geography, one term has been preferred over the other (see Best et al., 2022). Dunn and Andrews (2015) recommend flexibility in terminology, suggesting authors alternate between person-first and identity-first language or consult participants to respect their preferences. Powis et al. (2022) in their recent book on researching on disability, share a similar view accepting the use of terms such as *disabled people*, *non-disabled people*, *people with disabilities*, *people who experience disability*, *able-bodied people*. While this researcher would generally use the person-first or identity-first approach interchangeably, in this study the terms *disabled fans* and *non-disabled fans* are the ones selected. This choice reflects the terminology adopted in the UK by the Disabled Supporter Associations (DSAs), which were established by fans themselves and intentionally use identity-first language to describe their membership.

3. Introduction: research context and relevance

Football fans are often seen as the “12th man” due to their impact on matchday atmosphere and performance (Hagood & Vodag, 2016; Arrondel et al., 2023). UEFA recognises fans as key stakeholders, as demonstrated by its Memorandum of Understanding with Football Supporters Europe (FSE), an umbrella organisation representing supporter groups across Europe. This agreement aims to: a) safeguard and enhance supporters' rights and welfare at UEFA club and national team competitions, and b) promote human rights, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in European football (FSE, 2023). Both UEFA and FSE stress the importance of matchday accessibility for all fans. To this end, in 2025, the FSE created the Disability & Inclusion Fan Network, a branch of the organisation to support disabled fans across Europe and advocate for positive change (FSE, 2025). Indeed, disabled fans still face significant accessibility challenges (see DWP and DCMS, 2015; Level Playing Field, 2022, 2023). Although comprehensive data on the number of disabled football fans in Europe is not provided, indicative figures help to highlight the potential scale of this population. UEFA reports approximately 229 million attendances at football matches across Europe during the 2023/24 season (UEFA, 2025), while estimates from the World Health Organization indicate that between 6 and 10 % of people in the WHO European Region live with a disability (WHO, 2019). Therefore, these figures suggest that the number of disabled fans across Europe is likely to be substantial. Given that football is the most popular sport to watch live in the UK (Statista, 2024) – suffice it to mention that as many as 3.9 million fans attended top-tier matches in Scotland last year (BBC, 2025) – combined with the fact that 27% of Scots reported being disabled under the 2010 UK Equality Act definition (see Scottish Government, 2025) and that 23% of the English population, as well as around 10% of children (Kirk-Wade et al., 2024) have a disability, this study focuses on these two countries.

It is acknowledged that people with disabilities are less active due to various barriers they face. The UK Government *Get Active Strategy* recognises disability as one of the characteristics for being less active (DCMS, 2023). For instance, in England between 2022-2023, 52% of disabled people were physically inactive, compared to 31% of non-disabled people (Sport England, 2024). Similarly, in Scotland, 36% of adults with disabilities do not participate in any physical activity (Scottish Government, 2022). However, these inequalities persist also in football consumption, where disabled fans face barriers to access and engagement. This matters because sport spectatorship is associated with improved mental wellbeing, particularly when the sport is widely followed (Kinoshita et al., 2024). A survey

carried out by the UK based Disability Policy Centre (2024), revealed that over half of respondents were unable to watch live sport in their preferred venues like stadia and pubs, due to inaccessibility. Moreover, the 2022-2023 Sport England survey found that only 40.9% of disabled children attended at least two live sports events compared to 46.1% of non-disabled children, and that attendance decreases with age for disabled children while remaining steady for non-disabled ones (Activity Alliance, 2024). Additionally, according to Level Playing Field's (2024) recent survey the two main barriers to disabled match-goers are physically accessing the stadia (35%) and the abusive attitudes of others (26%).¹ Attendance costs are also an issue for 22.5% of respondents. This raises the question of whether disabled football fans are being overlooked as both stakeholder and potential customer. UEFA points out that “disabled people should be seen as valued customers, with good access being regarded not only as a moral imperative, but also as good business sense” (CAFE and UEFA, 2017, p.6). In the UK, households that include at least one disabled individual have a combined annual spending power estimated at around £274 billion (Scope, 2021), clearly representing a potential market. However, given that these households face approximately £1,010 in additional monthly expenses (see Scope, 2024), it is essential that an entertaining and tailored consumer experience is delivered by football clubs in a fair manner.

Thus, understanding what the football consumer experience is like for disabled fans through their own voice, is key. Non-discrimination principles must ensure that disabled fans can enjoy and consume football on equal terms. Examining how stadia accessibility and atmosphere affect their match-day experience can provide further insight into how to improve the experience. Recognising the barriers to accessibility and inclusivity faced by disabled fans is essential for shaping effective and inclusive policies. These findings can guide UEFA's future policies and best practices and support football clubs in creating inclusive experiences.

4. Research questions and aims and objectives of the research

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UNGA, 2006) not only recognises the human right to “participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities” (art. 30.5) but also sets forth the positive duty of State Parties “to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues” (comma 5c). General Comment N.21 of the International Covenant on Economic,

¹ From 2024, Level Playing Field expanded its annual survey beyond England to include disabled fans in Scotland.

Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 2009) engages with the right to participate in cultural life, including access to sports venues challenging institutions and policymakers to ensure that such rights are fulfilled. Current statistics estimate that 24% of the UK population, had a disability in 2022/2023 and that the numbers have been increasing in the past two decades (Kirk-Wade et al., 2024). However, disabled sports fans continue to encounter multifaceted barriers to consuming football, ranging from physical and financial obstacles to social and emotional challenges. These include inaccessible transportation, burdensome ticketing processes, inadequate facilities, isolation within venues, and exposure to discriminatory behaviours (see Level Playing Field, 2023). Yet, the degree to which people with disabilities have equitable access to the full spectrum of football consumption experiences remains underexplored. There is still limited understanding of how disabled fans experience football consumption. To fill this research gap this study aims to explore the lived experiences of disabled football fans in Scotland and England, by addressing the following two research questions:

- *What is the football consumer experience of disabled fans on match-day like?*
- *What is the impact of football consumption on their senses of belonging and inclusion?*

Thanks to a photo-narrative methodology, this research will bring further understanding on disabled fans' experiences to inform not only the physical accessibility dimension of their match-day experiences, but also the social and emotional impact that the football consumption has on their lives, moving from a mere accessibility approach to an inclusive one. Drawing on UEFA's accessibility standards (see UEFA, 2024) this study will investigate how match-day delivery is experienced by disabled fans. It will generate data to enhance implementation at club level by examining how accessibility measures operate across venues and match contexts (including away fixtures), and how this impacts fans' consumer experience. The report opens by outlining the disability models used to analyse the relationship between sport and disability, before setting out the study's combined framework (the human rights model and the social relational model). It then reviews the standards and guidance relevant to accessible stadia in Scotland and England, including UEFA guidance and UK-specific frameworks. Chapter 6 sets out the research strategy, including the method and rationale, how it was applied, the data collection process, the sample and participant selection, and ethical considerations. Chapter 7 presents the data discussion, moving from what football means to disabled fans to accessibility across the match-day journey (arrival/entry, seating, sightlines, movement, facilities, and assistive devices/technology), and concluding with friendship networks, belonging, and a

dedicated sub-section on away fixtures. Chapter 9 closes the report with the study's added value for research and policy and recommendations for clubs.

5. Literature Review

5.1. The Disability Models and their use in the football sector and research

The United Nations recognise persons with disabilities as “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UNGA, 2006, art.1). This framing of disability shows a shift from the *medical model of disability* – prevalent in the 1800s and much of the 1900s, which attributed societal inaccessibility to the individual's impairment (see Zaks, 2024) – to the *social model of disability* which moves the spotlight to how society responds to people's impairments (Oliver, 2004). For the medical model, disability is an abnormality depicted as an inherently negative condition that needs to be eliminated since it is the source of people's social exclusion (Brett et al., 2016). While the social model focuses on how societal barriers (physical, legal, communication, etc.) can prevent some people from enjoying full access to society thereby creating disability. The social model hence distinguishes the person's impairment (physical or cognitive) from the disability, which is the result of interacting with societal barriers, like discrimination (Oliver and Barnes, 2012). The interaction between the impairment and the societal barrier is defined as *disablism*, “a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being” (Thomas, 2007, p.73). The social model, which has been adopted in the past decade by policy makers, charities (Activity Alliance; Football Foundation; Level Playing Field) and sport governing bodies (see UEFA, 2024a; FA, n.d.; SFA, n.d.), strives to remove what are defined as disabling barriers. A third theoretical framework is the *human rights model of disability* based on article 30 of the UN CRPD that recognises disabled people's right to participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport (UNGA, 2006). This approach calls for policy and legal actions to be taken so that sport could be considered as one of “the usual activities of citizenship” to which disabled people should have equal opportunities to enjoy (Garcia et al. 2017, p. 240).

A fourth important model of disability is Thomas's (2004) *social relational model* which focuses on the interactions between the non-impaired – who are in a more powerful state

– and the impaired individuals – who are marginalised, because considered “problematically different” (p.23). The lives of disabled people are perceived as being restricted and governed by the actions, institutions, and social structures established by the non-impaired individuals. Thus, they hold “a position of lesser citizenship” (ibid., 23), creating what Thomas (2007) defines as *disablism*. Indeed, the social relational model builds on the social model, recognising that there are structural and behavioural barriers that make full access to social, working and cultural life impossible for disabled people. However, Thomas (1999) does not neglect the consequences of people’s impairments, recognising that the impairment *per se* can restrict the individual’s activities, creating the *impairment effect*. Indeed, one of the main critiques received by the social model has been its disregard for the distinctive lived experience of every disabled people that also includes emotional, psychological and physical (i.e. pain) components (Powis, Brighton and Howe, 2022). On the other hand, the social relational model acknowledges that the interactions of disabled people with physical barriers and non-disabled people’s attitudes and behaviours can negatively impact their emotional well-being creating *barriers to doing* (participation) and *barriers to being* (psycho-emotional well-being) (see Cologon and Thomas, 2014).

Finally, while various disability models have been developed and used in research, with increasing interest in access to sport and physical activity for people with disabilities (see Hodges et al., 2014; Fitzgerald, 2018; Engdahl-Høgåsen & Bentzen, 2023; Scelles et al., 2024), or the potential positive shift in disability perceptions by the public, thanks to para sport events like the Paralympics being more inclusively covered and broadcasted (see Pullen et al., 2020); the attention to disabled fans’ consumer experience remains limited. Exceptions include Southby’s (2011, 2013) analysis of social inclusion for people with learning disabilities as football fans in Britain, Garcia et al.’s (2017) study on Disabled Supporter Associations (DSAs) in England, Brown’s (2022) commentary and Penfold and Kitchin’s (2022) article, both of which argue that greater attention should be placed on the accessibility of English football stadia as fans returned after the COVID-19 pandemic, and Penfold et al.’s (2025) research on the inclusion/exclusion lived experiences of disabled football supporters in England, who, applying the social relational model, focused on discrimination. However, as the articles by Garcia et al. (2017) and Penfold et al. (2025) show, most studies on disabled football spectators focus on sport management, particularly compliance with stadium accessibility laws, leaving a research gap on the lived experiences of disabled fans that this study aims to fill by sharing people’s experiences through their voices and lenses.

5.2. Stadia accessibility in the UK: guidelines and standards

Both the social and human rights approach have brought forward significant positive changes. In the UK efforts to provide equal access to stadia for disabled fans have been ongoing. According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2017) since 1999, football clubs have been legally obligated to make reasonable adjustments for disabled individuals. Guidance was offered by the 2003 *Accessible Stadia Guide* (FSIF and FLA, 2003), a widely recognised resource for designing facilities to meet the needs of disabled spectators and other users, subsequently integrated with the 2015 *Supplementary Guidance* by the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA, 2015). Yet, the Commission's report (2017) underlined that many English Premier League clubs still fall short of meeting non-discrimination requirements for people with disabilities.

In 2011, UEFA, together with the Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE), drafted an excellent guide to develop and ensure football stadia and match-day experiences are accessible to all, which was updated in 2024 (UEFA, 2024). They suggested football clubs to carry out an “access audit” of their stadia and related facilities to identify potential “features and services that may affect or impose [...] barriers” (UEFA and CAFE, 2011, p.32). They recommended appointing a Disability Officer who is accountable for offering inclusive facilities and services for everyone (ibid, p.36). As a result, CAFE and UEFA (2017) drafted the *Disability Access Officer Handbook*. This latter recommendation became legally binding in 2015 by having added article 35bis – now article 46 (UEFA, 2024b) – to the *Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations*, requiring clubs to appoint a Disability Access Officer (DAO). According to publicly available data each club of both the Scottish Premiership (SPFL) and the English Premier League (EPL) has a DAO.

In 2021 the British Government issued a Fan-Led Review of Football Governance (DCMS, 2021) to find ways of enhancing the “governance, ownership and financial sustainability” of English football clubs. This led to a report outlining 47 recommendations to safeguard the future of English football (hereinafter the Report). Two years later, the White Paper titled *A Sustainable Future – Reforming Club Governance*, based on the fan led review was published with the promise of acting upon the recommendations of said Fan-led review (DCMS, 2023). In this 99-page long document, where the claimed intent is to “put fans right back at the heart of football” (ibid, p.1), the word ‘fan’ appears indeed 141 times, while the word disability emerges only once. In section 16 dedicated to DEI comma 3 states that “[...] We believe that

clubs' actions should focus on producing outcomes which: [...] *improve accessibility for those with disabilities*" [emphasis added]. However, it lacked specifics on how this would be ensured.

The relevance of, and need for, stronger attention to disability access is underscored by recent Premier League episodes. In 2024, Manchester United imposed a 20% increase on blue badge parking permits for disabled season ticket holders at Old Trafford (Railston, 2024). Manchester City also introduced matchday parking charges ahead of the 2024/25 season, ending a policy that offered 300 complimentary spaces to the DSA; following supporter backlash and negative coverage, the club revised this to a refundable £6 booking fee per match (City Extra, 2024; Lee, 2024). By contrast, Manchester United maintained its increase (Railston, 2024). Aston Villa similarly faced criticism after doubling disabled matchday parking costs from £190 to £380 with only a week's notice; the club later apologised, reverted to the previous rate, and reimbursed affected supporters (Townley, 2024; AVFC, 2024). More broadly, 9 of the 20 Premier League clubs charge blue badge holders to park on club grounds. Similarly, a nationwide survey in Scotland found nearly 60% of disabled fans rated parking as average or poor, with over one fifth saying very poor (SFSA, 2025). Hence, further investigating accessibility and inclusivity is crucial.

The following report section outlines the methodology used to capture disabled fans' lived match-day experiences and examines how accessibility is realised in practice.

6. Research Design and Strategy

6.1. Rationale and justification of the research design

This study combines the social relational and human rights models of disability. The first model allows an understanding of the lived experience of people with disabilities in relation to the issues that create barriers to doing and barriers to being. The latter model empowers disabled fans to advocate for social change through policy and legal strategies aimed at combating disablism. The application of these theoretical frameworks provides an in-depth understanding of disabled fans' consumer experience and informs how an inclusive experience can be delivered. While what an accessible consumer experience should look like is clear through the UEFA Accessibility Guidelines (UEFA, 2024), and how an accessible stadia should be built is outlined in the SGSA (2015), there is still limited understanding of what the consumer experience is like from disabled fans' lived perspectives, what obstacles they face, and how these challenges impact the football experience they *"live for"*. Accordingly, this report examines the match-day consumer journey through disabled fans' words and lenses. It

considers ticketing and travel, stadium entry and seating (including sightlines), movement within the ground, access to key facilities such as toilets and food kiosks, and departure. Specific attention was given to away fixtures to better comprehend if specific measures should be put in place. It also focused on the social side of the experience, by investigating what going to a live match means to disabled fans from a personal and social perspective, and the extent to which this contributes to building social networks.

In order to capture the nuances of people's consumer journey through a human rights based research approach that recognises research participants on an equal footing with the researcher and values their views and standpoints the study was designed to develop as a "collaborative endeavour" (Darnell et al., 2016, p.572), that recognises participants as co-researchers (CRs). This approach reduces the power imbalance between researcher and participants and aims to co-construct meaning (Mishler, 1995) through photos and dialogue. Accordingly, this study applied the Photo-CARE method (Pavan, 2026) to the contextual circumstances of disabled people. This participatory method creates two interpretive layers, with researcher's academic interpretation building on the meanings participants (now co-researchers) construct through visual storytelling. Photo-CARE stands for Co-Researching Alternative Rights-holders life-Experiences by using photos. The method creates the possibility to understand Alternative life experiences of a vulnerable population by adopting an asset-based approach which focuses on what participants engage in (in this case, football consumption) and the impact this has on their lives.

Finally, this method also enables this study to reach a wider audience, including academics, football governing bodies, clubs and non-disabled fans. Indeed, it allows disabled fans' experiences to be shared through accessible dissemination formats such as a website, infographics and an online photo exhibition. These outputs support clear communication of the results and can also be used for events and stakeholder engagement.

6.1.1. Method application

CRs were asked to take photographs of their consumer experience using their mobile phones.² To help them feel more empowered by being in the position of telling their perspectives on their experiences and participating in the construction of knowledge (Lewinson, 2015), they were given the freedom to choose what to photograph within five specific themes. They also had control over the aesthetics of the photographs, including black and white, colours, blurred

² Accessible platforms are available for those with sight impairments (such as Seeing AI). If participants cannot take photos (i.e. struggle to hold their phone still), they could ask the carer to take it on their behalf under their instructions.

effects, and other stylistic choices. Specifically, they were asked to take one photo for each of the following topics:

1. Accessibility (i.e. ticketing, seating, toilets, view, food)
2. Travelling (to/from the stadium)
3. Friendship (building friendship networks by attending the matches)
4. Atmosphere at the stadium (isolation or inclusion)
5. Independence (flexibility and sacrifices to enjoy the match)

While the first two topics are generally considered in match-day evaluations, being linked to the physical barriers people face (see CAFE, n.d.), the last three are generally overlooked. However, they are a crucial part of the consumer experience, particularly if the focus of the football experience for disabled fans shifts from mere accessibility to inclusion. Building consumer loyalty is fundamental for football clubs; therefore, the experience of disabled fans should also be a key focus. Indeed, while the atmosphere is generally considered one of the main elements of interest for clubs and companies targeting non-disabled match-goers (see Deloitte, 2018), this focus should be expanded to include disabled fans. To what extent do disabled fans feel part of the stadium atmosphere or excluded, and what factors influence inclusion or exclusion?

Physical and communication barriers might be more straightforward to understand in terms of impact, and in the UK the Equality Act 2010 (GEO and EHRC, 2015) “legally protect people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society” (ibid, 2015, section 20). The Equality Act sets out a duty to make reasonable adjustments, requiring individuals or organisations to take reasonable steps to ensure disabled people are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled people. These adjustments could be physical (i.e. ramps, accessible toilets), auxiliary aids and services (i.e. screen readers, BSL interpreters), or making information accessible (i.e. Braille); all of which can be applicable to football stadium grounds. Yet, there is limited attention to how such adjustments can influence people’s feeling part of the atmosphere, friendship formation, and their sense of independence. Nevertheless, these are all key elements to create an inclusive consumer experience.

Finally, with reference to friendship, Putnam’s (1993, 2000) concept of social capital revolves around the idea of creating social networks - bonding and bridging- through participation in the same activity (i.e. watching football live), which can foster interactions. Interactions, in a specific context, can offer “the opportunity to become friends” (Pettigrew, 1998). Emotional and social indicators can provide a deeper understanding of belonging. However, this often depends on being able to access the stadium and sit with family and friends,

which in turn shapes opportunities for wider networks to be built. Therefore, how accessibility links to friendship formation has also been analysed.

6.1.2. Data sample and selection process

The study focused on disabled fans of clubs from the Scottish Premiership and Championship, English Premier League, Championship, League One and Two. These leagues were selected to capture diversity in financial resources, stadium capacities, and levels of commercialisation, which vary significantly between English and Scottish football. Even within their respective top divisions, English Premier League clubs typically operate with substantially higher budgets and larger stadiums compared to Scottish Premiership clubs. Including Championship and League One and Two clubs further reflects ensures representation across a broad spectrum of financial and operational conditions in professional football.

Recruitment was conducted through the FSE Disability & Inclusion Fan Network, the Scottish Football Supporters Association, and direct contact with Disabled Supporter Associations (DSAs) affiliated with clubs in the selected leagues, as well as DLOs in Scotland; all these channels disseminated the call. Of the DSAs and DLOs contacted directly, some responded positively, while others did not engage with the invitation.

Interested individuals emailed the researcher to request further information. Following this exchange, they received a Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form to be returned signed (Annexes 1 and 2). Participants then submitted photographs via email and arranged an online interview date with the researcher.

The final sample consisted of 25 co-researchers (CRs) (15 from Scotland and 10 from England), all aged 18 years or older. They included both male and female fans. The call for participants was open to fans with any type of disability to gain knowledge from multiple perspectives. As a result, this study covers mobility impairments (wheelchair users, powerchair users, mobility scooter users, and those who use a walking stick or crutches), visual impairments (blind and partially sighted), deaf and hard-of-hearing participants, neurodivergence, sensory processing disability, functional neurological disorder affecting mobility, mental health conditions, quadriplegic cerebral palsy, and muscular dystrophy.

6.1.3. Table of participants: co-researchers:

Pseudonyms	Club's Country:	Club's Tier	Season ticket holder
Sarah	England	Premier League	Yes
Patricia	England	League 2	Yes

James	England	Championship	Yes
Jennifer	England	Championship	Yes
Michael	England	League 1	Yes
Linda	England	Premier League	Yes
Robert	England	Premier League	No
David	England	League 2	Yes
Peter	England	Premier League	Former
Samuel	England	League 1	Yes
Noah	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Alan	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Iain	Scotland	Premiership	Waitlist
Keith	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Jack	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Cameron and Brodie ³	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Matt	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Kenna	Scotland	Championship	Yes
Greig	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Gavin	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Freya	Scotland	Championship	Yes
Claire	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Duncan	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Harris	Scotland	Premiership	Yes
Paul	Scotland	Premiership	Yes

6.1.4. Data collection and generation

Between December and March 2026 CRs have taken part in an online⁴ individual semi-structured interview carried out by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews, which are flexible in nature, allow to create spontaneous and relaxed conversations. The interview had two parts. The first part of the interview included questions on CRs personal connection to football, attendance patterns, experiences of match atmosphere, emotional responses before and after games, practical challenges and accessibility issues, including at away games and suggestions for improving the overall football experience. A guide on the questions asked is

³ The two are father and son. The latter has a disability, and the researcher interviewed them together.

⁴ Interviews were carried out on MS Teams to ensure accessibility and recording. Indeed, the software supports screen readers, keyboard navigation, high contrast modes, and provides live captions, transcriptions and immersive reading. Furthermore, online interviews meant CRs did not have to travel.

provided in Annex 3. The second part focused on discussing the photos one by one answering the following questions:

- What does this picture represent?
- What does this picture mean to you?
- How does this picture represent one of the themes assigned to you?



Figure 1: Infographic showing the data generation process

Finally, CRs provided a title for each photo. Both the photographs and the dialogue between the CRs and the researcher upon the photos generate the meaning-making and co-produced knowledge via a photo-narrative analysis valuable to address the research questions. Narrative analysis “has emancipatory power” (Powis et al., 2022, p.29) and this photo-narrative analysis (Böök and Mykkänen, 2014) aimed to voice the consumer experience of disabled fans through a final online photo exhibition containing the photos and related captions. It is a tool to produce accessible research (see Schulenkorf et al., 2016) to reach a public beyond the academic one like non-disabled fans, football clubs, football governing bodies and civil society at large and potentially inform positive change.

6.1.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by MMU Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee, EthOS82266. Accessibility was prioritised throughout the research design. The photo-narrative component used disabled fans’ own mobile phones rather than disposable cameras to reduce burden and maximise accessibility, given CRs’ familiarity

with their devices and the availability of built-in accessibility features (e.g., screen readers, zoom, captions).

Participation was entirely voluntary, and CRs could withdraw at any time. They retained full control over their contributions: they could choose what to photograph within the agreed themes, were not required to appear in any images (photographs could depict places, objects, or environments), and could skip any interview questions if they wished (although no CR chose to do so). To address potential accessibility concerns for blind and partially sighted participants, the researcher consulted a disability access specialist with lived and professional experience; no specific barrier was identified, and partially sighted fans participated in the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity were protected by not linking CRs to specific clubs in the participants table and by using pseudonyms in the research materials. Although many CRs expressed a preference to use their real first name in the online photo-exhibition, anonymity was preserved in this report by using pseudonyms and the identifier CR (co-researcher) plus a number (e.g., CR1, CR2) in the sections where photographs are included.

7. Data discussion

7.1. We live, eat, drink football

It is well known that, for football fans, watching a game live is central, as this creates the matchday experience. The literature links this experience to identity formation through matchday rituals (Edensor and Millington, 2009), to the development of a sense of belonging and community (see Stone, 2007; Llopis-Goig et. al, 2025), to the role of wearing the football shirt and purchasing other memorabilia (Derbaix and Decrop, 2011), and to pre-match gathering place practices, such as, for instance, the pub in the UK (see Parry, 2019). Conversely, fans are an essential stakeholder in football culture and the football industry by contributing to create the matchday atmosphere. These studies on the meaning of football for non-disabled fans led me to wonder what football represents for disabled fans instead. Indeed, this question stands at the premise of this study. If one of the aims of this research was to understand disabled fans' matchday experience, supporting the idea that such an experience should be not only accessible but also inclusive, further investigation into what football means to disabled fans was necessary. For this reason, at the beginning of the interview, the question "*what does football represent to you?*" was posed.

For the majority of CRs, football is an essential part of their lives. The expressions used to describe the fundamental role football plays in their lives were so heartfelt that, from the beginning of this research journey, it was clear that watching football was *a sine qua non* of their life stories. As Sarah put it "*we live, eat, drink football, basically*". During our conversation, Matt exclaimed, using a phrase that could feature in next season's football advertising, that "*football's life; the rest is just details*". Similarly, Duncan stated that football means "*a lot and probably more than that should, to be honest [...] I would say it plays a pretty big part of my life*" and Paul said that "*it means a lot. I love football, I love the club*". Likewise, Cameron and Brodie shared that "*it's a huge, huge thing in our lives. We love it. Can't go every single week, so we rarely miss a game*".

For many CRs, football formed part of their lifelong personal history and identity. Claire stated that "*football is pretty much life. I grew up with it*". Freya similarly located her attachment in childhood, noting "*it's something I've followed all my life. I've been brought up watching football [...]*". Likewise, Alan explained that football "*has just been the sort of one thing that's been a constant in my life for really the past 20 odd years*". Jennifer shared a comparable experience, describing football as something she "*was like born into*", with family support that "*goes right back to my nan*". David expressed a similar experience stating that:

Well, football has always been a part of my life since I've been a kid. So, I started attending football matches with my father when I was a little child. [...] So yeah, I can't remember when I haven't watched football really.

For some, this attachment was described in even stronger terms. Linda went as far as to state that football is her “*main life*”. In a related way, Iain disclosed “*football has now shaped my life in a way I didn't think it would have before*”; indeed, “*it's been something that I've enjoyed so much and I'm so passionate about that I've completely changed my career because of it*”.

Of relevance is the fact that, for several CRs, football represents not only a leisure activity but also a source of distraction, and support during difficult times. Michael explained: “*it's incredibly important for me. I guess it's my hobby watching football. I used to play football, but obviously that's not possible anymore*”. Similarly, Claire expressed the comfort she finds in football “*it's taken me through some really hard times in my life, even right now [...] It keeps me going, basically, football's life*”. For Keith and Noah, the matchday was framed as a form of escape:

It represents a place where I can almost go to escape for 90 minutes that I can forget about what's going on in my life, not just in terms of my disability, but it could be just like in general, I think. (Keith)

Noah similarly asserted that “*it's just something I enjoy so much. It's an escape from everyday life. Watching football, watching it for 90 minutes, all your troubles disappear*”. This sense of stepping away from everyday pressures was echoed by Freya, who said: “*to me, it gives you that 90 minutes away from normal life*”, and by Harris, who stated: “*it represents, I suppose, enjoyment. It gets me out the house, gives me a chance to interact with my grandkids*”. James also described football as a long-standing and meaningful routine in his life:

It's just a breakaway from the novel working week. I've been going for since 1977 so nearly 50 years, it's coming up to now, lived up in whole, moved away and kept continued following them. [...] So that's nearly 20 years where we go to watch all, well, where it's a 256 miles round trip for every match for the home matches and we've got quite a few of the way matches as well. (James)

Moreover, the link between the football matchday experience and the formation of friendships became particularly clear through CRs' spontaneous emphasis on belonging and community. They repeatedly stressed the importance of physically attending matches, to the point that the friendships and networks formed through matchday routines can come to feel like a family.

Below are Matt, Duncan, Alan, Kenna, Alastair, Noah, Sarah, Robert, Michael, Jennifer, Peter and Patricia's replies on what watching football live means to them.



Figure 2: Infographic showing what football means - friendship and community

Clearly, the matchday experience is an intrinsic part of the lives of disabled fans, as generally it is for non-disabled fans (see Crawford, 2004; Gibbons and Nuttall, 2016). Accordingly, it should be as accessible and inclusive as possible, given that it is recognised as an integral part of social and cultural life and that disability should not be a justification for exclusion (SGSA, 2015; UNGA, 2006). Robert clearly expressed this concept by highlighting how, since he could not practice sport, watching it live was his way of experiencing sport.

Football is a sport, okay? It's something I was never able to access as a kid, being a wheelchair user and everything like that. It's never really something I was able to access, and *my route into accessing sport, if you like, wasn't through playing sport, as it is through many other people, but was through watching sport [emphasis added]*. (Robert)

Thus, what is the football match-day experience like for disabled fans based in Scotland and England? The next part of the report will further investigate this aspect.

7.2. The match-day experience in one word

In an effort to comprehend what the match-day experience is like for disabled fans and, at the same time, to make them reflect on it, CRs were asked to describe it in a single word and/or sentence. The purpose of this exercise was to allow them to find the prominent aspect(s) of the experience. Indeed, by needing to describe it briefly, CRs focused on the elements that best depict their experience. The activity was informative because it required some time for them to search for the best word or expression. This was evident in the contrasts that one can see within individual responses, like *“joyful but frustrating”*, *“anxiety and enjoyability”*, *“a rollercoaster, even in terms of facilities”*, *“enjoyable but often spoiled”*. These ways of describing the experience underlined how accessibility and inclusiveness impact their match-day experience.

When Keith described his experience as a rollercoaster, he initially referred it to his club’s results: *“it can be up and down, but you always come back [...]”*, but he also linked the term rollercoaster to accessibility:

Even in terms of facilities, because there's still some places that have to do better, I think. But all we can do and all we're trying to do and all you're trying to do through the kind of thing that you're doing is raise awareness and speak up, and hopefully better facilities become available [...]. (Keith)

How accessibility emerges as a key factor is, for instance, clear when Duncan decided that his experience can be summed up as *“improving but with the caveat that there's still lots more to do”*, similarly to Gavin who stated: *“it has improved but more improvement needs to be made”*. Likewise, Harris described it as *“strange”*. While he likes watching the matches he reflected on the fact that he would *“much prefer it if I could be able-bodied and I was able to go whatever in the stadium I wanted to be, rather than where you were dictated to be due to it [referring to his disability]”*. Meanwhile, Brodie linked the term anxiety to the away games. The lack or limited availability of information on accessibility would bring anxiety to his experience: *“[...] especially going to new places. I would have that anxiety going to new places”*. He argued that not knowing how to access the various stadia, or how many accessible toilets were available and where they were located, made the experience more complicated. Similarly, for Freya, there is a difference between home and away games, and that’s due to the familiarity of the home stadium, which is accessible, and she knows her way around it, and the poor level of

information on accessibility for away games “at home, at [name of stadium], excellent. It couldn't be any better if they tried. Away games: it can be difficult based on access”.

Other CRs decided to predominantly focus on the positive sides of the experience describing it as “rewarding”, “something I live for all week”, “good”, “exciting”, “enjoyable”, “it's worth living for”, “freedom and peace”, “camaraderie and a shared experience”. In this context, Robert emphasised the importance of the sense of community he finds through football, stating: “so that notion of community coming from football, that notion of, you know, community, building social capital, going to football matches, I think it's so important for disabled people”. Overall, CRs, as football fans, value attending their club's matches live. However, for many, the obstacles they face and the uncertainties they must navigate result in a matchday experience that James describes as “enjoyable but often spoiled”. Below is an infographic that summarises the CRs' replies.



Figure 3: Infographic showing how CRs described the matchday experience in one word.

7.3.The importance of accessible stadia: there was no space for me

This study was undertaken to focus on the perspectives of disabled supporters on the matchday experience and to raise awareness of the accessibility barriers that persist within professional football. Given the scale and economic significance of football in the UK and across Europe, with the European market generating approximately €38bn in revenues in the 2023/24 season (Deloitte, 2025), Scottish football contributing an estimated £820m in gross value added (GVA) to the Scottish economy (SFA, 2026), and the Premier League and its clubs generating £9.8bn in GVA for the UK economy in 2023/24 (PL, 2025), it could be inferred that accessibility challenges would have been comprehensively addressed. However, Jack's account suggests that meaningful improvements remain necessary.

Jack has been supporting his club since 1994. Yet, after he started using a wheelchair, he shared that:

There was no space for me. [...] I missed football for about 7 years [...] the club eventually built a ramp, a big ramp for wheelchair accessibility. And luckily enough, I got a space on the ramp. So, as soon as the ramp opened in 2022, I think I have missed a total of four games home and away. So, you could say I'm a little bit of a, I'm a football addict.

7.3.1.Stadium access and arrival: parking, routes and turnstiles

Initially, accessibility and independence are shaped by how easily fans can reach and enter the stadium. CRs raised attention on the barriers that occur early in the matchday journey, particularly at the point of entry. Providing alternative entry routes and ensuring that parking is sufficiently close to access points appear central to improving access in practice. In fact, CR4 stressed that he finds it very helpful to have a parking space at the stadium, so he does not need to walk long distances. CR14 illustrated how these measures can support entry, describing how she enters the stadium more easily due to the disabled section of the car park, where she has a reserved space (by paying an extra fee when she buys her season ticket). Because this space is located very close to the stadium access point, she can avoid the turnstiles and use the disabled access.



Figure 5: CR14 - Disabled car park

Similarly, CR16 reported having a disabled parking space “*which is right down the very front, so it's not far to go when I get in, when I get out of my car*”.



Figure 4: CR16 - Travelling for a match

Having a reserved space in the car park was also essential for CR24, who expressed a wish that the club provided more such spaces. CR20 reported that, because there is only one disabled car park at his home ground, he instead uses a school car park that is rented out during games. However, because he needs additional space to get in and out of the car and the school car park does not offer designated disabled spaces, he arrives very early and waits until the stadium has emptied before leaving. Similarly, CR9 indicated that, due to the lack of designated parking and his need to park close to the ground, finding a space is “*a worry*”. For CR19, it is “*a major problem since the car park, which had load of disabled spaces, was sold off for housing*”. As a result, he now arrives at the stadium one hour before kick-off. CR2 similarly underlined that disabled parking provision should be improved, noting that, to park close to the stadium, they “*have to set off 2 hours before the games kick off*”, despite living close by. This point was also echoed by CR9, who noted that “*there's no designated car park*”. In addition to availability, the state of pavements was raised as a further barrier. CR15, for example, stressed the difficulty of using a wheelchair on certain terrains.

Overall, parking was raised by almost all CRs as an area that clubs, both home and away, should improve. CR19 explained that many disabled fans no longer attend games because parking is not available and they have to park too far away. Even when off-site parking is provided, accessibility can remain inconsistent. As CR1 noted, *“the buses that run the shuttle from the off-site parking, not all of them are wheelchair accessible, so they [wheelchair users] can’t use it”*. These constraints, from parking availability and distance to shuttle accessibility, also shape the entry experience once supporters reach the stadium. As with CR9 and CR14, CR16 expressed appreciation for being able to access the ground easily and avoid turnstiles that would be difficult to use due to her mobility issues. This was significant for CR16’s sense of independence because she can walk on her own, whereas she would *“get stuck with my stick in the turnstile. [...] it doesn’t work for me to go through that”*.



Figure 6: CR16 - Independent access

CR17 expressed a similar view, noting that she can avoid the turnstile and use a door instead. In addition, CR4 explained that using the turnstile to access the stadium is difficult for him, stating that *“this is not great accessibility”*.

These reports highlight that barriers often arise across the wider approach journey, including parking availability, distance to entry points, surface quality, and the accessibility of shuttle transport. Importantly, these issues can hinder independence even before supporters reach their seats.

This theme links to another issue affecting access within stadia, namely the availability and reliability of lifts and step-free alternatives. CR15 mentioned that having a ramp as an alternative route alongside the lift is important so that, if the lift is out of order, supporters can still access the stadium easily.



Figure 7: CR15 - Gorgie Stand Lift

In line with this, CR21 suggested that there should be more than one lift and that a ramp should always be available. Because his club has only one lift, which can accommodate one wheelchair or mobility scooter at a time, he leaves ten minutes before the end of the game to avoid queues when exiting the stadium, missing out on his experience. He explained that, without a ramp, a lift breakdown can create serious difficulties: *“a friend had to wait two hours to get out”*, he exclaimed. This issue was also reported across clubs. CR12 noted that *“there’s always a ridiculously long wait to get on them [referring to the lifts], and they’re not big elevators either. I think you are lucky if you can fit two people or one person in a wheelchair. It’s not good.”*

Beyond arriving and entering the ground, CRs also described difficulties that emerge once inside the stadium, particularly in relation to view and seating.

7.3.2. Seating, sightlines, and matchday inclusive atmosphere: design and practice

The following examples show how seating location, flexibility, and sightlines shape inclusion, independence, and atmosphere. CR13 drew attention to accessibility barriers that affect not only entry and movement, but also the core experience of spectating. In several away matches, he reported being unable to follow large parts of the game *“purely because of people standing in front of me or because of a barrier or a fence or whatever”*. Issues related to visibility and seating were frequently raised by CRs. For example, CR15 reported that in some stadia the disability area was positioned at pitch level, where *“stewards walk out and stand on front of people on a wheelchair. Their view is obscured and that can frustrate people”*. In addition, physical barriers can spoil the view, as indicated by both CR13 and CR15 in their photos.



Figure 8: CR15 - Barriers in front of the stands



Figure 9: CR13 - Barriers

This highlights how stadium design and crowd practices can effectively limit disabled supporters' sightlines and participation, undermining the inclusiveness of the matchday experience. These concerns were framed in relation to both accessibility and atmosphere, interlinking the two themes by underlining that the matchday atmosphere is perceived as inclusive only when accessibility needs are met. For example, CR11 cited, as an instance of good accessibility, the provision of sufficient space for Harry, his guide dog, which was a key concern for him: *“so I could just enjoy the game knowing that had his comfort as well”*.



Figure 10: CR11 - Harry at Celtic Park

Seating-related problems were also highlighted by CR2. At one away game, her group was told *“well we’ve only got space for four wheelchairs”*, despite there being five wheelchair users. On another occasion, the allocated area created additional visibility barriers, as she explained:

We were behind this barrier which they, you know, the club thought was protecting us and it was at high level, so the people who were lower down in their chairs weren't actually able to see the game because they were looking through, looking at the safety belt.

At her home club, they *“pushed for”* an elevated platform, particularly because there were matches where *“quite a few of us [referring to wheelchair users] have been hit by the ball”*. She also noted that sightlines were frequently obstructed, meaning they missed parts of play: *“we’ve missed goals that are directly in front of us because the substitutes been stood there watching it in front of us”*. In addition, when it rains, wheelchair users move back under a small

roof for shelter; however, if other spectators then leave their seats, they may walk in front of the disability section, further restricting visibility. In this context, the planned elevated platform was described by CR2 as *“a huge thing for us, because it will allow everyone equal access to what everybody else can see”*. Concerns about exposure to rain in disability sections were also raised by CR12, who reported that fans *“get pelted with rain when it’s raining, which is a common occurrence [...] it becomes uncomfortable to sit when you’re constantly getting soaked”*.



Figure 11: CR12 - Rain here with sunshine

The lack of raised-level seating was likewise mentioned by CR8, who explained that *“you can only get the raised-level seats in this ground for pre-season matches or cup matches”*. Although he described the venue positively: *“this is a great ground. It’s a great view. It’s a great perspective”*, he pointed out that *“the downside to it is it’s very, very rare and there’s also very few seats in that ground”*.



Figure 12: CR8 - Friday night at Warrington

The link between atmosphere and accessibility was also evident in CR8’s account. In describing the raised-level seating experience, he stated:

It’s a good, clear view of the pitch, but you’re able to see what’s going on. It was a good atmosphere, good view, good action. You felt reasonably included. With all the supporters, there was a concourse just behind you where you were able to go if it was raining.



Figure 13: CR8 - Uni's Day in Hull

The extent to which seating shapes the matchday experience was particularly evident when CRs described aspects they valued or identified as requiring improvement. For instance, CR4, who uses a walking stick, explained that he does not sit in the disabled seating; instead, he sits in the main stand “*because of the atmosphere and because of the 9-10 people we sit with*”. CR4 also stressed that he appreciates the banister that supports him in reaching his seat inside the stadium, as it enables him to access the seat he prefers. As he explained:



Figure 14: CR4 - From the car to the turnstile

Although the seats we sit in don't have safe standing, that is my route up and down, and I can use those to get up and down. If they hadn't ever been put in, it would have been much more difficult to me to get up. I'd be linking arms with my wife or a friend to get up those steps. (CR4)

He suggested that this measure gives him independence, stating:

I don't need help getting down those steps, but if you notice on the left, I'm holding on to a bar. [...] because those barriers are there, it gives me pretty good independence because I can do that going up and down myself. (CR4)



Figure 15: CR4 - At the end of the game

CR16 similarly described the benefit of having a handrail to reach the seat that best meets her needs, and the importance of that seating position for both comfort and sightlines:

I've got one step to go up, but I've got a railing. and then there's an open space there because my leg doesn't go fully straight and fully bend. I can sit with my leg and it's great, that's the best, that's really the best seat for me.

I can see the dugouts where I'm sitting, if you know what I mean, and I can see the whole pitch, the whole goals and everything. I just, I've got a great, I like my seat, I'm happy with my seat and I like it, and as I say, you really do feel part of the atmosphere. (CR16)

Comparable points were made by CR9, who uses a crutch and explained that “*I can't walk up a lot of steps unless there is a handrail*”. He reported that his club previously did not have handrails, so he relied on holding his friend's shoulder. He added that, through the disabled supporters' association, “*what we did, we, as a disabled supporters association, we helped them [referring to the club] purchase some P-rails, they were called, and basically, they're just like handrails like that you can hang on them*”.



Figure 16: CR9 - Safer with rails



Figure 17: CR9 - Wrapped up for an away game

For CR9, the handrail was the practical adaptation that enabled him to reach his seat independently and enjoy a good view. In this context, the ability to access a preferred view without assistance became a symbol of independence, similarly to CR23, who explained that

the following picture is “*about independence because I’ve still got a good view and...I can get there by myself, I don’t need any help*”.



Figure 18: CR23 - Great view

CR9 concluded by stating that this change not only made access to the seating safer (including for older spectators) but also increased the number of usable seats because people could reach them more easily. Furthermore, the extent to which accessibility in seating arrangements is linked to independence was clear by CR17’s choice of photo. She selected the view from her seat, explaining that it signified independence “*simply because I’ve still got enough independence that I can get to that seat*”.



Figure 19: CR17 - My home

However, the extent to which supporters can choose where to sit may depend on the nature of a supporter’s impairment and on the seating configurations available. This can, in turn, reduce inclusiveness and weaken the sense of being part of the atmosphere. For example, CR22, a wheelchair user, explained that, due to the location of his seating at home games, “*you don’t feel that you are in the middle of the atmosphere. You definitely feel disconnected from it, 100%. [...] We are quite isolated. [...] There’s a lot of grounds you can go to, and you can feel disconnected.*” He also noted that when a person is seated at pitch level, “*you can’t see the game tactically unfold*”. A similar sense of isolation was described by CR13, who stated:

That is where disabled fans sit [...] very isolated from everyone else, because you’re nowhere near the other supporters. [...] a lot of times places where they put us were very isolated from the rest of the fans. (CR13)

By contrast, CR22 described good practice at an away match, where wheelchair-accessible viewing areas were integrated into the stands: *“these views are elevated, they’re in the middle of the stands. You’re surrounded by able-bodied people, so that when you watch the game, you feel really in the middle of it, and you feel really involved.”*

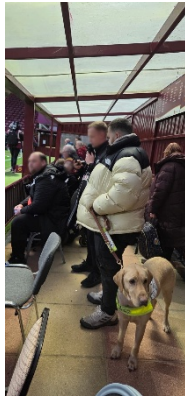


Figure 20: CR22 - Community



Figure 21: CR13 - Isolated

The importance of where disability seating is located within the stadium was also evident in CR19’s account, when he reported that at one club *“wheelchairs are right in amongst the fans there. So, you’re right in the middle and it’s just a fantastic experience”*. By contrast, CR14 pointed out that being seated at pitch level in a particular area meant that *“you don’t get to be part of the atmosphere”*. CR18 explained that his club introduced an area for wheelchair users a few years ago and, more recently, elevated it. However, he highlighted that:

there's still a bit to do in terms of there's a barrier that sits in front of you, [...], and you're almost kind of watching through a fence, which is not ideal. [...] you wouldn't ask anybody else in the stadium to do that. (CR18)

He further noted that wheelchair users may have their personal assistant (PA) seated further back; consequently, *“if you wanted to turn around and have a discussion during the game, it’s not really possible”*. CR18 also stressed that these disability areas are behind the goal at opposite ends of the pitch, which limits choice for wheelchair users regarding where to sit. To illustrate what effective provision can look like, he referred to the view from an away game he attended, explaining that *“you are raised from the ground, [...] clear lines in terms of views, nobody sitting in front of you, you can see the whole pitch”*. He then explicitly linked this to atmosphere and belonging, stating: *“and you know what you can't see from that photo as well is that you're in there with your own supporters and your part of the atmosphere, which is which is huge as well”*.



Figure 22: CR18 - A view from the terrace

The limited choice of where to sit was also highlighted by CR19. In his account, this could sometimes result in “*a poor view, obstructive view and was open to the elements*”. At his home club, he explained that he “*got fed up getting soaked*” and that his view was also interrupted when spectators or stewards stood up. As a result, he decided to purchase his season ticket in the hospitality area, where he could enjoy a good atmosphere. However, he noted that he is the only wheelchair user there on a regular basis. He contrasted this with an away-game experience where the DLO was not present and the stewards were not helpful, meaning they could not access their designated accessibility area.



Figure 23: CR19 - Access denied

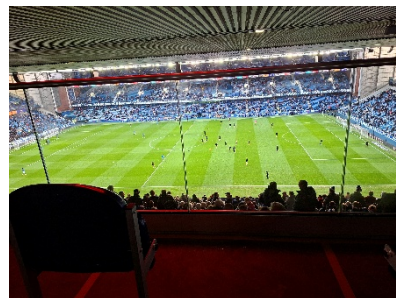


Figure 24: CR19 - Home match game viewing

He also described an example of a non-accessible ground, showing how barriers created an obstructed view: “*It's more or less eye level with you when you're in a wheelchair or a scooter. [...] not so good view and not so accessible, slightly more difficult to get in and out the left*”.



Figure 25: CR20 - Not so good view, not so accessible

These findings reinforce that clear sightlines and appropriate seating planning are not only matters of physical access, but also conditions for meaningful inclusion in the matchday atmosphere.

7.3.3. Essential facilities: accessible toilets and kiosks as a symbol of dignity and independence

Once, inside the stadium, toilet accessibility, moving on the concourse and being able to order food were repeatedly mentioned. CR13 described persistent barriers to basic facilities, negatively impacting essential needs and dignity. For example, he explained that accessing toilets was sometimes not possible: *“there’s grounds I’ve been to where I’ve been stuck in the toilet because the toilet’s not big enough. Or [...] you can’t get to the soap, or you can’t actually get to the toilet paper”*. CR20 said that having all facilities on one level helps him feel independent: *“everything’s on the one level, so going from there to the accessible toilets, you know, the kiosks, etc., it’s all on the one level, so you don’t need an awful lot of help there”*. For CR11, who is visually impaired, his experience of non-accessible toilets in the away end of a game he attended meant that he had to *“walk through the home end to get to it, which was a bit frustrating”*. CR4 shared that, thanks to the support of the DSA, they installed a disabled toilet - although portable - in the away end of his home club. The accessibility of toilets was also indicated as a positive improvement by CR2, who explained:

So, we've had to change the chain, we've had to change, sort out about the emergency cord as well. Because it's not always in a place where people can reach it. We've had issues with, even with toilet roll dispensers, you know, things like that. [...] And we tend to use the one on the other end now, which has got a bit more room in it. For people with, you know, for getting somebody in a wheelchair in there and things like that [...]. (CR2)



Figure 26: CR2 - Accessibility



Figure 27: CR2 - Accessibility

Accessing and purchasing food and beverages, a key component of the matchday experience, was also described as challenging. CR17 explained that once she reaches her seat she must remain there throughout the match: *“I can’t go up and down [referring to the stairs]. I can’t go to the bathroom. I’ve got to wait till the end of the game when I go down”*. Although her friends could assist her, she lacks the strength and energy to move repeatedly; as she clarified, *“I don’t even stand up when they score”*. As a result, if she needs something to eat or drink, she relies on others in the group to purchase items on her behalf: *“the group will say, oh, I’m going down, you want anything? [...] the group’s always there to ask”*. Relatedly, CR14 noted that attending a match alone would create additional difficulties, as *“it’s not always easy for me to go, to the kiosks to get things, because I’ve got to go up a couple of steps.”* In contrast, CR18 described a more supportive practice at his club. While he experiences a similar barrier because the food kiosk is located upstairs and he cannot use the stairs, he reported that *“the team come down before the game and take an order of anything that you want and they’ll kind if deliver that to your seat”*. Finally, as a symbol of moving around the stadium in a more accessible way and being able to enjoy food and beverages, CR1 used a photograph of lowered shelves that were installed in their club thanks to the support of the DSA. She explained:

These were put in during summer, so people in wheelchairs can eat their food and their pie and their chips and put their coffee down instead of trying to put it up high. [...] They are all in throughout the concourses. (CR1)

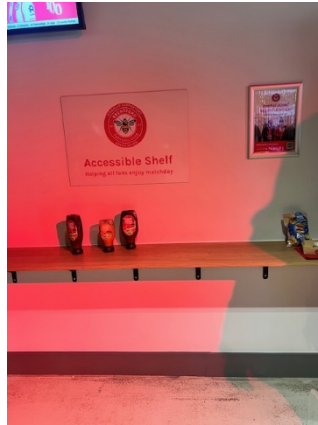


Figure 28: CR1 – Comfortable eating

Thus, club-led measures such as taking and delivering orders, and DSA-led interventions such as installing lowered shelves, can enhance independence, whereas without friends' help some supporters may be unable to access food and drinks.

7.3.4. Assistive provision to foster engagement and inclusiveness: “I felt I was a fan again”

Accessibility is not limited to entry and basic facilities but extends to whether supporters can meaningfully engage with the match itself. In this sense, assistive provision is central to inclusion, because without it, spectators may be physically present yet unable to follow the action or participate in the atmosphere. The lack of accessibility devices can render the matchday atmosphere exclusionary. CR7, who has a visual impairment, shared that:

People were cheering and I don't know why they are cheering, people are shouting, come on, and I couldn't see none of what people were shouting about. [...] and very quickly I didn't want to go back”. He thought “that's me, I am finished with football. (CR7)



Figure 29: CR7 - There's Innovations Out There, We Just Need Them to Be Accessible to Every Fan

By contrast, when he could try on a vision assistive device he exclaimed: “*I felt like I was a fan again*”. He described feeling involved in the atmosphere of the game. “*Being able to spot*

the difference between two players. Seeing the colour of what plyers are playing in. All that stuff adds to the experience”.

Similarly, CR11 had the possibility to try it on and said:

I thought it was absolutely fantastic [...] I was listening to the commentary at the same time as having the headset on, you're able to actually see what they're talking about at the same as well. And you can use the controller that's attached to the device and you can zoom right in and zoom out. So, I was able to really, for the, well, for the first time ever really being able to kind of read the name of the players on the back of the shirts. (CR11)



Figure 30: CR11 - Accessibility at Dundee United

Overall, these experiences indicate that fans can have different relationships with the matchday experience and may require different forms of support. For CR7, the audio-descriptive commentary offered at his club was not sufficient for him to feel part of the matchday: *“I felt like I was in the ground, and I was listening to it on the radio and it was just like... It was just very off-putting”*. This was to the point that, although he had been a lifelong fan of an English Premier League club, after he lost his vision, he changed club to attend where he felt the experience was more inclusive. For others, audio-descriptive commentary is a useful access tool; however, once they tried more advanced devices, they appreciated the improved experience.

The provision of tools can also mean that an entire family can attend their club’s matches. For CR1, the fact that her club provides a sensory room is:

The reason that she [her daughter] can now sit with her family. Oh, why do I get emotional about it? If it wasn't for the sensory room, she wouldn't be able to go to [club’s name]. She wouldn't be able to watch football with her family. [...] She is with her family watching football live. (CR1)

Importantly, in some cases CRs challenged clubs’ assumptions that they do not have many visually impaired fans and therefore provide limited accessibility tools. CR7 stated: *“well, my answer is asking yourself why. You should have fans, visually impaired fans in your, in your grounds. And if you haven't, there's probably a reason why”*. Similarly, CR5 highlighted:

You do. You've just never given anything out there to know. [...] Yet the club's saying to me, oh, you're the only one. And I'm like, I'm not. It's because you don't promote anything and you don't do anything. Put something out there. You might then know your actual numbers of visually impaired fans. (CR5)

She shared that the club started offering audio-descriptive commentary only a few months ago, following a formal request. She also reported that stronger and more reliable Wi-Fi was required for the devices to function effectively, stating: “*it's been a big battle, but they've put a new service in now*”. However, she described further issues in implementation, explaining that:

I was given a device that wasn't even charged. [...] it's up to me to go and find somebody [...] And it's just quite frustrating that if they've got proper processes in place, like checking the device before they give it to the user, that wouldn't have happened. (CR5)

What might be treated as a minor operational lapse in other settings becomes a significant barrier here, because it restricts access for the individual. She then continued by explaining that a process was put in place, but it was provided via a QR code, and she exclaimed that:

A QR code, which to me is another barrier that you've put in place. Like yes, I've got a phone that can scan a QR code, but then I'm relying on squinting and having my phone right to my face to even see what that is Apparently it's a map of the stage and it shows where the access stewards are. But that's kind of ironic that what it shows, but it's inaccessible to get to that. (CR5)

She then continued by saying that she bought a pair of [brand] glasses to make her experience more accessible. However, not everyone could spend money on special glasses. Hence, accessibility, and information about accessibility, should be available from the club in an easy way. Below she showed me the devices that she brings with her for an accessible matchday experience, which also make her feel independent:



Figure 31: CR5 - My Independence to the game



Figure 32: CR5 - My Independence to the game

Finally, similarly to CR11, CR5 had the opportunity to try the more advanced vision headset and shared:

I actually cried like when I first put it on and then I was like, I can see the lines, I can see the players, I can see the ball. Yeah, it's been really good. But using the both alongside each other, the headset and the descriptive commentary is really good because although I can see those bits, obviously it's still not clear. (CR5)

Lack of provisions means also lack of independence. Indeed, CR25 who is hearing impaired, relies on his family members and friends for interpretation. He said that he cannot understand VAR decisions, *“what’s has been said”*. He also struggles to order food, because it is difficult to communicate with the personnel. Therefore, he suggested deaf-awareness training, for instance, by having staff know that *“if they could point at the things, then I could go I want that or that”*, and introducing laminated menus. As good examples of accessibility indeed, he brought the possibility of having BSL interpreter at events and having a clear view at the stadium so that he can read the monitors, since *“his sight sense is being used more than his hearing”*.



Figure 33: CR25 – Clear view



Figure 34: CR25 - Accessibility at an event

Therefore, it is not sufficient for clubs to offer access tools in principle or partially; they must be delivered consistently and supported by workable processes. Basic provision (e.g., audio-descriptive commentary) should be treated as a minimum, with assistive technologies introduced as a complementary measure to further enhance inclusion. Attention to detail and meaningful engagement with supporters’ feedback are central to ensuring these measures function effectively in practice.

7.3.5. Friendship and belonging on matchday: “If I wasn’t going to the football, I wouldn’t know those people”

Finally, friendship and the sense of community developed through the matchday experience emerged as key components of CRs’ broader senses of belonging and inclusion in the matchday. As shown in the preceding sections on atmosphere, accessibility, travelling, and seating, inclusion is shaped by multiple interrelated features of the matchday experience, which can influence disabled supporters’ participation both positively and negatively.

The friendly networks developed through football were firstly mentioned in the discussion of what football represents to CRs, as presented earlier in the report, and were often referred to throughout the discussions and shown through their photos. Importantly, these friendships were not described as separate from the practical conditions of access discussed earlier; rather, they depended on whether supporters could travel to and within the stadium, enter the ground, and reach seating in a location that supports social interaction and shared participation. For instance, Robert suggested covered concourse areas not only so that disabled fans can stay warm and dry before the game and at half-time, but also because they would provide “*a space where they can mingle with other, kind of, non-disabled fans*”. This reflects the earlier discussion of how travelling, access routes, seating location, and proximity to the atmosphere shape belonging and inclusion in practice. Indeed, an issue highlighted by wheelchair users and mobility scooter users concerns seating flexibility and, specifically, who can sit with them. In practice, they may be limited to having only one person alongside them (often their PA), while the rest of their friends or family sit elsewhere. CR8 expressed his frustration that he cannot sit next to his brother, who is also a wheelchair user: “*we cannot sit together because there’s a seat put in the middle of it [...] so, having flexible seating for disabled supporters is really, really important*”. To illustrate what better provision can look like, he contrasted this with a match where seating enabled him to sit alongside his girlfriend, presenting a photo of them seated together as an example of independence: “*Didn’t have the barrier in the way. We had a good reasonable view, but we’re able to see the perspective and that sense of community*”. He reiterated:

That sense of being able to sit with the people you want to sit with to watch the game is so, so important [...] I dread going to games with my girlfriend sometimes because I know we are not going to sit together, because there is not space next to the wheelchair users [...] there’s literally a fixed seat. (CR8)



Figure 35: CR8 - Budding Romance

This example also points to a wider principle: when seating is designed with flexibility in mind, it can support not only independence but also family participation and a sense of community and belonging. CR8 also provided a positive example of seating arrangements, noting that his mobility scooter could fit in between seats and, as a result, his son-in-law and grandchildren could sit with him. He then explained that he moved further back due to the rain and exclaimed “*yeah, you get wet, absolutely*”.



Figure 36: CR20 - Very good view

CR11, who has a visual impairment, stated that the atmosphere at a specific game was enhanced by the fact that the seats were not fixed, which enabled him to sit with a larger group of friends, and enjoy the match together. Likewise, the preference to remain in the same seating area for as long as possible, so that supporters can stay with friends and relatives and remain immersed in the main-stand atmosphere, connects to a wider issue raised by many disabled fans: the choice of where to sit and with whom. CR17, who has mobility impairment, explained that she does not want to sit in the disability area because she wants to sit with her wider family and friends for many years. “*Football is my normal time*” she continued, “*I just want to sit there and enjoy it*”. Indeed, the combination of where she sits and who she can sit with shapes her sense of belonging: “*I feel included. [...] I’ve got friends at the football. [...] We get there*

and we are family”. She then explained, *“I still sit in the same seat with help to get there right now”*. However, she noted that a *“handrail would be really handy on the wall”* to reach her seat. For her, it is crucial to be able to attend her team’s matches because, when she is in the stadium, she said: *“I’m home”*.

In this sense, the matchday experience is interdependent: when movement is restricted, seating choice is limited, or supporters are positioned away from the atmosphere, the opportunity to build and sustain social networks may also be reduced.



Figure 37: Friendship photo-collage

CRs repeatedly articulated that social connection is embedded in routine attendance and in sitting alongside others over time. As David notes, *“I’ve made friend with the people. People that are also season ticket holders and they sit around us”*, while Gavin similarly described the routine of connection: *“I’m meeting friends at the game”*. Keith explicitly linked enjoyment to sociality and company: *“It’s an enjoyable experience because it is a social one as well. It gives that sense of company [...], there is a good wee unit of people”*. Brodie similarly referenced relationships formed through attendance: *“We are friends. “People that we met at the football from the experience”*. Jack reinforced the point that these relationships are conditional on being able to attend: *“He is the best friend I’ve made going to the football. If I wasn’t going to the football, I wouldn’t know those people”*. Claire’s description also illustrates how friendship can operate as both community and informal support within the stadium: *“The lady next to me*

actually is a friend through the football. So, we've met through the football over the last maybe 10 years [...]" indicating another person she said, *"she comes every game, she helps me to my seat, she goes gets me pie [...]* this is just friendship. This is that sums up my football life". For some CRs, this social dimension extended to memories and shared meaning across time: *"To share this kind of moments with friends and family is unbelievable, that's kind of memories that will last with me for a long, long time. [...] it brings people together and helps build that memories"* (Duncan). Michael equally underlined the formation of friendships through attendance: *"There's people in that picture, who we did not know before we started going to the matches, who we are now friends with. So, friendship is an important part of the matchday experience"* (Michael).

Hence, as argued before, seating arrangements, proximity to the atmosphere, and the availability of accessible routes and facilities shape not only physical access to the match, but also the social experience through which the senses of belonging and inclusion are produced and maintained.

7.4. Away games: "the easier you can make it, the better for disabled people"

The importance of accessibility is unmistakably clear in their decision-making process for away games, where its role becomes even more prominent. Although most CRs are season ticket holders and go to most, if not all, home games, away game tickets are rarely purchased. Costs, distance and time play a significant role in the decision of whether to go or not, but accessibility and the information available about that accessibility play an even bigger role overall. Indeed, Matt explained that:

Oh, home games it's easy because I know where I'm going to park, I know where I'm going, etc. Some of the away games, you get there, and you can't find a parking space even with a blue badge. And then when you get into the ground, you find your seat and your seat's not where you expected it to be. You're stuck down the front when it's raining, you get wet. (Matt)

Keith suggested that providing more information can help people to make an informed decision: *"I think there's a lot of people who would go to an away game, but sometimes it can be made difficult. So, it's about making it easier, making information more accessible"*. Freya, who has only very recently started going to away games, shared that she had a lot of questions because of the limited information provided. She explained that, while she enjoys going to away games using the supporters' bus, she had many reservations:

[...] How far away from the stadium do they park? What's the walk like? What's the terrain like? and then when you get there, you know, where's the seats? Is it flat? Do they have stairs? Do they have staff that you can approach? So, it was a lot I had to look into before I started going to away games. (Freya)

She then proceeded to explain that, for questions related to the bus, she asked her SLO, while for those related to the away teams' grounds, she would contact the SLO of the club in question to gather information about seating and stadium accessibility. While Freya managed to find answers and support to her questions via the SLOs of the respective clubs, what is relevant is that this information was not publicly available.

Kenna told me of similar questions, and, for her, they were reasons not to attend away games. Her reply contained multiple instances of "I don't know":

[...] There's 50 reasons. One of the reasons is because of my disability, *I don't know* like the layout of the ground, and *I don't know* because I'm not very good on stairs. So, *I don't know* the layout of the ground. *I don't know* if there's stairs. I don't know. Like if I'm going upstairs, I've got to have some a railing or something to hold on to. [...] it gets me all anxious thinking about going to it. [...] The main reason [for not going] I would say is I get so anxious because *I don't know* for other grounds the like for like where it would be going; how it would be getting on; how do you go upstairs and all that kind of things; it's like railings or something, because, as I say, I need a railing to hold on to when I'm going upstairs. (Kenna).

Indeed, as Michael stressed, a person becomes "*apprehensive about going to the ground, accessing the ground [...], thinking about getting out*". Whereas he explained that for home games, the problem does not subsist because he would be familiar with the place, and the stewards know him. What therefore emerges is that fans questions are often highly specific and are generally not addressed in the accessibility information on clubs' websites.

Thus, this report provides useful insight into what information should be made available to support fans in making informed decisions on away games, and it shows why the information gathered is important for understanding what is currently missing. Furthermore, the modality in which this information is available is crucial. A website could be easy to access for some, but not for all. Indeed, Cameron and Brodie noted that:

When you go on the internet, it can be very hard to find what you're trying to look for. It might be several clicks on a website until you get to it. [...] information is key at the end of the day, because I think that's where a bit of the anxiety comes from, not knowing. [...] that could put people off. Think, oh, this is too much hassle. But yeah, I think the clubs could do a lot better with making it a bit easier for people to get to the football. (Cameron and Brodie)

They continued the conversation by explaining that, for them, attending away matches is easier because they have been going to games for years. As a result, they are familiar with a range of grounds, and they also know the individuals who can support them with accessibility, meaning they can simply telephone them. However, they emphasised that information should be easily available also for first time attendees, rather than being something that can only be acquired through experience. Interestingly, Alan made a very similar statement by saying that: *“there are some grounds where the ticketing situation isn’t quite as straightforward as others. So sometimes, I think, it’s just not worth the hassle going through that to even try to get a ticket”*. Also, Gavin was of a similar opinion that many disabled fans avoid away games because *“you would not know how to get a ticket, how the other stadium is [...]”*. Moreover, the fact that uncertainty triggers anxiety was confirmed by Jennifer, who stated: *“it’s always the anxiety of where am I going or where’s the ticket office or where am I getting the device from? [she was referring to the audio-descriptive commentary radio] [...] I don’t even know where I’m going because I might not have been to ground before”*. She then continued by making a valuable point: *“that’s why I always try and say to clubs, the easier you can make it, the better for disabled people because we’ve already got enough to think about”*.

Additionally, while Gavin highlighted that he tends not to go to away games because of the limited public transport and the time of the games, he also specified that he does not go because: *“you’re either at ground level, which means you get drenched if it’s raining, or anybody is standing up in front of you and you can’t see the game.”* Hence, the decision not to attend games could also be linked to poor visibility and inadequate provisions, such as the lack of sheltered areas. Similarly, there are disabled fans, such as Harris, who would attend away games, but for whom the experience might not always be enjoyable. He shared with me his experience of the most recent away game he attended, stating that while getting to his seat was fine,

[...] But you’re reversed into an area where your carer is sitting next to you, and then you’ve got barriers in front of you. You’ve got a lower level of stand, people are standing up, so you can’t see critical parts of the game. For example, the goals, you’re not able to see them, so it diminishes from the experience. In the second-half, I managed to reverse myself into a corner [...] so I could see what was going on. (Harris)

Linda (who has a visual impairment) also shared her experience of away games and, when discussing the last one she went to, she indicated that:

It was absolutely appalling for any disabled supporter to attend the [club’s name] grounds. [...] trying to get there, we had to park nearly one mile away and people with

mobility impairment, like myself, I had to walk. And, in the end, the home support has helped us. When there's no coach parking, because I go with one of the supporters' branches, there is actually no coach parking within half a mile to 3/4 of a mile from the ground. They won't allow the coaches to stop. They won't allow those with disabled people on them to actually park where they said we could. [...] our driver in the end dropped us probably about half a mile away from the ground. And we got off. He said, I'm not taking these people any further, the disabled people on my coach. I will drop you here. (Linda)

She also explained that she required assistance from other fans to go back to the coach and that she had a similar experience in other grounds.

Further issues that were underlined in relation to away games are the availability of assistive devices that can make the matchday experience accessible and the accuracy of the information provided on their regard. Referring to the importance of their existence, David simply said that he has been to only a couple of away games, “[...] *but because I'm disabled, it's about access and what have you, so I don't go to every away game*”. He continued to explain that it depends on whether the away club offers accessible seating, accessible toilets and a reserved parking spot near the ground:

I walk with a crutch, so I can't walk very, long, distances, and especially in crowds, pushing and barging [...] I'm not climbing massive stairs or anything to get up to my seat. I need that accessible seating, you know, just a couple of rows up [...] or if there's a lift in big ground, a lift up to the next level and you go out on the concourse and your seats are just there so you're not walking up to seats [...] and also whether there's accessible toilets in the ground as well, that's a big consideration as well. (David)

Regarding the significance of providing correct information, Jennifer reported that she uses the audio descriptive commentary, so she generally gets in touch with the away club to ensure that it is available, since “*I only find it useful if it is descriptive commentary, not if it's local radio or just commentary. I don't find that useful at all*”. She also enquires about the process for obtaining the device on the matchday. Thus, she stressed that “*it's obviously a much longer day for away games as well. There's not the usual routine*”. She then specified that the information is often not accurate:

The issue I find is a lot of clubs will come back and say, yes, we offer that. This is the process, blah, blah. But when I get there and I start using it, I'm like, this isn't descriptive commentary. This is commentary. (Jennifer)

Clearly, the provision of the appropriate tool was the key element Jennifer would have relied on to decide whether to attend the match or not. The fact that the information was inaccurate

and that, as a result, she attended the game but could not “consume” it in the proper manner made her feel excluded:

So, I try to give feedback. I was quite frustrated myself because *had I known it wasn't available, it might not have gone because without descriptive commentary, I don't feel like I'm a part*, [emphasis added] as much as it's still good to be with friends and family and it all forms part of the day.

And frustrated:

When the actual game's happening and I haven't got descriptive commentary, I just sit there and just feel like, why am I bothered? Why am I here? So, it can be quite frustrating if I get there, they've said yes to descriptive commentary and it's not, it's like local radio or just commentary. (Jennifer)

Jack also reported a frustrating experience at away games, but in this case the poor experience was due to non-disabled fans standing in front of wheelchair users. He explained that, at away games, it is not always possible to buy tickets in the front rows:

Sometimes you get them in those areas, but people will just sit where they want, and then they stand up in front of you. And then when you ask you if they'll sit down, you get threatened. There's abuse and they'll just blatantly stand up in front of people even though they know you can't stand. So that's what puts us off. (Jack)

Finally, a common issue raised in away games was the need for improved steward training and greater consistency in matchday personnel, to avoid episodes described by the CRs. Jennifer reported that a lack of flexibility “*can be quite hard*”, particularly when being told: “*well, this is the way we've been told to do. [...] I'm like but use your common sense, use your humanity*”.

Similarly, CR11 shared experiences at away games, where he encountered difficulties with stewards not making exceptions to allow him to bring water (in a water bottle) for his dog. Given that, for CR11, his guide dog provides “*confidence to travel to certain games*”, it is fundamental that there are clear instructions and consistent practices regarding guide dogs' wellbeing and support. Guide dogs can be of utmost importance for visually impaired people; in this case, Harry also symbolised independence, as CR11 explained: “*I never actually went along to that game with anybody other than Harry*”.

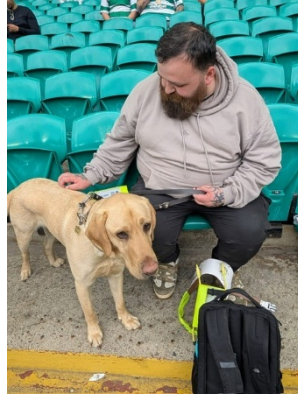


Figure 38: CR11 - Independent travel to Celtic Park

Claire highlighted that, due to the high turnover of staff, she must repeatedly have “*awkward conversations*” to explain why she can access the stadium via a specific door. She noted:

“I’ve had some [referring to stewards] that have been very difficult. So, sometimes my brain won’t talk, if I’m under pressure. Words don’t come out properly. So, when I am asked in front of lots of people: well, what’s wrong with you? I panic”.

Although she can rely on family members for support in responding, she suggested that having a card to show stewards explaining why she is permitted to use a specific access point would be helpful. Similarly, Noah stressed that high turnover could mean stewards are not familiar with what they are doing, stating that “*you don’t have the same people in the same area all the time and this causes problems*”. The same point was also made by Sarah. Likewise, Freya highlighted that when asking for directions to specific services she may be told “*if you just go upstairs and walk along, go up [...]*”, which is difficult because she would not be able to go upstairs. She therefore emphasised that negative experiences were more likely at away games, whereas she does not struggle at her home ground because stewards know her.

For fans like Keith, match attendance structures the week, as reflected in his comment that “*to know when the football game is and then I can plan my weekend around that. So, the football game is at the centre, and then everything else follows*”. In this context, offering easily accessible, accurate and thorough information about away grounds and their accessibility becomes essential for disabled fans, to make an informed decision about whether to attend an away match without uncertainties and therefore anxiety. As various CRs expressed, there is a lot of pre-planning that goes into their football experience. Alan emphasised that “*most people, can be quite spontaneous on a Saturday morning, they can just go on the phone, look at what games are available and buy their ticket in, you know, two seconds on their phone*”. This is not possible for people with access requirements, particularly because, as he underlined, each club has a different process for away supporters to obtain tickets. Indeed, as Alan puts it, “*there are grounds, I know that if I contact the other club’s disability access officer, they just sort*

everything out and make it such a seamless process” As a result, he will more likely attend certain away games, “[...] *just due to simplicity of getting tickets at that particular ground*”. For instance, he indicated that while at his home club, since they know him, the stewards simply “*come along and hand out our commentary headset*”, for away games, he will have to contact the club to gather information, and “*some DAO can be more responsive than others. Sometimes it can be hard to track them down [...]*”.

Therefore, the information provided should cover the full journey, starting from how to purchase the correct tickets and any companion provision, and extending to how to get to the ground, including step free routes, drop off points, accessible parking arrangements, and the distance and terrain between transport links and the entrance. It should also include practical details inside the stadium, such as the location of accessible entrances, and toilets the availability of lifts, ramps and handrails, and clear guidance on where accessible seating is situated, including sightlines and any restrictions that may affect viewing. In addition, it should confirm whether audio descriptive commentary is available, how it can be obtained on the day, and what the collection process involves. Disabled fans should be able to plan easily and with confidence rather than relying on prior experience. This would increase the number of games attended, particularly of avid fans like season ticket holders.

8. Limitations

The study benefits from a diverse participant group, including both male and female supporters and a range of impairments, including mobility impairments, neurological conditions, visual impairments, and hearing impairments. In addition, the inclusion of people from both Scotland and England widened the understanding of the matchday experience across national contexts. While the Scottish CRs, except for two people, were all drawn from Premiership clubs, these clubs vary significantly in terms of stadium capacity and financial scale, meaning that the inclusion of 15 CRs provides a valuable and varied sample.

However, although the English sample covered a broader range of leagues (Premier League, Championship, League One, and League Two), the number of CRs from England was more limited (10 people). A larger sample in England would therefore have strengthened the findings. Despite this, the consistency of the issues identified across different countries and tiers of football suggests that the challenges described are not rare but reflect broader patterns within the matchday experience of disabled fans. Future research could build on this work by expanding the sample and continuing data collection over time.

9. Bridging policy and practice: Research impact and recommendations

The UEFA Accessibility Guidelines (UEFA, 2024), provide a comprehensive and structured framework for improving accessibility across football, covering infrastructure, services, staff training, and matchday operations. They offer a detailed roadmap for clubs, emphasising planning, consistency, and the integration of accessibility into all aspects of the matchday journey. However, by design, the guidelines focus primarily on what should be in place, rather than how these provisions are experienced in practice by disabled fans across different contexts, leagues, and stadia.

The added value of this research outlined below is rooted in the approach adopted, which links a human rights approach grounded in Article 30 of the UN CRPD (UNGA, 2006) with Thomas's (2004; 2007) social relational model, enabling attention to both participation rights and the structural, relational and psycho-emotional conditions that shape matchday experience. The study brings together lived experiences, expressed through both narrative and photography, from disabled supporters attending football across two countries and multiple tiers of the game. Importantly, many CRs were season ticket holders with long-standing engagement in football, attending matches regularly over several years and across a variety of grounds. This provides extensive experience that strengthens the evidence presented, as CRs can draw on repeated and comparative experiences rather than isolated incidents. As such, the findings offer concrete, real-world insight into how accessibility is encountered in practice. The combination of words and images captures not only the presence of barriers, but their cumulative impact on participation, independence, and inclusion in the match atmosphere. In doing so, the findings show that accessibility is not only a matter of infrastructure or compliance, but of how systems function in practice, including how information is communicated, how staff respond, and how consistently provision is delivered across different venues and match contexts.

A further contribution of this research is the repositioning of disabled fans as active contributors to accessibility knowledge, by recognising them as co-researchers. While UEFA guidelines are developed at a strategic level, the findings demonstrate that valuable insight must also come directly from those who experience matchday conditions first-hand. CRs in this study dedicated time and reflection to share their experiences with the explicit aim of informing governing bodies, clubs, and wider civil society about the realities they face. Their stories therefore represent not only individual experiences, but an effort to make those experiences visible and better understood by both football organisations and non-disabled fans. This is

particularly important in relation to away fixtures, where unfamiliarity, inconsistent provision, and limited information can amplify barriers and often discourage attendance and limit participation.

The findings also bring out the social dimension of accessibility more explicitly. For instance, while UEFA supports flexible seating arrangements and emphasises choice over where disabled match-goers sit, the evidence presented here demonstrates that seating is not only a matter of access or preference, but one that directly shapes fans' ability to engage with the atmosphere and to form and sustain social connections. In this sense, accessibility provision is closely linked to friendship, belonging, and meaningful participation in the matchday experience. At the same time, the away matchday experience emerged as a significantly more prominent issue in the interviews. Although UEFA recommendations are intended to apply to both home and away fans, this study suggests that clubs may prioritise their own fanbase when implementing accessibility measures, with disabled fans disproportionately affected when travelling.

Moreover, the research highlights that, while UEFA Accessibility Guidelines set out clear standards and aspirations, gaps between policy and practice remain evident. By photo-narrating recurring issues across multiple stadiums, leagues, and national contexts, the report provides evidence that these challenges are not isolated, but systemic. In this sense, the study does not challenge the principles of the guidelines, but strengthens them, by demonstrating where implementation can be improved and by offering recommendations informed by the lived experiences of disabled football fans. It therefore reinforces the importance of combining top-down guidance with bottom-up evidence, ensuring that accessibility is shaped not only by regulatory frameworks, but also by the everyday experiences of those it is intended to support.

Finally, implementing the match-day inclusivity recommendations outlined in this report also contributes to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, n.d.). Improving accessibility and inclusion in football supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) by fostering positive social participation and emotional wellbeing; SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by addressing structural and social barriers that limit disabled fans' participation; and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) by promoting accessible and inclusive stadium environments and services.

For specific recommendations for clubs and accompanying infographics on how to ensure an inclusive matchday experience, please visit the *Matchday Through Our Lens* website dedicated page, by scanning the QR code.



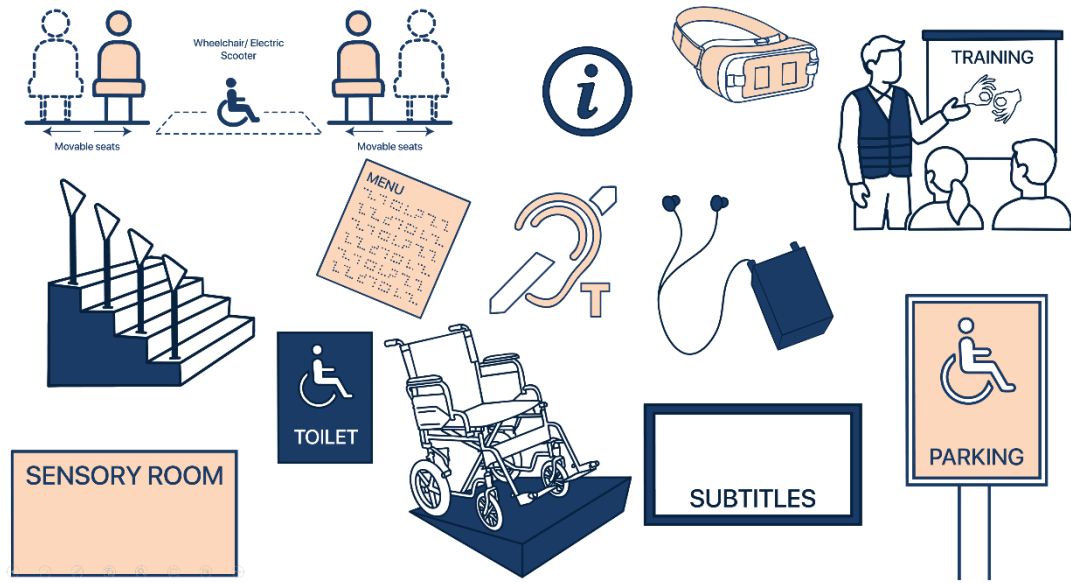


Figure 39: Infographic showing assistive devices and technology

10. Annexes

10.1. Annex 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

From access to inclusion? Voicing the football consumer experience of disabled football fans in Scotland and England

Invitation to research

I am part of a research team based at Manchester Metropolitan University who is working in collaboration with UEFA (who is funding the research) and the Scottish Football Association (SFA) on a study titled “*From access to inclusion? Voicing the football consumer experience of disabled football fans in Scotland and England*”. This study aims to investigate the lived experiences of disabled football fans. It intends to investigate the potential of the fandom experiences to foster disabled fans’ senses of belonging to the larger fanbase, the clubs, and the football community enhancing their social inclusion

Why have I been invited?

You have been chosen as we have identified you as suitable to provide insights on the topic covered. In both countries, we plan to involve disabled football fans who attend football matches of their football team.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary, meaning you do not have to take part.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to take photos of your football consumer experience using your mobile phones. You will have total control of the aesthetics of the photographs, black and white, colours, blurred. Specifically, we will ask you to take 1 photo for each of the following topics:

6. Accessibility (i.e. ticketing, seating, toilets, view, food)
7. Travelling (To/from the stadium. It can include the parking area)
8. Friendship (Building friendship networks by attending the matches)
9. Atmosphere at the stadium (i.e. abuse, isolation or inclusion?)
10. Independence (flexibility and sacrifices to enjoy the match)

After that you will be attending an online interview where we will be discussing what football means to you, your experience as a football fan and the photos you shared. The online interview will be audio and video recorded for analysis. No audio or video clips will be published.

Are there any risks if I participate?

You are not expected to put yourself in any risky or uncomfortable situations while taking photographs for this project. If you encounter verbal abuse or any form of distress, you should not take photos of the individuals involved. Instead, you may choose to photograph an

object or scene that represents the experience, and we can discuss its meaning during the interview. The data collected will be securely stored and anonymised during analysis, meaning you will not be identified unless you explicitly consent to having your real name associated with the photographs.

Are there any advantages if I participate?

You will help to create a photo-narrative analysis that will voice the consumer experience of disabled fans in England and Scotland. The photos will be displayed in an online photo exhibition. A webpage will be designed containing the photos, related captions you will provide and extracts of the interviews. This online photo-exhibition will serve to raise awareness on the consumer experience of disabled fans among non-disabled fans, football clubs, football governing bodies and civil society at large. It will be the tool to produce accessible research to reach a public beyond the academic one and inform positive change.

Informed consent

You will provide informed content through signature of the consent form associated to this project where you are given a Participant Identification Number. The consent form includes a series of questions that you will be asked to answer with 'Yes' or 'No' to confirm your understanding and agreement with different aspects of the study.

What information about me will you collect and why?

I will collect data about your lived experience as disabled football fan. The data collected will help take stock of disabled fans consumer experience and the current obstacle they face, further to the positive elements of their experience.

How will my information be stored and how will you look after it?

All computers used to access data and recordings will be password protected. Besides the research team and UEFA, access to your personal data will be granted only to authorised representatives from Manchester Metropolitan University to permit study-related monitoring, audits and inspections. At the end of the project, where participants have given their consent, fully anonymised data will be made publicly available on the MMU Open Access repository e-space.

How will you use my information?

Data and recordings generated will be analysed by the research team at Manchester Metropolitan University in Manchester. When analysed, the data will be anonymised, meaning you will not be identified in the research outputs.

Will my data be sent anywhere else, or shared with other people or organisations?

The data will not be sent anywhere else or shared besides the research team, UEFA, and authorised representatives from Manchester Metropolitan University.

When will you destroy my information?

Both identifiable and anonymised data generated by the project will be stored for 10 years. After 10 years, under the authority of Manchester Metropolitan University business requirements, there will be review for destruction of data. This will not include the any photos where I have permission to retain and use the photographic materials. At the end of the project, where participants have given their consent, fully anonymised data will be made publicly available on MMU Open Access Repository e-space. On 31/3/2036 your data, other than photographs you have agreed we may use in publication, will be fully anonymised and all non-photographic personal and identifiable information will be destroyed unless you have given us consent to retain your contact details to send you a copy of the final report. In this case we will retain your contact details for this specific intention only. These details will be kept in a separate file and not linked to the data.

Data Protection Law

Data protection legislation requires that we state the ‘legal basis’ for processing information about you. In the case of research, this is ‘a task in the public interest.’ If we use more sensitive information about you, such as information about your health, religion, or ethnicity (called ‘special category’ information), our basis lies in research in the public interest. Manchester Metropolitan is the Controller for this information and is responsible for looking after your data and using it in line with the requirements of the data protection legislation applicable in the UK.

You have the right to make choices about your information under the data protection legislation, such as the right of access and the right to object, although in some circumstances these rights are not absolute. If you have any questions, or would like to exercise these rights, please contact the researcher or the University Data Protection Officer using the details below.

You can stop being a part of the study at any time, without giving a reason. You can ask us to delete your data at any time, but it might not always be possible. If you ask us to delete information before we start analysing the data, we will make sure this is done. If you ask us to delete data after this point, we might not be able to. If your data is anonymised, we will not be able to withdraw it, because we will not know which data is yours.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research study will be published in the Final Report for UEFA, academic articles and / or book, photo exhibition(s).

Who has reviewed this research project?

This project has been reviewed by the Manchester Metropolitan University Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

Dr Marianna Pavan, Principal Investigator, can be contacted at m.pavan@mmu.ac.uk

Dr Nicolas Scelles, Principal Investigator's Line Manager, can be contacted at
N.Scelles@mmu.ac.uk

Prof. Kevin Albertson, the chair of Manchester Metropolitan University Faculty of Business
and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee, can be contacted at
foblethicsenquiries@mmu.ac.uk

Manchester Metropolitan Data Protection Officer, our Data Protection Officer, can be
contacted using the dataprotection@mmu.ac.uk e-mail address, by calling +44 (0)7584
330586 or in writing to: Data Protection Officer, Legal & Governance, Ormond Building,
Lower Ormond Street, Manchester, M15 6BX, UK

UK Information Commissioner's Office

You have the right to complain directly to the Information Commissioner's Office if you
would like to complain about how we process your personal data:

<https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT

10.2. Annex 2: CONSENT FORM

From access to inclusion? Voicing the football consumer experience of disabled football fans in Scotland and England

Participant Identification Number:

PART 1

		Please tick your chosen answer	
		YES	NO
1	I confirm that I have read the Participant Information Sheet, Version: 3 Date: 21/10/2025 for the above study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. In that case the material will be deleted.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	I agree to participate in the project to the extent of the activities described to me in the above participant information sheet.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	I agree to my participation being audio and video recorded for analysis. No audio or video clips will be published.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	I understand that anonymised extracts from this interview may appear in publications, presentations or exhibitions relevant to this area of research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	I give permission for a fully anonymised version of the data I provide to be deposited in an Open Access repository so that it can be used for future <i>research</i> and <i>learning</i> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	I agree any photographs taken in connection with the project and given to the researcher will remain in their possession and may be used for research purposes. I will not make additional copies, and I undertake to delete securely all such images once they have been transferred to the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	I consent to assign any intellectual property rights I may hold in photographs taken during this project to the researcher, with the understanding that these images will be used solely for the purposes outlined in the participant information sheet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	I consent to my real name being associated with the photographs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	I wish to be notified of the results of this study. My email address is _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

PART 2

This consent form applies to the use of the photographs that you supplied. All photographs will be securely stored.

As discussed with you, I will use some photographs (in electronic or print form) in reports, presentations, publications and exhibitions potentially resulting from the project. Please sign one of the boxes below to indicate whether or not you will give me consent to proceed. To facilitate the choice, please find below a numbered list of the topics of the photos:

- 11. Accessibility
- 12. Travelling
- 13. Friendship
- 14. Atmosphere at the stadium
- 15. Independence

Please sign either 1, 2, or 3 below and retain a copy of this information and consent form for your future reference:

1. I give my consent for these photographs to be reproduced for non-commercial purposes in presentations, publications and exhibitions connected to this research project. I understand that real names will NOT be used with the photographs.

signed.....

date.....

OR

If you would like to give permission for me to publish only some of the photographs, please list the numbers of the photos you will allow me to use:

2. I give my consent for photo numbers.....

.....(please specify)
to be reproduced (in electronic or print form), for non-commercial purposes in presentations, publications and exhibitions connected to this research project. I understand that real names will NOT be used with the photographs.

signed.....

date.....

OR

3. I do not wish any of these photographs to be reproduced in connection with this research project.

signed.....

date.....

Please note that Participant's likeness may be published. Kindly select one of the following options:

a) I agree my photos taken for this project may be published, but that I and all individuals will be made anonymous in the photos by having faces and distinguishing features blurred out to protect our privacy.

b) I agree my photos taken for this project may be published, and if my face appears in a photo, my likeness may be published – all other individuals will be made anonymous to protect their privacy.

10.3. Annex 3: INTERVIEW PART 1 QUESTIONS GUIDE

Background questions:

- Type of disability if they feel like sharing it

Section 1: Personal connection to football

- What does football represent to you?
- What football team do you support?

Section 2: Attendance and Frequency

- How often do you go to watch a game live?
- Who do you go with? Why?
- Do you go to both home and away games? If so, why?

Section 3: Emotional experience

- How does attending football make you feel, both before and after the match?
- What is a word or brief sentence that could describe your football experience?

Section 3: Match atmosphere

- What's your experience of the atmosphere at a live match?
- What's the difference in terms of atmosphere between home and away games?

Section 5: Practical challenges and accessibility

- What are the positive and negative elements of your matchday football experience?
- Is there any difference in terms of accessibility between home and away game?

Section 6: Suggestions for improvement

- If you could change / improve one thing about your football experience, what would it be?

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