



# EFL FAMILY EXCELLENCE SCHEME

Guidance for Clubs  
2025/26



# Contents

Introduction and Background	1
What does the Family Excellence Scheme assess?	3
The assessment process	3
How do Clubs achieve Family Excellence status?	5
The Touchpoint Journey	6
First and Second Visit Reports	16
Awards and Recognition	18
How final scores are calculated	19
2024/25 Highlights	21
Club of the Season	21
Touchpoint Award Winners	22
Quick Tips	24
FAQs	26
Family Excellence Testimonials	28
Help and Support	29



## Introduction & Background

The EFL's focus on enhancing the experience of match-going families, via its Family Excellence Scheme, has contributed to record-breaking junior attendance levels over the past 17 seasons. The Scheme, and the good practice it has helped to generate, has assisted Clubs in establishing themselves as beacons of excellence and benchmarks for family engagement in the UK, and in the 2024/25 season, over a million junior supporters enjoyed a live match across Football League fixtures.

The Scheme, run with partners the Fan Experience Company, is an on-going qualitative assessment and consultation programme for EFL Clubs, aimed at changing mindsets, driving change and supporting efforts to attract and retain future generations of supporters. The Scheme not only offers improvement opportunities for Clubs on a season-by-season basis, but also reflects, in the breadth of its feedback, societal and behavioural changes over time.

When the Scheme was first launched in 2006/07, League survey results had shown that there were various potential barriers to family attendance, notably poor facilities, a lack of family-friendly entertainment and little that met the increasingly high expectations of parents ahead of attending their first game with children. **A key aspect to the conception of the Scheme, therefore, was to ask how the EFL could centrally support and encourage Clubs to improve standards, in order to attract and retain families, as family expectation levels increase?**



## WHAT DOES THE FAMILY EXCELLENCE SCHEME ASSESS?

The Family Excellence Scheme is an assessment programme that tests Clubs on a range of criteria across numerous touchpoints including ticket purchase, provision of information, social media, facilities, retail and refreshments, entertainment, activities and people engagement, and overall matchday experience.

The Scheme provides both quantitative and qualitative feedback from families, ranging from ways the Club signposted family activities, dealt with their booking, through to engaging them on matchdays, managing expectations and creating a memorable matchday. Acting as a key improvement tool, the Scheme ultimately provides Clubs with overall recommendation scores from families across two matchday assessments in the season, with recognition for their performance ultimately provided at the end of each season in the form of a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award, reflecting the standard of family experience on offer.

### The Assessment Process

The central approach of the Family Excellence Scheme assessment process has remained largely unchanged with elements evolving over time to ensure it continues to be an effective tool for Clubs to monitor performance.

Each League Club receives two 'mystery' visits across each season from an assessing 'family', who attend a match and test the experience on offer across a range of touchpoints – to determine whether there is enough evidence to recommend that Club to other families and thereby award them with Family Excellence status.

Unbeknown to Clubs themselves, our assessing families will make contact and enquire about purchasing family tickets to an upcoming fixture. They will utilise the Club's website, its social media channels, and where appropriate they will contact the Club via email or telephone to further their enquiries. All these areas are key 'first impression' opportunities and research has shown these initial touchpoints are important at giving families and first-time fans the key information they need to both prepare and excite them ahead of their matchday visit. Once tickets are purchased, assessors will obtain all they need to know pre-match as a 'first-time fan' - including checking up on travel advice and how to orient themselves with the stadium - then it's all down to the matchday experience itself.

From arrival at the stadium, interaction with Club representatives, visits to the shop, the refreshments on offer, through to the inside stadium experience and entertainment, families record their matchday experiences accordingly.

**The rationale for sending families to assess games, is that they offer a genuine response to the experiences they have at what would be their first visit to a Club local to them. They are not a traditional professional 'mystery shopper', therefore they provide an unedited, authentic response to what they find on offer on any given matchday, and crucially, whether it would motivate them to recommend the Club to other families and return themselves.**

Over the lifetime of the Scheme since, the benefits of positively engaging junior fans and families have been continuously positively reinforced. Engagement with young fans can help to form early attachments and habitual behaviours which can last a lifetime. While there are clearly financial advantages to this, by forming a strategic focus on elevating the experience junior fans and families have, Clubs can also generate an uplift in the overall fan experience and create a more vibrant, inclusive and exciting matchday atmosphere for all attendees.

**As part of research carried out in the 2024/25 season, together with partners the Fan Experience Company, the EFL looked at match attendances, league position and the Family Excellence performance (score) of Clubs across the divisions, with the results suggesting a strong correlation between Clubs' Family Excellence performance and an increase in attendance. While clearly a number of variables can impact on Club performance, the relationship between the quality of the family experience on offer, and an increase in attendances was notable for many and significant for a range of Clubs.**

With contrasting resources across Clubs, the Scheme seeks to highlight low or no cost examples of family engagement best practice and high levels of service and innovation. Thus, it has become a fundamental tool to drive Clubs' internal family engagement strategies, and consequently assist them in promoting the work they do to engage families and fans in their local community.

This guidance pack provides all Clubs with a broad understanding of the Family Excellence Scheme, ways in which they can prepare for assessment and create a family focus to their match activities, and ultimately how they can enhance the services they offer across family touchpoints to maximise their Family Excellence performance.

## Assessing guidelines

- **Assessing families are designated a particular Club local to them and asked to identify a fixture they can attend within the respective visit periods. They are asked to avoid local derbies or games where there may be a heightened security presence.**
- **The family group is defined as a minimum of one adult and one child/junior (between the ages of 5 and 12).**
- **Assessors are asked to enquire about the most suitable ticket location for attending as a family, and purchase tickets in a family area, if available (and evident from their website visit and/or call). If it is not possible to book a ticket within a designated family area, the assessing family will be guided by the Club as to the next-best location, following the recommendations of the Club representative they speak to.**
- **We ask families to arrive at the stadium no later than one hour before kick-off, to ensure that they don't miss any family activities or entertainment run by the Club before the match.**
- **We encourage families to record any attending child's perspective too. The views of parents or carers are important, of course, but the reaction of their children can often be more telling.**

## Two-Visit Approach

The two-visit approach has shown to assist Clubs as the first visit helps to identify both positives and areas in need of improvement, to make any necessary adjustments in time for the second visit.

### First Visit (August-October)

All Clubs will receive their first visit from an assessing family at some point between August and November. The EFL will not schedule the visits on Clubs' first games of the season, or when they are playing local rivals or very high-profile fixtures.

The family will assess multiple Club channels and touchpoints, factor in any perceived Club constraints, and make clear recommendations to improve/maintain Clubs' Family Excellence status.

### Second Visit (January-March)

Following the recommendations provided by the first visit assessors, in the second half of the season Clubs are visited a second time by a new assessing family. The family again assesses the Club across the same touchpoints, highlighting their experiences; providing richly detailed information and ultimately their intention to return, whether they would recommend each Club, and feelings of personal value. The Clubs' performance in the second visit take on further importance as the assessor's final recommendation score is 'double-weighted', to reward Clubs for improving on their first visit performance.

## How do Clubs achieve Family Excellence Status?

The decision to award Family Excellence status is based on the recommendation scores achieved over the two visits. To calculate the Club's overall score, we add the first and second visit scores together (with the second score 'double weighted' to recognise improvements made between visits).

Depending on the overall score achieved, Clubs fall into a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award category. E.g. a first visit score of 7, and a second visit score of 8 would create a total score of 23 (7+8x2). In this scenario, a final average score of 7.6 would be determined which, following a period of review and verification by the EFL, would then see that Club receive a Silver Award.

Further information on how the award process works can be found on page 16.

All Clubs who have achieved Family Excellence status are announced at the end of each season, ahead of a Family Excellence Best Practice Seminar, where advice and guidance is shared and innovation celebrated.



# The Touchpoint Journey

In each visit, assessing families will provide Clubs with a score for each touchpoint. These scores, ranging from 1-10, denote whether they felt the overall experience was poor, average, satisfactory, good or excellent. The following guidance provides some context into what families are looking for at each step of the journey.



## 1. First Impressions



### What are we looking for?

Websites are how a Club presents itself to the world. The content, style and tone all contribute to create an initial impression of the Club: what makes it unique, why it means so much to its community of supporters and why new fans might confidently engage with it.

They must serve the needs of families just as much as they serve existing supporters, making it clear what the Club offers fans on a match day, providing this information in an easily accessible high-profile way so that new families are reassured that the Club provides for them. Matchday timetables, for example, are a concise way of providing clear detail for families on what to expect and where to be to get the most from their visit.

Fanzones, activity zones, live music, etc., all contribute to extend the match day experience and to offer more value, so the more they are promoted as integral to the match day, the more likely families will turn up early to enjoy them. If Clubs don't tell fans what's happening, how will they know what to expect and what not to miss!

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

*“The sheer volume of information the Club provides is outstanding. A range of guides provide superb detail, from what to expect as first time fan, lots of travel info to plan your matchday, a handy video guide, food guide and the sort of entertainment fans can expect to see on matchday, from junior areas to bars, music, mascots, and fanzone. It not only gives you the information needed to plan your day but promotes it in a way that generates lots of pre-game excitement.”*

## 2. Ticket Purchase



### What are we looking for?

People expect a seamless convenient experience when booking tickets. Making an online purchase quickly and

being able to save the ticket in a digital wallet are all basic expectations these days.

However, anything you can do to lift the experience for new families (such as a first-time fan experience for your children) will make this touch point one of the most memorable ones.

New families will appreciate any guidance the Club can provide on the most appropriate place for them to sit/stand to get the best possible experience. The more personalised the experience (i.e., being guided to the most appropriate location in the stadium and being able to select their own seats), the more likely the fan is to feel valued. Ticket office staff can play an influential role at this stage of the process by simply picking up on it being a family's first time visit, offering information, guidance and a warm welcome.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

“The online process was completely hassle-free. I was pleased to receive an email the day before the game with additional information about the fans zones which helped us plan our visit and the call to the Club was also very good, with the member of staff being really helpful and friendly, proactively offering further information about what not to miss on matchday. Coupled with the price of the ticket, which was good value and ease of downloading our tickets to my iPhone wallet – the overall experience here was really positive”



## 3. Social Media



### What are we looking for?

In little over a decade, social media has become a 'hygiene factor' e.g. something supporters regard as a basic

expectation and a key communication channel. However, for it to impact positively on fan value, it must go beyond simply broadcasting to becoming a more pro-active engagement tool.

How well does the Club use social media to engage fans? How is it used to connect different types of fans (i.e., families, new fans etc.) to the Club and the match day experience? How well does it update supporters on important changes and what innovation has the Club introduced? Well-timed social posts tailored to families, advising them what not to miss or what they can enjoy at the match, helps to create a sense of anticipation and demonstrates the Club values their upcoming attendance.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

“The real strength of the Club's social media presence for families is its use of multiple, targeted accounts. For example, the main X account shared a post from the Supporter Services account (which provides handy matchday information and frequently asks for fan feedback), which also featured the handle for the Family Zone account (which focuses on family matchday activities and engages fans in man of the match polls).

A few routine checks of the Club's channels in the week before the game gave us everything we needed ahead of matchday, and really emphasised the Club's commitment to providing everything a family would need at this stage of the experience”

## 4. Travel



### What are we looking for?

Although some elements of the travel experience are beyond the control of the Club, ensuring a hassle-free journey to the stadium is important. Families are asked to concentrate on those areas that a Club could reasonably be expected to address and the more the Club can do to remove the stress from travel and parking, the more valued families will feel.

By offering a reliable travel plan to fans & backing that up with relevant updates via social media, families know that you're doing everything possible to make their match day journey hassle-free. Certain types of fans (those with young children and elderly supporters) will appreciate any targeted guidance the Club can offer (such as walking times to the stadium, alternative parking, well-lit routes, etc.). This is also a chance for the Club to promote its environmental commitments and offer walking routes, cycle parking, car sharing and public transport.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

“Absolutely comprehensive, nothing left uncovered. I particularly like the Park and Ride options but there also detail on rail, bus, bike, coach and by plane too! The map was very detailed and proved useful on the day and the guidance for those coming by car was comprehensive, with walking times from the car parks also provided – and an additional map to help you”



## 5. Facilities (ease, comfort and orientation)



### What are we looking for?

Elements such as comfort, view, hygiene and wayfinding can make all the difference to a first-time fan's experience. The availability and quality of toilet facilities are of particular importance to families, while clearly visible signage (especially to key locations such as the Club shop, the fanzone and the entrance to the family stand/section) is vital.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

“There were clear, large maps which could be found around the stadium vicinity, as well as attractive decoration on the ‘pillars’ around the stadium with directions to the fanzone. Inside there was comfortable seating in the designated family zone, with close proximity to the pitch and action, and inside the concourse there was more child-friendly decoration both outside and inside of the toilets too”



## 6. The Immediate Stadium Vicinity



### What are we looking for?

If Clubs are to extend their reach into their communities and grow attendances, there is an established expectation that they will offer much more than a match.

Many Clubs have set up entertainment areas, fan zones and special activities in the vicinity of the stadium to make sure fans not only enjoy themselves but also arrive earlier and spend more too.

Clubs displaying strong evidence of supporter engagement at this touch point will create a strong sense of arrival by ensuring the experiences, activities and entertainment they offer are well promoted, well sign-posted and well executed. A 'wow' moment for a young family on arrival at the stadium should not be underestimated.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

*“There was so much on offer. Very helpful stewards and other Club representatives were all very visible and very busy on arrival. Young fans were encouraged to have their faces painted and to get a balloon model and we counted four mascots milling around outside, all of them fantastic at entertaining and welcoming young fans with high-fives, dancing and photo opportunities”*

## 7. Physical Retail and Merchandise



### What are we looking for?

Physical retail outlets can make a significant contribution to match day revenues. Success is built on several factors, including access, ease of browsing, queue time, product range & diversity, price (important during the present cost-of-living crisis) and levels of engagement from those representing the Club.

The Club's retail & merchandise services provide a clear opportunity to capture the attention of families and teenagers: thereby extending the experience.

This is also a chance for the Club to offer products that celebrate its identity, values, history and purpose and to remind supporters of their motivation for following the Club in the first place.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

*“I was really impressed with the Club store, a real pleasure to spend time in, and in terms of what was happening, plenty to keep my family engaged. There was lots of interesting gifts and things to see such as a table football game, a sit-down football game, a really cool 3D display of the Club crest, and to top it off, excitement was also created by several players signing autographs and posing for photos”*

## 8. Refreshments



### What are we looking for?

The refreshments experience is not only an opportunity to provide hot food on a cold day or to delight a youngster at their first game, but also a chance to promote your Club (or regional) identity, your awareness of refreshment trends and/or food that is popular within key target supporter groups.

By offering a good selection of refreshments in any official fan zone, and advertising their availability beforehand, Clubs will help to attract families to the stadium earlier, manage their expectations, and extend their match day experience.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

*“The refreshments selection inside was outstanding. There were so many choices, the hardest part was deciding what we were going to have, from chicken burgers, chicken & waffle fries, buffalo chicken fries, to chicken katsu, and frankfurters.*

*The food quality was excellent, and portion sizes are really good. The choice included a tuck shop, selling sweets and other small snacks, and this was staffed by children, which was a nice touch! All round this part of the day was memorable!*



## 9. Inside the Stadium



### What are we looking for?

Clubs might not be able to control the quality and outcome of what happens on the pitch, but through the creation of an immersive in-stadia environment, engaging activations, interactive games, and use of eye-catching branding, Clubs can generate an engaging experience for families that extends way beyond the game and creates magic for supporters of all types.

The activities of the mascot and the positive actions of any 'here to help', family-focused staff and stewards, can be particularly impactful at his touchpoint to take engagement to the next level.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

*“There was so much that impressed me from a new fan and family experience perspective. The welcome received when we arrived at the concourse, the family zone activities, the first time fan experience and gifts received to commemorate my daughter's first game. There was face-painting, a 'guess the score' board, several gaming stations, a golf putting station and other activities in the family zone. We also met the mascots who were everywhere entertaining junior fans – we had a great day, and I would really struggle to find ways to improve our experience inside the stadium”*



## 10. People



### What are we looking for?

We know from the lifetime of the scheme that Clubs achieving the highest scores in this part of the assessment have people who are a big part of the experience themselves. They are always on the look-out for opportunities to assist, engage and often to surprise and delight supporters and their families. They understand the value of a 'high five' to a family group & display positive body language and good eye contact.

Service is as important a steward's objective as safety and security are, while a dedicated 'here to help' team will lift the experience with energy, pro-action and magic moments.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

*“A really positive experience – we saw several 'here to help' staff who were really welcoming and helpful. They proactively approached us asking if we needed assistance and made friendly conversation.*

The people were consistently a strength for this Club, right from the first phone call to the stewards, here to help staff, the Club gave the impression that they knew what families needed. A great matchday staff team and a reason on its own to visit the Club – we had a great day!”



## 11. Post-match



### What are we looking for?

This is an important touch point for Clubs, as it offers an opportunity to promote future attendance, offer appropriate services and products and, importantly, to ask the fan for feedback on their experience.

A Club with insights into what matters most to new fans will be in the best position to retain them and to create new advocates.

### Good practice – Real Assessor Quote

*“Really impressed with the Club's approach to asking fans for feedback through a variety of channels, whether over the phone, website, via QR code on the big screen. I got the impression that the Club genuinely wanted to create a great fan experience and therefore understood the importance of hearing what fans thought about the matchday”*

## Final Recommendations

Finally, assessing families are asked to score across three key areas. Firstly, how likely they are to RECOMMEND attending a match at the Club, from 'not at all' through to 'definitely' (1-10). This acts as the Club's overall visit score and, by combining this score from the first and second visits, produces an overall score and determines the level of award received at the end of the season.

Assessors are also asked how PERSONALLY VALUED the Club made them feel (1-10). This is a measure of whether or not they felt the Club, in its personal interactions with the assessor, made them feel welcome, demonstrated in some ways that they were pleased they had attended, or encouraged them to come back.

Finally, assessors are asked how they rate the overall FRIENDLINESS of the Club (1-10). This measures the general approach from staff encountered and/or observed throughout the whole experience, from first impressions and purchasing tickets, through to stewards and in-stadia staff.

## First and Second Visit Reports

After each visit, Clubs are provided a summary report and comprehensive full report containing all their touchpoint scores and overall visit recommendations, valued and friendliness scores.

First visit reports are issued in December – which will contain overall summary recommendations on which areas they should focus on ahead of the second visits taking place.

### What's in the reports?

Club reports feature a mixture of quantitative and qualitative feedback. All Clubs receive a summary report which provides the key numbers and top highs in an easy-to-read format, ideal for quickly sharing with colleagues across the Club. In addition, appended to the summary, is the Club's full assessor report, which features feedback on each touchpoint and the real thoughts and views of the assessing families that undertook the visit.



### Quick Guide to what Clubs receive:



Visit summary



Overall visit score



Touchpoint scores and qualitative data



The main strengths and opportunities identified by the Assessor



Key recommendations (where to focus to lift scores)



Score projection - what the Club needs to score to achieve bronze, silver or gold



Benchmarking and the Club's last five seasons' performance



Part of the feedback Clubs receive is their benchmarking data. While the names of other Clubs will be anonymised, this data will give each Club a position to see how they compare to others both in their division and across the 72 as a whole.

For example a Club's score might place them in fourth of 24 in their division, and when compared against all other Clubs, this might equate to an overall ranking of 15th out of 72. Using the touchpoint scores and average totals, Clubs can be placed in order of performance and provides crucial additional context to see where improvement may be required.

## Awards and Recognition

Clubs achieve Family Excellence recognition by being awarded a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award. This is achieved based on the recommendation scores they receive across their two family assessments. Fundamentally, the approach of the scheme is about rewarding 'excellence' and recognising the strategic efforts to enhance the family experience across multiple touchpoints.

Underpinning the scoring approach is the 'net promoter' method, a measure used to gauge customer loyalty, satisfaction, and enthusiasm, which ultimately determines how likely someone would be to recommend an experience to others. Therefore, while many fans may be likely to say they would return to a Club, the key for first time families and new fans is whether they would be compelled to recommend the experience to others.



### How final scores are calculated

Clubs are awarded a score from 1-10 for each touchpoint, and a final recommendation score 1-10 at the end of the visit. At the end of the season, Clubs' first visit scores are added to their second visit scores, which are double weighted. For example a first visit score of 7 and a second visit score of 8 would result in an overall score of  $7+8+8=23$ . This overall score is then divided by 3 to establish a final weighted score of 7.6.

To determine overall benchmarking, Clubs are further split by their touchpoint scores/average (effectively like goal difference). For example, two Clubs may achieve the same overall recommendation scores but one Club may score slightly higher across a number of individual touchpoint areas.

The thresholds for attaining a gold, silver or bronze award are as follows:



The Club receiving the highest overall recommendation scores from their two visits at the end of the season will also be crowned the Family Excellence Club of the Season. In the event of a tie of Clubs, who both receive the same final overall score, as above, touchpoint scores will effectively act as 'goal difference' to determine the highest average score, and the highest ranked Club. If Clubs are still tied, the award will be made based on the 'People' touchpoint score, as the area recognised as generally having the greatest impact on the family experience, and all final decisions made in respect of the overall scores are at the discretion of the EFL.



## 2024/25 HIGHLIGHTS

### POTTERS CROWNED FAMILY EXCELLENCE CLUB OF THE SEASON

A record 18 EFL Clubs received Gold status in the 2024/25 season, another milestone for the Scheme, but it was Stoke City who took the overall crown and were recognised as the Family Excellence Club of the Season.

Excelling across all touchpoints and praised for their warm and friendly approach to new families, the service provided by the Club's matchday staff, and the range of family entertainment on offer across the stadium were particular highlights. Family assessors lauded the experience for young, first-time fans who are treated to a pitch side photo and a special welcome gift from the Club, but also noted the extensive range of pre-match activity in the FanZone that included face painting, arcade games and a golf putting station.

EFL Chief Executive, Trevor Birch, added: "Stoke City has demonstrated that they are worthy winners of the Family Excellence Club of the Season.

"From delighting first-time fans with dugout and pitch side photos, welcome letters and gifts, through to offering action-packed family zone activities and memorable staff interactions, Stoke City's fantastic family experience has made a positive and lasting impact on both old and new supporters of the Club."

## GOING FOR GOLD

The full list of Gold winning Clubs for 2024/25 was as follows:

- Blackburn Rovers
- Bradford City
- Bristol City
- Coventry City
- Doncaster Rovers
- Exeter City
- Harrogate Town
- Huddersfield Town
- Lincoln City
- Middlesbrough
- Norwich City
- Peterborough United
- Plymouth Argyle
- Preston North End
- Queens Park Rangers
- Stoke City
- Tranmere Rovers
- Walsall

## TOUCHPOINT AWARD WINNERS

Each season, along with crowning a Club as overall Family Excellence Club of the Season, a range of Clubs are highlighted in excelling across the various touchpoints assessed in the family visits. These Clubs are named as 'Touchpoint Winners' in a 'best XI' at the end of the season. Last season's winners came from across all divisions in the EFL, with some fantastic standout achievements across the scope of the programme.



### First Impressions: Huddersfield Town

The Terriers' website not only provides new families with a rich, detailed and compelling guide to attending games but also, with innovation like the mascot's own page, the 'you said, we did' section (what the Club has done with fans' feedback) and multiple activities for children, is a destination itself.



### Social Media: Coventry City

For several seasons now, Coventry City has shown 'how to do' family engagement on social channels, with its dedicated X account for families, detailed guides and engaging imagery of families enjoying themselves at games: key to reassuring new groups that Sky Blues match days are wonderful experiences for children.



### Travel & Last Mile: Wigan Athletic

The final stages of the journey to the stadium are always a potential stress points for new families but this is completely removed by the fan-centric way in which the Latics guide new fan groups to games. They utilise a video encouraging fans to 'take a tour' around the stadium and its vicinity, a unique example of 'best practice' in new family engagement at this touchpoint.



### Welcome: Middlesbrough

As one of the EFL's longest-standing centres of family excellence, Boro ensure that new families enjoy magic moments from the off, with those new to the Riverside Stadium receiving a personal tour with several unforgettable moments designed into the process (like joining other flag bearers in a parade around the pitch in the moments before kick off) to create a top-class welcome.



### Entertainment: Bristol City

The match day experience at Ashton Gate is designed to ensure that, from arrival to departure, kids get an unforgettable experience. The concourse family zone is excellent with a range of entertainment and football-themed activities, decorated imaginatively throughout, with plenty of photo opportunities for families to remember their day, with a mini-shop in there to extend the experience further.



### Retail: Norwich City

The Canaries retail experience on match days is a great example of how a thoughtful and innovative approach to families and young fans can elevate a shop visit. The eye-catching and extensive family range is supported by pro-active and friendly Club representatives - and families can also plan a little magic by ensuring their time in the store coincides with the well-communicated visit of the Club mascot.



### Refreshments: Harrogate Town

The Sulphurites' refreshments experience is designed to perfectly meet the needs of family groups with a dedicated and extensive kids' menu that delivers all of the quality families would expect at a high quality visitor destination.



### Mascot: Peterborough United

Peter Burrow is a legend among EFL Club mascots. Not only does he never miss an opportunity to make Posh fans smile but, by visiting his home in the family stand, kids of all ages can enjoy games and activities that make the hour before kick off fly by.



### Magic: Swindon Town

The Robins have, for several seasons now, offered young first time fans (and their families) and unforgettable 'my first game' pitch-side experiences pre-match. Warmly supported by the Club's excellent team (and the Club mascot) the experience lives long in the memory for new families.



### People: Stoke City

One of the principal reasons for the quality of family engagement at the Bet365 Stadium is Stoke City's people and the impression they make on new families. The warm welcomes and smiling faces at every touch point, the kind interventions of the SLO (inc. a thank you card received by the family post-match) and the gifts brought to the new family's seat are all designed to convert new fans into walking ambassadors for the Club.



### Listening Club: Doncaster Rovers

A perennial leader in family excellence, Rovers clearly invest in continuous improvement. Not only do they make it easy to give feedback but, as a direct result of an obsession with making things better, a new 'family pack' offer has been created to ensure that, for first time families, nothing is left to chance.



## QUICK TIPS

Whether a Club is new to the EFL or simply in need of a little inspiration, below is a selection of ten quick tips that can be implemented, customised or considered, with little or no cost, to help enhance the approach to family and junior fan engagement.



**1. Read All About It!** – is family-oriented information easy to find and access on the Club's website? Why not enlist the help of some parents/families or friends to visit the Club website and test it, and ask them to like to try to find information for families and navigate the ticket purchase process?



**2. All Mapped Out** – if your website contains information on where families can park or describes routes to get to the stadium, why not include a mini map showing walking times and other landmarks on it? Families will appreciate the extra help, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the area.



**3. Walk the Walk** – want to understand the experience a young fan might have in the stadium vicinity, inside the Club shop or concourse areas? Why not gather key staff together and walk the areas families would ordinarily go, and consider what you might see around you from the perspective of an 8-year-old fan. Is it exciting, is it branded, is it engaging?



**4. What, Where, When?** – do families know where to go to see the best attractions you have to offer? Why not ensure you email or post a timetable for families ahead of matchday, providing key times and destinations to head to in and around the stadium, ensuring they see things you have to offer like 'meet the mascot', fun activities in the fanzone or get player autographs.



**5. Here to Help** – If the Club knows where the majorities of families will enter the stadium (family stand?) and which concourses they will visit, why not ensure that friendly Club representatives welcome them, engage them, and coordinate any activities to ensure they leave feeling well looked after.



**6. Bon Appetit!** – want to know what families think of your refreshments experience? Why not send a small survey to existing families/parents on your database, see what they like, don't like or what would make them spend more with you on matchdays.



**7. Power of the Badge** – need to introduce some family fun with limited resources? Utilise concourse walls or floor areas in family zones/stands by making them colourful, using the Club's branding, graphics such as height measuring charts to see how kids measure up to the Club's tallest player, or mascot prints that include fun quiz questions.



**8. Sights & Sounds** – wondering how to keep young fans entertained once inside the stadium bowl? Why not hand out some mini quizzes, with things for them to spot or listen out for from their seat during the game?



**9. Matchday Memories** – why not ensure junior fans leave their first game with a unique reminder of their time with you? A small collectible (e.g. badge, sticker, pennant or certificate) can go a long way in reminding them of the fun they had!



**10. 'We are Family'** – by recording details of first-time families the Club can reach out after the game to thank them for coming, ask what they thought of their experience and whether they are coming back.



## FAQs

### Who manages the Family Excellence Scheme?

The Family Excellence Scheme is an EFL project, run by the Fan Engagement team, in conjunction with partners, The Fan Experience Company.

### Who is eligible to be assessed?

All 72 EFL member Clubs are assessed as part of the Family Excellence Scheme each season. There is no cost for Clubs in relation to any visits conducted and all assessments and reports are coordinated and provided by the EFL.

### When do Clubs receive their reports and final results?

Clubs receive their first visits reports by December and their second visit reports and overall score/result by early May at the end of the season.

### Can we identify who our family assessors are?

Clubs are not informed who the family assessors are, or which match they are attending. The principle behind the Scheme is that it seeks to replicate a family or parent and child's first trip to their local football Club. In that sense, Clubs are only provided information and clues by what the assessor might communicate (via point of sale, social media, or to Club representatives on the matchday). In other words, just as in a 'real' situation, first-time fans might only be identified as such should the Club have a mechanism in place to do so (e.g. signposting a process for fans to follow if they are attending their first game or offering a first-time junior fan initiative). The emphasis, therefore, is on Clubs to proactively have measures in place that seek to provide new match going families and new fans with the support and guidance required to manage expectations, and deliver an engaging experience that makes them want to return.

### Can we query any of the Assessor's comments or content of our reports?

The EFL's approach is to endeavour to clarify any feedback or queries that might arise in respect of assessor visits. As a minimum we will seek to establish further context or feedback around any particular question for Clubs and, should any aspect of a report warrant further amendment, it will be discussed and actioned at the EFL's discretion.

### What if our Club does not achieve scores sufficient to achieve a Bronze award?

A fundamental aspect of the Scheme is to guide Clubs on what is required to achieve sufficient scores to reach a Gold, Silver and Bronze Award. Guidance is provided as part of the first visit report feedback, where it will be made clear what score Clubs will need to attain in their second visit to reach the various level of award. For example, if a Club scores 6/10 in the first visit, they will need to score 7/10 in the second visit to guarantee a Bronze Award. After the first visits are completed, should any Club require any guidance or support the EFL is on hand to discuss any aspect of their report. Should any Club not reach a Bronze Award standard at the end of the season, again the EFL can provide assistance as required and attendance at the end of season Family Excellence Best Practice Seminar is encouraged. As part of the end of season announcements, any Clubs not achieving Family Excellence standard will not be named in any promotional articles or press releases, whereas all achieving Clubs will be.

### Do winning Clubs receive anything to showcase their performance/result?

Those Clubs awarded a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award receive a number of assets to use across physical and digital sites. Clubs receive foamex boards for their concourses, window clings for ticket office/retail store windows, and Gold Award winners also receive x50 Gold Award pin badges for family-facing staff and stewards. Clubs are also provided digital logos for use across any brochures, letters, emails and other materials as at their discretion.

### What if we require further guidance on the Family Excellence Scheme?

The EFL Fan Engagement team is on hand to offer advice on any aspect of the Scheme. Clubs should contact [fanengagement@efl.com](mailto:fanengagement@efl.com) and we'd be happy to discuss this further with you.



## Family Excellence Testimonials

**Anthony Emmerson**, Head of Supporter Experience, Stoke City

"The Family Excellence Scheme has become 'the driver' of supporter care at EFL Clubs and a hugely important tool for us here at Stoke City. More than ever, staff members at Clubs are acting upon the detailed feedback from assessors and using it to drive continuous improvements across matchdays and services.

"The Scheme's comprehensive reporting leaves no stone unturned and Club staff are inspired to receive the regular recommendations, seeing the scheme very much as a critical friend. The outcome, of course, is that football fans enjoy ever improving interactions with their Club".

**Hamilton Mattock**, Fan Engagement Manager, Harrogate Town

"As a growing Club, we've found the Scheme to be a vital part of how we plan and deliver our family engagement strategies and matchday activations. Each visit gives us fresh insight into what's working and where we can improve. By taking the time to review the reports and act on the recommendations, we've been able to make targeted changes that genuinely improve the matchday experience for families. It's helped us focus our efforts and keep raising standards season after season.

"The impact is clear — we've seen a steady rise in the number of families attending our matches, which has contributed to a broader uplift in attendance overall. This growth reflects the progress we've made both on and off the pitch. The Scheme gives Clubs like ours a practical, results-driven framework to build on, and if used properly, it opens the door to a wide range of positive outcomes. For us, it's become an important tool in driving sustainable fanbase growth and making Harrogate Town AFC a more welcoming place for everyone".

**Clive Edwards**, Head of Media & Marketing, Peterborough United

"At Peterborough United we are fully committed to offering the best possible family experience for our supporters, and the EFL's Family Excellence Scheme offers us a brilliant way to benchmark the success of our family-based matchday initiatives at the Club.

"We have used the constructive feedback constantly throughout the seasons to shape our decisions and the Club achieving Gold status is a testament to that.

"As we move into next season we will continue to look at ways to improve the family experience at the Weston Homes Stadium with the ambition of maintaining our Gold status".



## Help and Support

The EFL Fan Engagement Team is on hand to assist with any aspect of the Family Excellence Scheme.

EFL partners, The Fan Experience Company, can be reached via [fanexperienceco.com](https://fanexperienceco.com)

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**EFL**