

FUN!



PLAY!

Belong



Introduction

This is football but not as you know it – results, stats and performances be damned. It's not traditional; it's where playfulness and friendships come together.

It's a safe space where disabled children can believe and belong. It steps outside the usual parameters with a bespoke, flexible way of playing. Because this is football that breaks all the old rules and replaces them with a new one: just be you.

[Click here to see Comets in action!](#)

What is the Comets Disability Football Programme?

Comets is a recreational, pan-disability football offer for disabled children aged 5-11.

The programme is focused on helping disabled children have fun, whilst building confidence, independence and social relationships. Comets provides an environment in which participants can feel safe and belong.

All sessions are delivered by FA qualified coaches, who have received specific programme training and guidance to provide a safe place for disabled children to try football for the first time and develop key skills.

Why have we created Comets Disability Football?

There is a lack of opportunity and a gap in the pathway for disabled players of this age, especially in a recreational environment. Comets will help give more clubs the confidence to engage and support disabled players with a fun introduction to football, helping grow this pathway.

What is pan-disability?

Pan-disability is the largest format of disability football, which sees players with a broad range of impairments and health conditions play together.

Although this a pan-disability programme, there may be opportunities to utilise it in an impairment-specific environment, which sees players with the same impairment play together. Contact your County FA to discuss.



Programme Overview



Who can apply and how?

We would like to engage grassroots clubs who do not currently have a recreational offer for disabled children aged 5-11, to help support the growth of disability football across the club network. We would also be happy to explore organisations who have expertise in disability and are interested in engaging their members in football. Providers must complete the application form and meet all required criteria to be considered.

The application form can be found [here](#)

Delivery

Comets is a unique programme that has been developed to appeal to disabled children aged 5-11. The expectation is that providers will differentiate children into appropriate age groups to ensure sessions are safe. For example, we would not expect a 5 or 6 year old to be grouped to play with an 11 year old.

Sessions must take place within community hours, to allow accessibility for all. Either during the evening 4pm onwards or on the weekend.

- The programme must be delivered with the intention of it becoming an established and embedded offer within your football provision.
- Staffing ratios must be appropriate to the group size and players needs must be maintained (see programme criteria section 3d).
- To ensure everyone has the best experience possible, providers need to regularly talk to parents/carers. It's important to understand what every player's needs are and how best to support them.
- Parents and carers of the youngest participants (5-year-olds) **MUST** stay to meet their child's toileting and intimate care needs. Parents and carers of older children are also encouraged to stay with their child during sessions as they know their child best of all.
- Providers must use the The FAs tech platform provided (Clubspark) to create sessions and take weekly attendance.
- As a deliverer of Comets, providers must adhere to the criteria set out in this applicant guidance document and the minimum requirements in the terms and conditions (see programme criteria section 3i).



What will a provider receive?

£500 grant

This is intended to support facility costs whilst establishing sessions.

County FAs will distribute the grant to providers in one payment, following an approved application, completion of the Comets online training module and set up of sessions on Clubspark.

Resources

This will include:

- On pitch game cards to help plan suitable sessions.
- Behaviour and emotional regulation support including flashcards and emotion cue cards.
- Marketing assets to help recruit players.

Kit and equipment pack

This will include a variety of footballs and cones as well as bibs, a whiteboard and fidget bag.

It will be distributed following an approved application, completion of the Comets online training module and set up of sessions on Clubspark.

Training and Signposting

Providers will have access to the Comets online training module to support programme delivery and a Clubspark training session to aid the use of The FA platform, where you will create sessions and take attendance.

Further learning is also available including the new **Disability Training for Clubs** and **Introduction to Coaching Disabled Footballers course**.

Programme Criteria



- a) Safeguarding
- b) Health & Safety
- c) Insurance
- d) Staff
- e) Sustainability
- f) Training
- g) Accessibility
- h) Participants
- i) FA Terms & Conditions





a) Safeguarding

Providers must be able to evidence a Safeguarding Children Policy. If they do not have a Safeguarding Children Policy, they can download The FA's club template by visiting;

[The FA Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures: Templates](#)

The FA's Safeguarding Children Policy principles must be adhered to by those involved with the delivery of Comets and all of its related activities. When working in partnership to deliver football activity, it must be clear how Safeguarding Children Policy principles will be adhered to, and what the process is for recognising and responding to concerns about a child.

The FA Safeguarding Children Policy principles are that:

- The child's welfare is, and must always be, the paramount consideration;
- All children and young people have a right to be protected from abuse regardless of their age, gender, disability, culture, language, racial origin, faith or sexual orientation;
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately;
- And working in partnership with other organisations, children and young people and their parents and carers is essential.

The safeguarding policy must be clear about the following requirements:

The Referral Process

Includes The FA Safeguarding Case Management Team (Safeguarding@TheFA.com).

Named Designated Safeguarding Lead

Responsible for ensuring safeguards are in place and maintained effectively. All staff, parents/carers and players must be made aware as to who this person is and how to contact them. Providers are responsible for messaging the name of DSL & contact info to parents/carers

Safer Recruitment

Including DBS checks; via The FA DBS Unit (checks completed via the Premier League and/ or PL Club should make use of The FA portability agreement to comply with the requirement for an FA accepted DBS check).

Safeguarding Training

Completion of The FA's Safeguarding Children Training e.g. SCC/WOC. EFL and PL Club DSLs must be up to date with their respective leagues DSL safeguarding training

Reporting Concerns

Concerns should be reported as quickly and easily as possible. Each provider must have a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) who is clear about the FA referral and whistleblowing procedures.

Prevention

It is essential that every Comets provider implements preventative safeguarding measures to help create safe and enjoyable environments for every aspect of the proposed activities.

Planning, Delivery and Compliance

All parties must be clear about the safeguarding requirements for Comets including who is responsible for what safeguards during i) planning, ii) delivery and iii) compliance monitoring.

Please involve the Designated Safeguarding Lead at your County FA, for further support advice and guidance.

Note: In addition to these measures, remember early years safeguarding guidance states your 5-year-old players **MUST** have a parent/carer stay for sessions to meet their toileting and intimate care needs.



a) Safeguarding

Safeguarding DBS FAQs

Q1: Do disabled children need extra safeguards?

The principles of good safeguarding are the same for children with or without disabilities.

However, as disabled players can be more vulnerable to poor practice and abuse it's important to be aware of additional considerations.

Disabled players may find it hard to report abuse for a number of reasons:

- They may be isolated and more likely to be bullied
- Some disabilities mean people struggle to understand social interaction and may not recognise inappropriate touch or behaviour (their own or other people's)
- They may have tried before, but were not listened to or taken seriously

Some ways you can support your players:

- Make sure you understand your players' communication needs & use clear and plain language

- Have enough helpers – you may need more than usual depending on the needs of your players
- Learn to recognise signs that a player is stressed or unhappy and have a plan
- Report any concerns straight away

Q2: How do I get an FA DBS Check?

A: Contact your County FA Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or PL/ EFL DSL for advice and guidance. Or reach out to The FA DBS Unit (0115 969 4618 or FAChecks@TheFA.com) for more information.

Q3: I already have a check via my PL Club can I use this?

A: Yes, but only if your check is for the child workforce, was completed through your PL Club account with 'First Advantage', and there's no content on your DBS Check. You'll need to contact First Advantage on 0115 969 4618 or FAChecks@TheFA.com, who will be able to port this over to The FA. You'll need to give your name, DOB, the address you used to complete your check and give consent for First Advantage to port your DBS Check to The FA.

Q4: I have registered with the DBS Update Service – do I still have to do an FA DBS Check?

A: If your check is for the child workforce and was completed through your PL Club account with 'First Advantage', follow our guidance in Q2. If your DBS Check is for the child workforce and you have registered with the DBS Update service, see the answer to Q3.

Q5: I already have a DBS Check via another organisation – can I use this?

A: If your DBS Check was carried out by any other organisation e.g. a school, church group, or volunteering organisation, you'll need to complete an FA DBS Check (Children's workforce).

Q6: How long will it take for my DBS Check to be completed?

A: It generally takes around 14 working days to carry out a DBS Check. But if you sent off a paper application vs online, it could take longer. Other factors can also cause delays, such as if you have a complex address history, a common name, whether your local police force is busy, and the ease of accessing local records.



b) Health and Safety

c) Insurance

Comets provides an environment in which participants can feel safe, believe and belong. To ensure sessions are operating safely, programme organisers must evidence the following:

H&S Activity Checklist (FA Template provided)

H&S Risk Assessment (FA Template provided)

Public Liability Insurance
(minimum limit of indemnity of GBP 5 million)

The County FA cannot approve applications until they have evidence of these documents, which should be attached to the application form on submission.





d) Staff

Staff Roles & Requirements

1. There must be a minimum of two DBS checked adults, with a clear role, available at all times. One of these adults (18+) must have completed at least the EE Playmaker or have the FA Introduction to coaching football qualification.
2. Click [here](#) where you will find the document (5.5) ratios of adults to children, at the bottom of the page in useful documents. This will help you understand the number of staff members your Comets session will require. The ratio may be higher for disabled children to ensure you can meet the specific needs of any given group.

*Applicant	*Lead Coach	*Coaches/Volunteers	*Designated Safeguarding Lead	Volunteers (U18)
<p>This role is responsible for completing the sign up process</p> <p>This person cannot be directly involved in the delivery of football activity unless they meet the criteria of another specified role namely; lead coach, coach/volunteer or DSL. In this instance they must also provide their details under the relevant role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In date accepted FA DBS Check • Must be 18+ • Minimum of The FA EE Playmaker (including FA Safeguarding Children & FA Emergency Aid) <p>or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have completed the FA Introduction to Coaching Football qualification (including FA Safeguarding Children & FA Emergency Aid) 	<p>You must include a minimum of one adult (18+) who holds an in date accepted FA DBS Check</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaches U18 – coaches aged 16 & 17 can be registered – but they cannot be considered as part of the staffing ratio for the sessions (you must have parental consent for them to volunteer and they must be supervised at all times) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In date accepted FA DBS Check • Responsible for ensuring safeguards are in place and maintained effectively • Must have attended FA Welfare Officer Course (WOC) or PL/EFL relevant DSL training • All staff, parents/carers and players must be made aware as to whom this person is and how to contact them <p><u>Note</u> - this person can also be the administrator, lead coach or coach/volunteer only if they meet the requirements for the role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers must be supervised at all times by the Lead Coach • Volunteers aged 16 and above must have an in date accepted FA DBS check • Minimum age for a volunteer is 14 • You must have informed parent/ carer consent for the volunteer to take on a role • The appointing of an U18 volunteer must be covered within your safeguarding risk assessment

*Successful applications must have entered individuals into these roles that meet the required criteria above.



e) Sustainability

Comets is a great opportunity to welcome disabled children aged 5-11 into football, and we want to retain and grow these opportunities.

We would encourage you to embed this programme as a continuous offer to ensure opportunities remain for the players engaged, and so consider how you will sustain the Comets programme, following use of the initial £500 grant.



What does sustainability mean?

The Comets Programme should be:

RELEVANT, RELIABLE and FINANCIALLY VIABLE

Relevant

Is continuing to offer a programme which is appealing to the target audiences, evidenced by a high number of returning players.

Reliable

Running a sufficient number of weeks to ensure it builds a reputation for being open, running and delivering to a high and consistent standard; with sufficient staff to ensure it can accommodate holidays/illness etc.

Financially Viable

Genuinely covering its costs, including those relating to delivery, facilities, marketing, upskilling staff and administration.

Questions to consider in your sustainability plan:

- How much are you going to charge participants?
- How are you going to recruit staff?
- How are you going to involve your parent network?
- What links do you have to the wider networks?

This topic is covered within the Comets online training, giving you some ideas to add to your own.



f) Training

Applicants must commit to completing the online Comets training module. Training will be available on-demand to complete at a time suitable for you, and should not take longer than an hour to complete.

It is mandatory for all providers to complete the training module and you will only be able to begin your sessions once it has been completed.

There will also be a short training session available for The FA tech platform (Clubspark) where you will be required to set up your sessions, as well as signpost parents for sign up and take attendance.



Kit and equipment will be distributed on completion of these tasks.

Further information on access to the training will be distributed once your application has been approved.

Further Learning Opportunities

At the end of the Comets training module, we will provide signposts to further learning opportunities if you wish to find out more about disability football and the strategies we suggest.

On Pitch Support

Local disability coach mentors may be available to support initial delivery and help build confidence and competence in those leading the sessions. Contact your County FA to see if this offer is available near you.





g) Accessibility

Overcoming Challenges

Comets is a disability football programme designed to create safe and welcoming opportunities for disabled children to play recreational football, whilst also helping them overcome physical, social and psychological challenges.

Physical Challenge

20 mins of physical activity a day (or 40 mins 3 x a week).

- UK Chief Medical Officers Physical Activity Guidelines for disabled children (2022)

Social Challenge

Relationships, interactions, self-perception and acceptance.

Psychological Challenge

Loneliness, getting hurt, how they look, not knowing what to do.

Removing Barriers

Economic Barriers:

Disabled children are a part of every community and demographic in society! If your participants are from disadvantaged backgrounds the cost of sessions or location may be a barrier for them. Consider this when setting fees for participation and selecting a location that is easy to travel to.

Logistical Barriers:

Comets is a community programme and therefore needs to operate during community hours i.e. outside of school time. Providers should select a venue and start time that is accessible for participants within their community.

Can Comets be delivered in schools?

Any organisation delivering Comets on a school site must ensure that the session is delivered at a suitable time for access for participants from surrounding schools. Therefore, sessions must take place within community hours, either during the evening 4pm onwards or on the weekend.

If you are looking to deliver within school hours or as an after-school offer please contact your County FA who can signpost you to a more suitable Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) resource for an education setting.



h) Participants

Numbers of participants may vary for each provider depending on the group of children and their needs. Comets sessions should be able to meet the demand of the number of participants that wish to attend by ensuring they have the correct coach to child ratios. The ratio may be higher for disabled children to ensure you can meet the specific needs of any given group.

Equality Act

As mentioned earlier in the guidance Comets is for disabled children aged 5-11.

The legal definition of disability according to The Equality Act (2010): “A physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities”.

For further information on this definition, click the link below [Equality Act 2010](#)

Participant Booking/Consent

All participants must be booked onto a Comets session via the Clubspark online booking system, by their parent/carer, prior to taking part in a session.

- Comets coaches/volunteers must have confirmed parent/carer consent to participate
- Comets coaches/volunteers must take attendance at the end of each session
- All Comets sessions must collect participant data and ensure its retention is in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR); medical needs, emergency contact information, any additional needs

It is mandatory for all Comets providers to use Clubspark.

By using this system you will be:

- GDPR compliant
- Able to promote your sessions via the FA Find Football tool to recruit players
- Able to take online payments if you wish

have:

- Parental consent
- Parent/guardian emergency contact information
- Medical and additional needs information
- Easy attendance register system

Note: Although ‘Disabled people’ is widely used as a catch-all phrase, some groups and individuals don’t identify with the term. Disabled people have the right to choose the terms they describe themselves with and this is why there isn’t always a universal agreement about the correct use of language or terms.



i) FA Terms & Conditions

All Comets providers must agree to the FA Terms & Conditions once their application has been approved and must operate within the parameters of the agreement.

The minimum requirements providers will be expected to meet are:

- Deliver the Comets Programme in accordance with the 'Comets Applicant Guidance'.
- Commit to delivery of the Comets programme using its best efforts to maximise attendance of its sessions and establish a programme that can be delivered over a long-term period.
- Evidence and comply with an appropriate safeguarding policy.
- Evidence a health and safety policy which includes a risk assessment and activity check list.
- Have public liability insurance (up to a minimum value of £5 million).
- Meet and adhere to the staffing criteria as specified by The FA throughout delivery of the programme.
- Complete the Comets online training.
- Operate within community hours, to allow accessibility for all; Either during the evening 4pm onwards, or on the weekend.
- Ensure that all participants are booked on by their parent/carer prior to taking part in a session. The session organiser must take attendance at the end of each session.
- Deliverers must refer to the Comets Programme using such name and/or logo as directed by The FA as may be updated from time to time.
- When holding participant data ensure that its retention of such data is in compliance with GDPR.
- Use The FA platform (Clubspark) provided to create, manage and take attendance at each of its sessions.
- Optional set up of an online account with Stripe, a third-party payment provider, to receive payments made to the Provider via The FA's platform.



Ready to start your journey to becoming a Comets provider?

All you need to do to get started is get in touch with your local County Football Association by dropping them an email or giving them a call.

1. Apply to become a Comets provider
2. Once your application is approved, complete the online Comets training and set up your sessions on The FA platform (Clubspark)
3. Request and receive your kit and equipment pack and resources
4. Receive your £500 grant via your County FA
5. Start running your Comets sessions!

