



## **Types of independent supporters' organisations**

There are a number of different types of supporter organisations that have been set up independently from their clubs. Although there will be some blurred lines when it comes to their purpose from club-to-club, we have summarised their typical features and roles below.

### **Supporters Trust**

- Legal form - Incorporated as a Community Benefit Society (CBS).
- Primary purpose - To strengthen the influence of supporters in the running of the club they support and be actively involved in the wider community.
- Background - A model inspired by the work of Brian Lomax at Northampton Town in the 1990s and a recommendation to replicate it from the 1999 Football Task Force Report. It recognised that 'fans organisations are being asked to play an increasing consultative role' which led to the formation of Supporters Direct (one of the forerunners to the FSA) in 2000 and the subsequent formation of 200+ Supporters' Trusts as CBS entities. Any trust acting properly will automatically qualify for FSA affiliate status. Being incorporated gives extra powers such as owning assets (and shares) collectively, limited liability for members and opportunities to raise finance by offering shares. Regulatory oversight can help build credibility with partners.

### **Independent Supporters' Association (ISA)**

- Legal form - Unincorporated or possibly incorporated as some sort of company limited by guarantee.
- Primary purpose - To bring like-minded supporters together.
- Background – ISAs came to the fore in the late 1980s/90s to establish an independent supporters' voice from the club. Some, but not all, became

forerunners of supporters' trusts with each case depending on different issues and objectives. ISAs can often be a lead voice for supporters at clubs, and assuming they are incorporated, create accounts and, if they are democratically structured, they can qualify for FSA affiliate status.

### **Supporters' club**

- Legal form - Unincorporated or possibly incorporated as some sort of company limited by guarantee.
- Primary purpose - A core group of long-standing fans that want to arrange social events, fundraisers and travel for the benefit of the club and supporters.
- Background - Supporters' clubs have traditionally been the lifeblood of clubs and have on numerous occasions bailed out and saved clubs. Typically, they don't seek involvement in the decision-making at a strategic level although a few have evolved to become supporters' trusts particularly where the club has been in crisis. Assuming supporters' clubs create accounts and are democratic they can qualify for FSA affiliate status.

### **Diversity Groups**

- Legal form - Unincorporated or possibly incorporated as some sort of company limited by guarantee.
- Primary purpose - Promote diversity and inclusion at football.
- Background - Diversity groups are probably the fastest growing of the supporter groups, typically formed to represent a particular diversity group but equally focussed on inclusion for all. These groups can qualify for affiliate or associate status, depending upon their structure.

### **Atmosphere groups or ultras**

- Legal form - Unincorporated.
- Primary purpose - Improve the atmosphere in stadiums.
- Background - These groups are typically a loose collection of like-minded fans who are keen to create atmosphere in stadiums, and possibly orchestrate displays and chants. With the rise of social media it has become far easier to pull together loose collective such as these and often this is how the collective defines itself. These groups can qualify for FSA associate status.

## **Fanzines / online forums**

- Fanzines and online forums can make up an important part of supporter culture. Both can wield great influence and prove popular for supporters in getting their opinions across. We've not included them in detail, not because they aren't important stakeholders, but they don't typically have a structure in the same way that supporters' trusts, associations and clubs do. However, they can qualify for FSA associate status.