



THE SPL FAMILY CHAMPIONS SCHEME BEST PRACTICE GUIDE 2009 / 2010

**BUILDING OUR FUTURE ON THE FAMILY
EXPERIENCE**

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1. FOREWORD

In October 2009 we launched our SPL Family Champions scheme - an initiative that saw families go undercover into all 12 SPL grounds to assess our clubs on how they treat family groups. At the end of the season, at the Clydesdale Bank Premier League Awards, St Mirren became the first club to be crowned SPL Family Champions.

But it's not just about an end of season award - and certainly not, as some have suggested, about face painters, clowns and stilt walkers. It's about improving standards.

It's about fostering a culture that welcomes families to our grounds. It's about listening to families and catering for them. It's about making families feel valued by clubs. It's about those same families choosing to come back, time and again, after enjoying a safe, exciting and enjoyable visit to their football club.

By introducing an element of competition, by sharing best practice, by raising the bar across the whole of the league, we can improve standards and attract more families to our great game. And we can start to fill up the empty seats across our grounds.

By focusing on the family experience and by assessing how our clubs perform, seen through the eyes of real families coming to grounds for their first visit, we can learn from our mistakes and make sure that we tempt families back, time and again. We can, in short, make sure that all supporters want to come and enjoy SPL football.

To do this however we must think differently. New families, by definition, are unfamiliar with the live football experience. They may feel vulnerable, especially when they compare us with other competing leisure activities. They may have expectations that we cannot meet, but we mustn't fall into the trap of believing that what is right for our existing fans is right for new families.

It's clear from the recent seminar that the need to tempt families away from the plethora of other competing leisure activities is already well understood and the increasing number of innovative club initiatives we are seeing is testament to culture change that is beginning to pick up pace.

This guide is designed to help maintain momentum by sharing Family Experience best practices and acting as a catalyst for change, to benefit clubs, the SPL and Scottish football as a whole.

Good luck!

Neil Doncaster
Chief Executive
SPL

2. INTRODUCTION: BUILDING OUR FUTURE ON THE FAMILY EXPERIENCE

The SPL Family Champions scheme was introduced in 2009 to help support clubs' efforts to attract and retain families who are new to the 'live' football experience.

Our aims are:

- To recognise those clubs where there is compelling evidence that they have the strategies, activities and actual family experiences in place to persuade them to return time and time again.
- To identify and share best practices so that clubs can learn from each other, establish benchmarks, overcome resistance and increase the pace of change.
- To help clubs attract and retain more family groups and to use the learning to generate wider fan engagement.

Each club was visited twice between December 2009 and March 2010 by two different families. One family was new or relatively new to the 'live football' experience and was from the club's local area. The other family were experienced assessors who have been involved in a similar initiative with the Football League.

Our first year has not only helped highlight some very good practices already in place but it has also exposed the need to do much more for new families. It has helped identify a number of 'quick wins' – low or no-cost solutions that will make a real difference, but it has also acted as a catalyst for the need for new attitudes.

Some families perceive that going to football is expensive (perhaps based on what they've read about tickets for major fixtures) and assume that this will be the case at their local club.

Other families have very busy weekends, ferrying children from one activity to another – and finding that many Scottish leisure attractions are entertaining alternatives, designed with their needs in mind and also offering good value for money.

And yet, many families yearn for an activity that they can all do together, with everyone equally engaged. But we can overcome these perceived obstacles and attract a new generation of family groups.

Our work has provided many insights into what influences families to return regularly to watch their local Club. Previously it was commonly thought that where a family did not return, it must be a result of poor performance on the pitch or the 'shock' of the normal pricing. However, our research has given us a new explanation.

While **pricing** and **performance** are important influences on the decision to return (with family tickets proving particularly effective), it is the **overall experience** that plays the greatest part in determining whether you have recruited a new family of supporters or not.

The SPL Family Champions assessments showed that the factors influencing the supporter's likelihood of returning stretch well beyond ticket prices and the match itself. They include the warmth of welcome, the quality and availability of family facilities, such as toilets, and the quality and variety of refreshments.

Significantly, the clubs who are proving most effective at retaining families are those who have recognised that kids require additional entertainment above and beyond the football on the pitch, if they are to employ their powers of persuasion on their parents. Put simply, 'kids for a quid' might attract them to one game, but getting them to return regularly will hinge on how well you engage children at your stadium – regardless of the football on the pitch or their parents' perceptions of how safe an environment it is. And remember, kids are not all the same. Their interests change from 6 to 12. The younger kids will love the sight of a mascot, but the older ones will yearn for the excitement of being in a passionate away end.

Our research also questions the belief that clubs with new stadia have a definite advantage when it comes to 'impressing' new families. Furthermore, fans often complain of new stadia being soulless and it is this very connection between clubs and fans that is the SPL's unique selling point. All of the feedback our assessors have provided leads us to one clear conclusion – lifelong support results from strong emotional and personal connections.

Many of the clubs who have the most basic amenities focus strongly on warmth, friendliness, pro-activity and personal engagement. It could also be argued that using the power of the emotional connection to generate and retain extra fans is something that is far easier to do with small crowds than in large modern stadia. The supporter experience is the great leveller.

This Best Practice Guide collects together all of the positive experiences recorded by our family assessors together with examples from other clubs elsewhere in the UK, Ireland and further afield. It is a quick reference guide to any club wishing to make progress in this area and we will ensure it is updated regularly to reflect progress across the SPL.

If you have any questions about the Guide, please contact Natalie Duncan at the SPL on 0141 620 4142 or email natalieduncan@scotprem.com.

3. BEST PRACTICE

The following sections are set out in the order in which they are usually encountered by new families. Each section contains a brief introduction in which we share what we've learned about the importance of this particular 'moment of truth'.

It is then followed by an extensive list of good practices, advice and ideas (with SPL clubs listed where the families encountered examples on their specific visit).

They are gathered from our recent visits to every SPL club, but also from further afield, in the interest of encouraging innovation and experimentation.

Not every example will be appropriate to every club, and we acknowledge that some require more resources than others. However, we believe that every example, if analysed in the context of clubs' own particular challenges, will provide 'clues' that will help the development of some even more appropriate solutions.

3.1 PRICING FOR SUCCESS

While the evidence continues to tell us that price is a less important factor than overall experience when considering the reasons that compel families to return, it is nevertheless extremely important to develop a pricing strategy that encourages new families to your club.

The idea that clubs should be giving free tickets to fill the stadiums has been aired earlier this season, but it is clear from our research that this may be counterproductive. If a family receive free tickets but the experience is poor, free tickets for future games will not encourage them to return. Creative pricing strategies combined with an enjoyable match day experience are what will encourage families attend time and time again.

In our seminar discussions we identified the following fantastic examples of family pricing initiatives:

Dundee United offers a child season ticket at £19.09, allowing game entry for as little as £1, as part of their centenary celebrations.

Falkirk admits under 5s free of charge with an accompanying adult.

Aberdeen operates a 'Bring a Buddy' scheme that allows season ticket holders to bring a friend for £5 or an Under 12 for free.

Hibernian has frozen season ticket prices at 2007 price ranges.

Heart of Midlothian has an Under 12 season ticket that costs just £19.

Beyond the price itself, there is evidence both here and further afield of clubs adding value to the season ticket package. This may not always be 'monetary' value, but access to benefits that are of great importance to young fans and their families. Some of the examples we have found are:

Kids' club membership (as part of the season ticket).

Access to the club's facilities outside of a match day.

Access to open training days.

Participation in a family panel (online or face-to-face).

Access to pre- or post-match activities (indoors or, weather permitting, on the pitch).

Participation in Junior AGMs.

When pricing match tickets do bear in mind that not every family consists of two adults and two children. It was encouraging therefore to see examples such as **Motherwell's** one adult/one child offer.

Often the children's ages span several traditional pricing points (under 5, under 12 and under 16) and there are often more than two children. In these cases, 'matrix pricing' is recommended where, different prices are offered, depending on the number of adults and children in the group. For example, one adult and one child for £20, two adults and one child for £25, one adult and two children for £23, etc.

One European club has experimented with 'no frills airline' pricing, where the ticket price rises steadily over the period between the tickets going on sale and the day of the match. In this particular case, tickets were sold for £1 a week before the game, with the price doubling each day until match day itself.

This is not necessarily going to work for everyone, but innovations like this will attract wider media attention and increase the likelihood of a new family committing.

Our aspiration should be to create an outstanding experience that is worth paying for – **a value for money day out that nurtures affection for and attachment to their local club.**

3.2 FIRST CONTACT – FIRST IMPRESSIONS

One of the common observations recorded at our SPL Family Champions seminar was the need to recognise the different needs that ‘new’ fans have. They may not be aware of your history and heritage, they may be unfamiliar with the stadium and the immediate surrounding and they may not know the songs your fans sing.

Typically, existing fans will look for updates and information on your official website, unofficial websites, sports websites, newspapers and on TV. A new family will not have these habits, so it’s importance to acknowledge that in the offer you make them. Make it easy for them to obtain information about your Club. Do not assume that they know.

This is particularly important when it comes to the family’s first contact with you. Most existing fans will know what they want and, if phoning, the transaction can be completed in a few seconds. However, for new families, their unfamiliarity with the process may mean you need to take more time to put them at ease, explain everything, reduce their sense of vulnerability and make them look forward to the match. This explains why many of them will phone, rather than transact online or pay on the day of the match.

Having said that, our initial contacts with SPL clubs were positive. We encountered many warm, friendly and helpful people and this ‘moment of truth’ did emerge as an area of relative strength.

The following Best Practices are designed to reflect this to provide a first impression that reassures and engages new families.

3.2.1 First impressions count, so be an advocate for your club

If you operate a telephone ticket booking service, a polite ‘we’re looking forward to seeing you’ when ending the call is always welcome and lifts expectations for the match day experience itself.

In addition, when club or ticketing employees speak knowledgeably and passionately about their own experiences as fans, this always has a positive impact on first timers, as it personalises the experience.

Aberdeen, Hamilton Academical and Motherwell.

3.2.2 Make it easy for families to contact you

Make the Ticket Office contact number central and easily visible on your website. Other sports, both here and abroad, display the number in letters an inch high, so as to leave enquirers in no doubt about how they obtain tickets for the next game. Some clubs have put their ticket office number in the main website banner heading, so regardless of the page you are on, you always see the most important number.

3.2.3 Introduce a 'new fan' button

Why not have a 'new fan' button on your website? By bringing together all of the information likely to be important to a first time family (and other new fans) under one 'button' you will make life considerably easier for them. Importantly, you are also demonstrating that you know new fans have different needs too.

3.2.4 Collect 'new family' contact data to enable feedback & dialogue

By collecting contact details you have a useful source of feedback. You can either contact individual fans to ask for their feedback on their own match day experience, or create a forum of fans/families to help you develop a strategy based on the customers' actual experiences.

3.2.5 Promote 'family fun days' well in advance

Family Days are extremely important, as they're likely to show your Club in a positive light. By expanding the experience you're likely to engage first time families, so do ensure that any agreed Family Days are clearly promoted on your website, preferably well ahead so that people can make plans.

3.2.6 Ensure that all relevant local information is provided

Ensure that all of the relevant local information is displayed in a place easily visible to ticket office assistants. New fans may be unsure of travel directions and parking arrangements, etc, and if you are not able to provide them with this information, their first impressions will be disappointing. This is particularly important if you are using a third party ticket seller.

3.2.7 Help new families find their way around

Ensure that your website displays a plan of the stadium or at least some guidance as to where fans are likely to be sitting. Often callers are looking at the club's website when they telephone, so the ability to direct them to a specific page, illustrate where they will be seating and/or print off and email/send this information will be very helpful. Some clubs will enclose route planners and travel information when sending out tickets – and families will welcome this.

Celtic's 360-degree video tour was appreciated by our visitors, as was **Rangers'** facility to allow the visitor to choose their own seats.

3.2.8 Put yourself in the family's shoes

Carry out your own assessment of the ticket purchase part of the supporter experience. Put yourself in the customer's shoes and organise for a family you know to 'mystery shop' your own ticket office and encourage them to tell you where they feel you could improve.

Also, see how easy it is to navigate your club's website is by arranging for someone new to your club to attempt to find out all of the necessary information required to attend a match. How many clicks does it take to find the number for the ticket office? Are directions contained within the same section? Many families give up their initial attempts after finding too many obstacles.

Two clubs whose visitors did find website navigation easy are listed below.

Hamilton Academical and **Motherwell**.

3.2.9 Collect birthdays and key life moment data

Use the new family's details to communicate offers to them. Collecting fan data allows you to send a birthday card containing relevant offers to the fan and his or her family and stands out from many other forms of direct marketing. For example, collecting kids' birth dates allows for initiatives such as the 7s scheme, whereby children under 7 are registered and then receive a free team shirt on their 7th birthday, thus strengthening their link with the club.

Hearts.

3.2.10 Identify the words that work – and use them

Our research shows that certain phrases are particularly powerful in engaging with new families. For example, 'I think your kids would love these seats, as they're right behind the dug-out', 'I've put you right on the end of an aisle, in case you need to get to the kiosk or toilet quickly' or 'From these seats the kids will get a great view of the mascot. He's great fun'. In order to build your colleagues' confidence, why not produce prompt cards that give ideas of what to say when different fans call.

3.2.11 First Impressions

For smaller clubs, or those dealing with smaller volumes of supporters, we recommend asking new families/fans to come to a pre-arranged meeting point before the match, so that they can be 'introduced' to the club – perhaps meeting a representative from the Membership scheme. This offers many opportunities, from issuing wristbands (to be used in the case of lost children) to explaining how important the family group is to the club and what further benefits fans may enjoy.

3.2.12 Ticket innovation can strengthen first impressions

Is it possible to print kids' / first timers' names on tickets so that they can keep as a souvenir? Personalising the experience for children can contribute to a desire to return, while personalising memorabilia adds additional value - 'Look, this was the first match I ever attended.'

Could kids' tickets be numbered so, say, five could be drawn out of a hat at each match and then go and meet the players afterwards (accompanied by parents/carers)? This has proven particularly successful in 20/20 Cricket.

3.3 JOURNEY TO THE MATCH

From our experience visiting SPL Clubs we know that the physical journey can sometimes be the most stressful part of the day. When a family is unfamiliar with an area, it's important to make sure assistance is given. In many of our experiences it is 'assumed' we know where we are going, even when we tell the assistant we have never been before, so anything you can do to take the hassle out of the journey and make it easy to get to your stadium will have a powerfully positive effect on the first time family.

3.3.1 Make it easy for new families to find your stadium

Have your team carry out an assessment of your own signage. Try approaching your Club from several different directions in a car and/or more closely on foot and record your impressions. At what point should the signage start? Is it clear to existing fans as well as first timers?

Dundee United's road traffic signage was scored highly by our visitors.

3.3.2 Make the final part of the journey safe and secure

Make sure all walkways/pathways and public rights of way in the stadium vicinity are safe and well lit. If this cannot be verified, encourage supporters to use other access routes.

The pedestrian signage around New Douglas Park at **Hamilton Academical** was found to be extremely helpful.

3.3.3 Promote a destination point for new families

If you're planning a Family Fun Day or making a special effort to promote a particular game, do provide an Information Point and / or a place to meet and greet new families. Give them information about your club and help them start their day you're a fantastic first impression of your club. Weather-permitting this does not have to be a kiosk, but simply a table with someone on hand to offer help, provide information and engage with the visitors.

3.3.4 Be aware of all possible parking options

Make sure that all ticket office assistants are aware of alternative car parking, so that the new fan has options, in the event of a very busy stadium vicinity. While some clubs have little option other than to recommend off street parking, anything that gives reassurance on safety, lighting, etc, is helpful. We've also noted that 'third party' ticket sellers often do not have the necessary local knowledge, so liaise with them, explain your particular access solutions to them and ensure they contribute to the family cause.

Assistants at **Aberdeen**, **Hamilton Academical** and **Motherwell** all gave very accurate and helpful advice regarding travel, directions and parking.

3.3.5 'Brand' the journey to your stadium

Consider 'club branding' the route to the stadium (e.g. the Wanderers' Way, the Rovers' Route or the White Mile, etc). This can make a significant contribution to the first timer's experience and may be something that a club sponsor would be interested in supporting.

Given the increasing distances that people are prepared to travel to matches, it is important to consider motorway as well as major trunk road signage.

3.3.6 Take the pain out of travelling

Travel Match Packs could appear on many websites – and would be valued by new fans. In particular, the ability to highlight dining stops, non-competing leisure activities and/or budget hotels would be welcomed.

It would be helpful if websites could contain details of any traffic hold ups, long term road works and/or railway engineering works – as well as approximate travel times from strategic points, motorway exits, etc.

Ensure that all directions on the Club website are up to date.

3.3.7 Bus schemes & Park and Ride

Consider offering a bus scheme that picks up fans from your club's catchment area. 'Park and Ride' schemes are also gaining in popularity around the UK.

St Mirren.

3.3.8 Incentivise positive activities

Consider offering prime parking places for free to groups of fans who travel together in the same car. Not only does this demonstrate your environmental awareness and generate some good PR, but it also makes it easier for people to get to the game and may also encourage more people to come (if they are going to fill a space in the car, for example).

Consider including a parking permit in the price of the ticket. This reduces hassle significantly and would appear to improve match day traffic management.

3.4 STADIUM VICINITY

From our recent SPL visits, the lack of any engaging activities outside of the majority of stadia visited was picked up as an opportunity by our families. Having often made the effort to get to the ground early, our visitors often found there was little to do an hour or so before kickoff.

If you have elected to offer 'reduced price' tickets or other discounts, ensure that some form of entertainment is laid on for those kids who are making their first trip to your stadium.

Our research shows that the younger kids rarely remember the action on the pitch, so we need to find alternative ways to ensure they 'pester' their parents to bring them back.

In our experience this could range from a reception table (with free items for kids – such as the stickers and albums handed out at some clubs), to a penalty shoot out competition outside the ground, a bouncy castle or other attractions.

The need to address this continues throughout the remaining elements of the match day experience – from the Club Shop to the food kiosk and the game itself.

We appreciate that some Clubs are clearly constrained by their immediate vicinity, but we believe all would benefit by considering the following ideas and best practices:

3.4.1 Make customer service a core activity – for ALL roles

Regardless of the specific role (either assistant or steward) the ability to engage with people is absolutely vital in building affection for the Club and a desire to return. While we appreciate the difficulties in recruiting personable individuals, pre-match briefings should focus on customer service as a core activity, rather than added value. On many of the visits, there was a lack of stewards around the stadium and those that were there showed little warmth and engagement with fans.

Aberdeen and St Mirren

3.4.2 Ensure your stewards are encouraged to welcome as well as to ensure safety

Make sure that your stewards have all of the information they need to help families get the most enjoyment out of their visit. Issue fact sheets with updated information on the stadium, the club and all relevant services and make sure stewards receive regular briefings on what is important to family visitors.

Families reported friendly, pro-active stewarding at **Aberdeen, Celtic, Kilmarnock** (where a steward accompanied a family right around the stadium so that they would find the temporarily relocated Family Stand) and **St Mirren** (where the steward remembered the family from their first arrival and caught up with them later to wish them well).

3.4.3 Make your programme sellers part of the 'reception team'

Programme sellers meet many fans and often represent the first point of contact on a match day. Do ensure every effort is taken to encourage programme sellers to engage with the fans they meet.

Equally, it is very difficult to sign a legible autograph on a programme, due to the glossy nature of some pages. A 'matt' page within the programme to collect autographs would be helpful for kids.

Aberdeen.

3.4.4 Introduce volunteer fan ambassadors, advocates and 'stadium angels'

Introducing the additional role of 'fan ambassador' on a match day can create opportunities for pro-active assistance, etc, while leaving stewards to focus on safety aspects and crowd control. Such assistants can focus on welcoming new faces, spotting 'lost' fans and engaging with kids, either through issuing 'goodie bags' and / or handing out information/selecting youngsters to take part in on-pitch activities, such as a half time penalty shoot out.

At the seminar we discussed the idea of 'stadium angels' – volunteer fans whose job it is to approach people who may look lost – or families in general – and to greet them, strike up a conversation with them and remove any feelings of doubt or vulnerability

3.4.5 Deploy your Mascot outside the stadium

Consider employing the club Mascot outside the ground in the hour or so before kick off. Allowing first time kids an opportunity to meet the mascot can only build their affection for the club. The Mascot is a really important resource and, from the recent fan experience research undertaken, we know that the families considered that it is a generally underused one.

3.4.6 Walk the talk

Having a senior club representative (such as the CEO) spend time in the stadium vicinity before kick off, will allow the collection of feedback from fans as well as the opportunity to observe the quality of interactions, allowing for feedback and subsequent improvement discussions. Importantly, it also allows the club to catch people doing the right things and reward them accordingly. Senior club officials miss so many wonderful 'cameos' and this activity would allow them to acknowledge, share and reward such acts. Most importantly, by undertaking this sort of activity, senior officials are leading by example and encouraging others to focus on the supporters' experiences.

3.4.7 Introduce pre-match fun activities

Offering kids the opportunity to take part in activities outside the stadium before the match is a good way to retain their support. Those clubs with access to a marquee and/or extra space have found that mini-training sessions or penalty practice is well liked by their young customers. Where this cannot be provided at every match, ensure that you promote future opportunities.

Most children will also relish the opportunity to have their faces painted in the home team colours before the game starts. This can either be offered for free or in exchange for a small donation to the club's chosen charity or beneficiary.

Do also think about child protection measures when you are considering introducing such activities.

Motherwell.

3.4.8 Surprise your visitors with free gifts

Our visits spotted two examples of club officials giving away free albums and stickers at their stadia. This had a fantastic effect on the children involved. 'It made their day' was one comment.

Rangers and St Johnstone.

3.4.9 Create a pre-match family destination

Why not operate a youth club on match day and/or offer a family room? Inside the room (or the youth club) kids are offered a range of activities (a basketball hoop, pool table, board games and free juice/snacks) to keep them and their pals entertained.

3.4.10 Introduce 'information points'

Few information points currently exist outside football stadia. Information Points also allow for natural engagement between the club and its supporters. Whether handing out leaflets, promoting future matches or simply offering directions, they offer an important opportunity for the club to engage with its audience on match days. Where clubs have implemented information points, they have been surprised at how popular they have been. They offer another chance for interaction and even if the question most asked is 'how do you think we'll get on today?', it demonstrates how much supporters enjoy engaging with club representatives on a match day.

3.4.11 Display stadium plans

Detailed, multiple stadium plans are extremely useful in helping new families feel comfortable in their surroundings, while ensuring signage to the Family Stand is clear is also helpful.

Celtic and Rangers.

3.4.12 Make the big games bigger!

When considering scheduling Family Fun Days try to make them big matches. There is a tendency in football to only arrange Family Days when the opposition isn't bringing many supporters, the game is low key and current performance is poor. Why would those circumstances be of particular appeal to a new family? Our belief is that you should 'make the big games bigger'. If my first game as a new supporter is a local derby or an important well attended game, then I'm much more likely to 'get the bug'.

3.5 RETAIL

SPL clubs did well in this regard. Retail emerged as the overall best performing 'moment of truth' in the view of our visiting families. This is especially positive, since they are clearly comparing clubs' retail offerings with their own view of the High Street. New families' expectations are high and the majority of clubs met them well.

The fact is it's simply not all about the quality and price of your current team kit. The retail experience says a lot about your brand, your values and your intentions as a club.

So, it is important to consider how best to maximise the experience as some families still did not feel inclined to purchase nor felt that the experience was designed with their needs in mind.

3.5.1 Make customer service a core activity

Having Club Shop assistants who are warm, friendly and welcoming will make all the difference to a family visiting for the first time.

Hibernian.

3.5.2 Make it easy to browse

Make sure that all kids' items are within easy browsing reach. If you make it easy for kids and their parents to see your products, then it will be much easier for them to purchase.

Aberdeen.

3.5.3 Make it easy to purchase

Equally, make it easy for customers to purchase. Display shirts in all available sizes, but keep wrapped shirts behind the counter. Fans can then try shirts on for size and collect theirs at the counter. Some clubs put all of their stock on the rails and at busy times this can lead to chaos.

Falkirk.

3.5.4 Secondary retail outlets

Implement secondary retail outlets at different parts of the ground – and especially in the Family Area as this offers the kids an added attraction and makes the purchasing process a lot more hassle free. Why not add small souvenirs to the mobile food kiosks that clubs are beginning to deploy?

Also, by providing ‘mobile’ retailers (hawkers with trays) or ‘portable’ outlets (free standing kiosks that can quickly be erected), clubs can make it easier for fans to encounter spending opportunities by taking the shop directly to them.

Many fans we speak to do not walk past the Club Shop on their way to their turnstile so make it easier for families to find things to spend their money on.

3.5.5 Introduce a floor walker

Deploying a floorwalker makes it easy for new visitors to ask questions, to find things and to feel at ease visiting your Club Shop. This was noted as making an important contribution to visits to the clubs below.

Hibernian and Celtic.

3.5.6 Display merchandise that will appeal to all family members

Ensure you have items for all members of the family. Girls and young women are increasingly interested in football, so make sure you have club kit that is designed for this market and also provide other items of interest. The product ranges at the clubs below were complimented in this regard.

Rangers and Kilmarnock.

3.5.7 Cater for ‘life moments’

Many families want to spend money at your shop, especially as their first visit will require a souvenir or keepsake of some type. By having a range to suit life moments such as christenings, weddings etc and offering good quality items (jewellery, etc) families (and other fans) will buy.

3.5.8 Top Ten

Have a 'top ten' sale rail in your shop on a match day and advertise that the 'sale' will begin at a time that will encourage families to your stadium earlier.

3.5.9 Promote big discounts

Well publicised, great value offers are always welcome, especially when the family has more than one child to keep entertained, so one club's home replica shirt/baseball cap deal (£19.99) on the day the family visited was a real stand out this season.

Falkirk.

3.5.10 In-store entertainment

Provide in-store entertainment on a match day to attract custom and create interest in your merchandise. This could be player appearances, special video screenings, face painters or educational activities & displays.

3.5.11 Encourage people to visit your Club Shop

Find ways of encouraging people to your Club Shop. If you are going to offer a free item upon ticket purchase, ask fans to collect it from your **retail** outlet (if different from your ticket office) and they may make a 'secondary' purchase.

3.5.12 Think about collectables

We know that many youngsters would prefer a free gift rather than free entry to the ground. Other leisure providers who operate such approaches confirm that these gifts can cost as little as 6p per child. As stated before, kids enjoy collectibles and given the size of football squads, photographs, etc, represent a good opportunity.

3.5.13 Player Appearances

Again, player access has proven very important when introduced into the Club Shop. Why not have a couple of players autographing items in the Club Shop? Again, this has a big impact on the child's match day experience. Consider how you could safely allow family / child access to players on a match day, since the experience is crucial in generating a will to return.

3.5.14 Hold themed days in your Club Shop

Having staff dress up on special occasions such as Halloween or Christmas can have a huge impact on children visiting for the first time. Never underestimate how important these apparently small concessions to children really are.

3.6 REFRESHMENTS

One of the areas where fans most usually question their clubs' true values is in the area of refreshments. This is one of football's biggest challenges, and the recent family visits to SPL clubs revealed that there needs to be significant improvements to this key 'moment of truth'. Core long-term fans often choose not to buy refreshments, but new families will almost always want to get something – especially as it's simply another way of keeping the younger ones more engaged.

The following ideas and best practices have been shown to engage new and existing families as well as making a considerable difference to the bottom line.

3.6.1 Make the most of your local delicacy / traditional food item

Offering a diversity of food options is recommended. Why not ensure your local 'delicacy' is on sale? Again, think of the impact on your club's brand of doing this. Our visiting families commented regularly on how much they enjoyed the pie experience at one club – especially with four different pies on sale (Scotch, Homecoming, Macaroni and the legendary Killie Pie).

Kilmarnock.

3.6.2 Prepare your food correctly

Make sure that powder-based drinks such as hot chocolate are served correctly stirred. It's often not an option to return the item as the queues are so long. Please ensure that catering staff know how to prepare and serve food.

3.6.3 Introduce kids' deals to take the sting out of pre-match refreshments

Offer kids deals at food kiosks; to compensate for the 'hit' families take when providing the whole group with food. There were family deals noted at several clubs.

Falkirk, Heart of Midlothian and Hibernian.

3.6.4 Provide children's portions / mini-snacks

Some fans with younger children wonder whether or not children's portions will be provided, especially in family areas. If they are, these fans are more likely to buy kids' portions than share their own food with their kids, but if they're not available, sales could suffer.

3.6.5 Introduce kids' meal boxes

Kids' meal deals/boxes are particularly welcomed, especially if the contents offer a fair balance of healthy/popular food. Our visiting families particularly liked the 'animal-shaped' food box provided by two of the clubs visited.

Hearts and St Mirren.

3.6.6 Take the food to the families

Why not introduce mobile kiosks in family areas? These kiosks, just like the ones in cinemas of old, could contain the most popular items and be brought into the family seating area. This will allow parents to let their kids buy food within eyesight.

3.6.7 Address queue management (and factor in family needs)

Kids often fail to get served at kiosks, simply because the staff cannot see them or because there is no adequate queuing system. Implementing a barrier-led system or employing the assistance of a steward can be the difference between the decision to spend or eat later (regardless of whether you are dealing with kids or adults). Low-level wheelchair access counters are very useful for families too.

3.6.8 Brighten up your refreshments kiosks

Branding the refreshments kiosks can add to the experience and offer something different and enjoyable. Visiting families described bright and decorated refreshments areas at three clubs, so why not brighten up the area around family area food kiosks?

For example, have a full sized cut out of a leading player and invite kids to measure themselves against him. This will get some strong messages across regarding nutrition and may also complement any particular product you have to offer

Aberdeen, Hibernian and Dundee United.

3.6.9 Introduce innovations to make it easier for families to buy refreshments

Consider introducing a pre-order drinks system. You can order before kick off and they will be ready for you at half time. This imaginative way of overcoming the traditional problems of the half time queue is novel and recommended – and while it may only be appropriate for certain parts of the stadium (dedicated family areas, for example) it may increase sales by removing personal hassle.

3.6.10 Families want healthy options

Our visiting families were very concerned about the lack of healthy options, revealing something of the culture change that is affecting Scottish eating habits. They argue that food such as wraps, fresh sandwiches and fruit should be much easier to store and serve than burgers, hotdogs and fries that are often cold by the time you return to your seat. It's clear that the staple diet of Bovril and pies is likely to be the first choice for many long-term fans, but offering families a healthy option provides a choice that is likely to be welcomed. Having said this, families did praise the healthy options on offer at three clubs.

Hibernian, Heart of Midlothian and Rangers.

3.6.11 Practise professional supervision

Food kiosks with the presence of a supervisor or manager always seem to provide better service. Having someone co-ordinating activity, keeping an eye on stock and checking on queue management instils confidence in the customers and enhances the match day experience.

3.6.12 Make it easy for families to enjoy their refreshments

Provide families with somewhere to rest their refreshments, as they will often have their hands full. Our visitors to Tannadice found shelving that allowed them to rest their food. While clubs may not be able to go as far as one European club, who has lined its family concourse with Astroturf, thereby creating a sheltered 'picnic' area, it should be possible to provide additional shelving to remove the hassle from the half time rush.

Dundee United.

3.7 THE MATCH & INSIDE THE STADIUM

The importance of creating a dedicated family area cannot be stated enough. Families do expect to be shielded from abusive language and even the more boisterous but acceptable behaviour and chanting that goes on at football matches can be unsettling for youngsters.

However, by restricting admission to family groups (i.e. not groups of youths), training stewards to pro-actively manage the area, decorating the area and providing entertainment (mascots, freebies, mobile kiosks, etc) the chances of new families returning are greatly enhanced.

We know that some long term/season ticket holders resent the presence of families in their stands (often because of the perceived lower cost of their tickets) and while we acknowledge that many clubs are engaged in a dialogue with core fans to explain the need to generate new and younger support for the future, our research always points to the family area as the best solution.

There are also clubs whose seating and ticketing arrangements make the immediate creation of a family area difficult. This means that these clubs need to be even more alert to the needs of families in different parts of their stadium, perhaps by creating convenient ways of reporting issues and difficulties (texting a special number when there's an outbreak of trouble, spiteful language, etc).

3.7.1 Make customer service a core activity

The importance of a warm welcome from a turnstile assistant, steward or other club official cannot be underestimated. The human touch is the great leveller, allowing clubs with less modern facilities a level playing field against those with new stadia. Supporter engagement must become a core part of stewarding activity on match days, whether that is achieved by introducing volunteer assistants or by ensuring the recruitment, training, briefing and reward of match day personnel is focused on the supporter experience. Our families reported an excellent in-stadia welcome at one club in particular.

Aberdeen.

3.7.2 Recognise colleagues who contribute to a great family experience

Introduce a 'steward of the year' award at your club to heighten the profile of supporter interaction. Base this decision on winners of 'steward of the month' where you invite feedback from fans on a regular basis. This also offers a useful sponsorship opportunity.

3.7.3 Get help with decorating your concourse / family area

Engage the services of a local school to help you decorate your family concourse. Murals are particularly attractive and such exercises many even form part of the art curriculum at your local school.

3.7.4 Practise good signage inside as well as outside the stadium

In-stadia signage was clear and helped the family find their seats easily at one club.

St Mirren.

3.7.5 Think about the location of your Family Area

Do create a family stand or area of the ground where all facilities are close by (toilets, exist, refreshments, places to rest food, etc). It's clear from our visits that the **majority of SPL clubs** have introduced dedicated family areas.

3.7.6 Introduce an Away Family Area

Some clubs in the UK have created 'away family areas' to attract more visiting supporters and a combination of this and the family travel organised by one SPL club offers the League a way of safely introducing youngsters to the away experience. This does rest upon liaison between home and visiting teams however.

3.7.7 Be alert to the vulnerability of new families

Where families have found themselves in an inappropriate part of the ground, fast, pro-active assistance is always welcomed, whether this is to move them to a family area or to an area of the stand more appropriate for them.

3.7.8 Introduce half time entertainment

Consider introducing half time entertainment. Penalty shoot outs and Mascot races are great fun and capable of engaging everyone in the stadium at half time. We heard an activity called 'on me shed, son!' described at the seminar in April where fans attempted to kick the ball into a shed provided by a local sponsor and also found great examples of entertainment at four clubs.

Celtic, Dundee United, Heart of Midlothian and St Johnstone.

3.7.9 New families will make judgements about you based on the cleanliness of your toilet facilities

Toilets are often quoted as the biggest influence on a female customer's intention to return to a club or to recommend them so it is important to consider what can be done to enhance the washroom experience. Whether this is through the installation of mirrors in ladies' toilets or simply ensuring that there are sufficient hand towels and/or functioning hand dryers, it forms a key impression.

3.7.10 Make them look forward to coming back again

When families are leaving the match, have your stewards ask them if they've had a good time. It's good to leave on a positive impression.

St Mirren.

3.7.11 Pro-actively address hateful/abusive language

Display signs and posters asking fans to moderate their language, particular near areas where there are likely to be children and families and do pro-actively steward foul and/or obscene language. Previous research shows that it is likely to be one of the biggest factors dissuading families from returning again. Where you don't have such schemes in place, it is all the more important for stewards to intervene pro-actively when foul and / or abusive language occurs. Our family noted excellent pro-active work by the stewards at two clubs.

Heart of Midlothian and St Mirren.

3.7.12 Make sure your Family Area borders the pitch

Do try to ensure that your Family Area borders the pitch-side, so that access to players, for autographs, etc, isn't difficult. This was in evidence at one club and particularly noted since it allowed their mascot to greet virtually every child in the Family Stand there.

Falkirk.

3.7.13 Introduce post-match activities

Consider putting on post-match activities/services/entertainment for families so that their departure is delayed until after the usual crowd dispersal and they feel less vulnerable. This could potentially be combined with on-pitch activities etc, to further engage the families.

3.7.14 Make the most of your mascot

Club Mascots can come into their own pre-match and at half time and our visitors reported hard-working and entertaining mascots at two clubs.

Falkirk and Motherwell.

4. CONSULTATION

In the USA recently, research was published showing that the simple act of asking a customer for feedback generates increased warmth towards the service provider asking the question, and yet many clubs may be reluctant to consult for fear of receiving unwelcome feedback or fear that people will only want to discuss what goes on pitch-side.

But consultation is not just about asking for feedback. It's about forming a partnership that enables a frank and honest exchange of views about progress, to lead directly to improvements that resonate with fans.

Ultimately, it gives clubs an opportunity to close the gap between what fans believe the club stands for or represents – and the treatment they actually experience.

The benefit of applying this thinking to families is clear. If we strive to use the **SPL Family Champions** reports as a general indication of what families may be encountering, we should be confirming this by widening the scope of consultation and getting feedback from our wider family base.

The principles of successful consultation

- Ensure **the scope of consultation is clear** and ensure that there is demarcation between consultation on football matters and 'off the pitch' improvements
- **Make it easy** for families to give feedback. Many websites allow inexpensive subscriptions to online survey services. It is possible to run multiple surveys with multiple questions to thousands of supporters for less than £200 per annum or even for free – and to have the results accessible in real time. The research link between the SPL and the University of Strathclyde also provides clubs with an opportunity to undertake such research for free.
- Ensure the results of the feedback are **communicated** in some form back to those who took part. Why not regularly update your club website with a section focusing on 'what our families are saying' or publish fans' questions with a response from the club?

As we have seen, consultation need not be expensive, but clubs should take it further than an initial online engagement. Our experience leads us to recommend the following approach, which we've seen work well in other clubs in Europe.

Develop online feedback communities

By asking the question 'would you like to participate in an online community of (club) families?' and requesting an email address, not only can you add names to your CRM database but you can also create a more representative body of families who can set a reliable agenda for more specific face-to-face meetings

Develop a Family Panel

Deploy emails regularly to your online panel and use their responses to produce an agenda for face-to-face meetings – and rather than letting face-to-face meetings be driven by the loudest voice, let them be an opportunity to work on providing detailed solutions to the responses generated by the online panel.

Choose two or three key priorities from your initial research and break these down so they form the 'agenda' for, say, several consequent meetings. Producing a 'family strategy', for example, will take more than one meeting, so develop ideas over a period of time, while perhaps addressing one or two other issues.

Find out what matters most

In the early stages of consultation it is important not to get too wrapped up worrying about statistical significance, but to focus on finding out what matters to your families (and other people you are targeting for feedback).

To determine what these areas might be, you should consider canvassing families on a match day, to generate some common themes. Once you have them, we recommend you seek to identify any 'gaps', by asking what areas of the match day experience are most important to them and then how well the club delivers on these areas.

When you review the results, the areas where there is the greatest gap between **importance** and **quality** will quickly be exposed – and they could become the focus of your first face-to-face meetings or your initial online/email survey.

Understanding expectations

Different fans react in different ways to the things you do as a club. New fans have different expectations to long-term loyal fans (some might say 'higher') so both of these constituencies need to be engaged.

Determining what influences any of the club's partners – fans, potential fans, lapsed fans, community representatives and corporate contacts – will lead you to recognise that people have different needs. Our research to date shows that family groups, for example, may be tempted to their first game by a special reduced pricing package, but their long term support is less dependent on pricing and more dependent on the quality of the experience they get.

5. THE FAMILY EXPERIENCE: TOP TEN RECOMMENDATIONS

In the sections above we have attempted to include as many ideas and recommendations as possible, but if Clubs follow the ten principles listed below, we believe that many more useful and more appropriate ideas could emerge.

1. Make it easy

Experience tells us that it can sometimes take four or five clicks to find the ticket office number on a club's website, while poor signage can make the first journey to your Stadium a nightmare. Your Club Shop may be in a position that makes it unlikely to be visited by new families and the half time queues at your refreshments kiosks may put off a family from spending money. Therefore it's important not to make assumptions and to take every opportunity to remove the doubt from the first time visitor.

By taking the time to 'walk' the match day experience, from the first visit to the website to getting into the stadium, and assessing how easy it is to be a first time fan, you will identify lots of opportunities for improvement.

The most important thing you can do to 'make it easy' for families is to create a dedicated family area – as this allows you to manage the different needs that this group has in a safe, controlled and welcoming area.

2. Put yourself in their shoes

When you take the time to see things through a new family's eyes, you realise that different thinking is needed. Families feel vulnerable, are unsure of their surroundings and may need help finding their way around the stadium.

Websites, for example, are solely targeted at existing fans and things that are clear to this constituency are baffling to new families.

The fact that no club in the UK has yet to install a 'new to us?' button highlights how many are failing to consider the needs of the new family, so take the time to think about the match day experience from their perspective and opportunities will start to present themselves.

3. Make customer service a core activity

Customer service is often an afterthought in football, or, worse still, regarded as only important when someone is making a complaint. This low profile works against the attraction and retention of new fans.

At one League One club in England they have appointed a Customer Service Manager and their position in the structure (between the executive team and all of the departments) ensures that all decisions are taken with the fan experience in mind.

4. It takes more than football and pricing to make them come back

We know that pricing is important in attracting people to your stadium and that it forms a key part of the decision-making process ahead of attending a game, but our research shows that it is the overall experience that persuades new families to come back.

Acknowledging this by putting on pre-match and half time entertainment or having activities in the family area can make all the difference when a game is 0-0 and the kids are bored.

5. They're comparing your refreshments with other leisure destinations

When similar family assessments were first carried out in the Football League one of the first comments was 'I could buy four happy meals for less than a tenner at McDonalds'.

Regardless of your views on McDonalds and fast food generally, it is evident that families expect to get good quality food at good prices in sufficient quantities, correctly prepared and served in hygienic conditions in a professional and friendly manner.

6. Access to players is vital

One of things to bear in mind when positioning your family area is the proximity to the pitch, because if you can arrange for kids to have access to players, to smell the deep heat, to get autographs (ideally just after the warm up) you are likely to generate 'fans for life'.

Squad (or injured) players can also play their part, perhaps by doing signing sessions in the Club Shop in the hours before kick off.

7. Families will love the away experience

Our experience is that as kids grow older, the more the away fan experience appeals. However the majority of clubs have made no provision for this, which is surprising given the additional spend these families will make when visiting your ground.

Some clubs put on special family travel so that families can journey to away games together while others invite away families to sit in home family areas (with one English Championship club organising two mixed family stand areas this season).

By creating an away family area and liaising with visiting clubs we will encourage the next generation of travelling fans.

8. Make the most of your Mascot

Most mascots appear in the period of time before kick off, exclusively inside the Stadium, greeting kids in the crowd and occasionally going through a repertoire of tricks.

While this is often great fun for the kids involved, the lack of activity outside the stadium suggests that deploying your mascot outside, in the hour or so before kick off, would add to the atmosphere and make new families feel immediately at ease.

9. Be friendly, approachable and welcoming

It is vitally important for 'fan-facing' colleagues, such as stewards and Club Shop staff to be proactive, friendly and welcoming as these are the people new families are likely to be interacting with and upon whom their first impressions of your club will be formed.

10. Start a dialogue with your Families

As we have stated earlier, the individual SPL Family Champion reports should be built upon with consultation. Inexpensive online surveying options make it easy for clubs to identify, survey and consult with a large number of families.

It should be possible to garner a wide range of feedback from families, use this to set the agenda for face-to-face discussions and establish a Family Panel to do this.