English Football’s ‘Rooney Rule’ for BAME managers: An Open Goal

**New Report by Researchers from University of Greenwich and Charlton Athletic Community Trust**

**Dissemination Event and Reception**

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**The Valley, Charlton Athletic FC, Floyd Road, London, London SE7 8BL**

Our report investigates the Voluntary Recruitment Code (VRC), a new positive action measure for English football, intended to address the deep and persistent under-representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff in managerial positions.

Adapted from the 2003 US National Football League’s (NFL) ‘Rooney Rule’, the VRC was piloted in the English Football League (EFL) in the 2016-17 season and made mandatory across all EFL clubs from 1 January 2018. The Code requires clubs to interview at least one BAME candidate for any new senior coaching vacancy.

The report explores the potential impact of the VRC on recruitment and selection practices in clubs. It breaks new ground by presenting evidence from club-level stakeholders.

In the first half of the report, through a comparison with the US experience, we review the relevant policy debates and identify the Code as a ‘soft’ form of positive action.

In the second half, we present our findings and reflect on the challenges faced in accessing data in professional football. Despite these barriers we present results from a questionnaire survey of EFL Club Secretaries and case studies of four EFL clubs, based on meetings and interviews with senior club staff and industry experts.

We find that, while it is too early to assess whether the VRC is likely to be effective in terms of actually increasing BAME representation in senior club positions, there is evidence to suggest rapid early improvements in recruitment and selection processes. These improvements are selective, however, in that they are largely limited to youth academy and off-field roles in the lower leagues, while higher-profile first-team appointments look likely to remain immune from the VRC and continue to operate separate informal recruitment and selection practices.

We analyse how clubs are at different stages in their adaptation journeys, with varying degrees of readiness and willingness. We thus characterise our four case study clubs as:

i) The Early Complier;

ii) The Business Experimenter;

iii) The Diverse Metropolitan; and

iv) The Values-Driven Club.

We also identify a range of industry factors and club-level factors that both enable and constrain the implementation of the VRC going forward.

Enabling factors include:

• the professionalisation of HR (human resources) managers;

• committed leadership and active outreach;

• academisation; and

• non-football influences in boardrooms.

Constraining factors include:

• the ‘First Team Bubble’;

• crisis-management and the ‘managerial merry-go-round’;

• club-ownership changes; and

• non-metropolitan demographics.

We conclude that, despite the patchy implementation of the VRC thus far, there are reasons to be optimistic. We assess that, even in this most volatile and complex of industry environments, the VRC has helped to create the necessary conditions to embed fairer and more inclusive recruitment practices, and that clubs are generally willing to be led in this area.

We contend that compulsory BAME-inclusive shortlisting is politically achievable and immediately implementable, even for the most senior coaching roles in clubs. Generalisation to the Premier League represents a huge but important challenge.

We end with six broad recommendations, including compulsory inclusive shortlisting, accompanied by transparent monitoring and a combination of positive and negative incentives for clubs to adapt.

Our overall assessment is that the time is ripe. The English football authorities are missing an ‘open goal’ to embed long-overdue regulation in this culturally and economically important industry.

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