



NUST Ticketing Round Table Event

On the 22nd of October 2023, the Newcastle United Supporters Trust hosted and facilitated a roundtable event on ticketing issues at Newcastle United. This document sets out a summary of the main points discussed at the event. Prior to the event, NUST was contacted by Newcastle United Supporters Club London (NUSCL) and the Irish Mags Supporters Club. A representation of the Newcastle United Supporters Club (NUSC) also attended. The meeting was held on the basis that all discussions following the speaking slots were under Chatham House Rule, where the points discussed can be reported, but cannot be attributed to any specific individual or organisation.

Welcome and Introductions

A welcome from Greg Tomlinson, NUST Chair:

Greg welcomed all and explained how attendees are a representative cross-section of the fan base, with season ticket holders, members, and international fans represented. NUST had recently run a large ticketing survey and the results were clear and stark – a large part of our fan base is not happy with many aspects of ticketing operations at Newcastle United.

NUST have met with other supporter clubs, such as Arsenal and Tottenham who are facing similar issues with changes to ticketing. It is evident that this is an issue that fans are facing across the country.

Thomas Concannon, FSA Premier League Network Manager:

Thomas explained his role at the FSA and stated that there have been ticketing problems across the Premier League; this is not a Newcastle-specific issue.

Ticketing prices are also an issue that the FSA is dealing with, especially at clubs like Tottenham and Fulham, whilst prices are rising across the country. This is difficult especially when compared to pricing in other countries and at clubs like Dortmund.

Thomas stated there has been a lot altered in the NUFC ticketing process and arguably it has been done too quickly. He hopes that this session can be a forum for solutions that can be presented to the club. Thomas also encouraged fans to join the FSA, as a national supporters organisation to voice their concerns on the national stage.

Some questions were then put to Thomas:

“Are there any best practices the FSA have come across in PL or in European clubs?” -

Thomas: “No in regards to the PL, but there are some European clubs that are doing great work and could be looked at for good practice.”

“Are the FSA aware about the increase in ticketing touts?”

Thomas: “The FSA are aware and working with the PL on this.”

An update from Newcastle United Supporters Club London (NUSCL):

There are around 500 members in the NUSCL, which is a fairly ‘broad church’ of different types of ticket holders, but a large amount of NUFC members.

The group conducted a 48hr flash survey, of around 100 people, with a mixture of qualitative and quantitative responses.

- Have you experienced any benefits of NUFC membership scheme? 85% said ‘no’
- How have you found the club’s communication on ticketing? 83% said ‘not good enough’
- Majority of respondents said that their experience of digital ticketing would be marked less than 2.5/5
- Main qualitative response themes were regarding the allocation of tickets, and that their members are almost completely frozen out, London Mags wrote to the club with 8-10 questions about members ticketing and received just one line in response.

Due to late communication and on sale periods, members, even if successful with ballots, are often unable to get train tickets affordably, and it appears unsold corporate tickets are not distributed back to fans.

Some suggested solutions for the club from the NUSCL were:

- More meaningful consultation with fan groups and more open communication
- Supporters groups outside Newcastle could be used to grow revenue, they are an asset, therefore treat them as such.

An Introduction to the Irish Mags:

The Irish Mags are a body of 400 members, representative of the whole of the island of Ireland. This, again is a fairly ‘broad church’ of fans, as those in Galway, Cork, Dublin, and Belfast all have different experiences but are all united in their support of NUFC.

The main issues that Irish Mags face are:

- Similar issues as to NUSCL in that the timing and communication of ballots/ticket releases results in last minute travel plans that are expensive.



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- Feeling as though they are treated as “other” by being labelled as ‘international’, when they are only a short flight away from Newcastle.
- The group leadership also having to work as a customer service body due to poor communication from club on ticketing.
- Supporters groups could be used more effectively for messaging, for example releasing information about when to get into the ground due to digital ticketing queues a few hours before the match is ineffective and the message is not as easy to disseminate; whereas communicating with leadership within these groups can get messages out early (agreement from NUSCL).
- Cannot download tickets on Irish networks when in the UK; WiFi at the club is poor which does not support the digital transition.
- Reactive stewards rather than supportive; could benefit from better training in order to support the transition to digital ticketing.
- The stadium being cashless is difficult for Irish fans, as they encounter charges on foreign cards.

Some suggested solutions offered by the Irish Mags were:

- Could the club put a section of ticket on ballots out straight away? This would replicate Manchester City who open all match ballots at start of season so people can plan travel.

Section 1 – Season Tickets/Home Ticketing

An open discussion about the issues facing season ticket holders and general home ticketing problems. The main themes that were brought up in this discussion were:

- The queues to get into St James Park on a match day are a big problem in certain areas of the ground, potentially exacerbated by the number of turnstiles in the older East Stand, or any small issues with ticket scanning resulting in a build-up of queues.
- The NUFC ticketing website is not good enough with frequent technical issues/errors and not enough information about the new process on the website. Groups like NUST have had to help supporters by learning solutions and workarounds from other supporters.
- Transferring tickets has worked well in general, but when there are issues there is not a lot of support from the Box Office/NUFC’s website.
- The Box Office is overworked and under resourced, which has caused so many problems. The wait time is extremely long when you call to try and resolve the issue, and when you can speak to someone, often they do not know the answer, or at times provide incorrect information. Often fans are asked to attend the Box Office in person, which isn’t feasible for all supporters.
- The fraud protection systems that are in place seem to be rejecting some card payments, which has caused a lot of issues and seems to be occurring at random. When fans are contacting the Box Office, there is no support offered.
- The website is incredibly poor and is not user-friendly. Changing the ticketing process has only made this more apparent.



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Section 2 – Memberships

This session was focussed on members and their experience of ticketing so far this season. Members have probably experienced the most dramatic changes to their ticketing processes, and this session was an open, honest discussion of the issues and of the potential solutions to these.

One of the most consistent issues mentioned in this discussion was the anxiety and uncertainty that the new system has produced. Often the ballots begin with no announcement and on ballot result day, fans are left refreshing their emails/bank accounts/website in order to find out if they have been successful or not. Other clubs have a system where you are immediately told whether you have been successful or not as soon as the ballot closes, this would alleviate so much anxiety that our fans face at the moment.

The ballot systems will always have ‘winners and losers’, with fans sharing in this discussion that some have been successful 7/7 times, some being unsuccessful 9 times. The problem does remain that the process is not transparent. Other clubs release the exact numbers of how many tickets are available, how many have applied and how many were successful in each of their categories. Without this data, NUFC fans are left with no way of knowing their chances of success or where best to apply in the ballot.

It would be useful for the club to share how the ballot system works to aid category selection. For example, is there a ballot for each category? Or is there one draw and those successful are allocated the best available seat based on their indicated top price? The ballot/resale process is leaving a lot of fans disgruntled and disengaged with a genuine worry that the next generation of fans will not be able to get tickets.

Section 3 – Away Ticketing

The main changes to away ticketing have been the introduction of ID checks. The main themes raised are as follows:

- There are a lot of people who work shifts/work away from Newcastle and people have shared season tickets between family members. It is now impossible for anyone other than the named Season Ticket holder to attend away fixtures. This could be solved in several ways, such as allowing the transfer of an away ticket a small number of times per season to a pre-nominated individual.
- The changes in away ticketing have resulted in lower loyalty point requirements for most away games. This has allowed other fans to attend. Many feel this is a positive change.
- There is unclear guidance on what ID is acceptable for away ticket checks.
- It appears fundamentally wrong to undertake an ID check process based on randomly issuing “dud” tickets on a guilty until proven innocent basis. There must be a better and more targeted way for the club to do this.



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- When ID checks happen and the ticket scan flags up an issue, fans must make their way across a potentially hostile, unfamiliar away ground to speak to the stadium Box Office. Fans could be travelling alone, or with a child who ends up being separated by the check or could be caused undue anxiety by the process.
- It would be an immense shame if the new ticketing process led to a negative change in our famous away support and have a negative impact on the team.
- Once again, transparency is an issue with the changes to the process. Fans do not understand the process or the logic behind it, and the club has not explained their reasoning.



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