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# Latest Insights

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A collection of views on football governance, women's sport, charity governance, and much more.



Supporting Fair Game since 2021

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# Back of the net!

Now the Football Governance Act has become law, Greg Campbell explores with Fair Game CEO Niall Couper what this means for English men's football

First published in CT Brief Issue 79



**Greg Campbell**  
Partner,  
Campbell Tickell



**Niall Couper**  
CEO,  
Fair Game

## Interviewer: Greg Campbell

**Greg Campbell:** Welcome, Niall. Exciting times, with the Football Governance Act now on the statute book. It's been quite a journey, and Fair Game has been absolutely fundamental to making this happen. You more than anybody have driven this, Niall.

**Niall Couper:** Thank you Greg. It means a lot to me. Rarely do you get a chance to stop and look back at what's actually happened. Lots of people have helped on the journey. Honestly, I still haven't really taken it all in. So how can we deliver that vision of a fair future for football, the path we've been on for four-and-a-half years? We need to think about development of the governance code, a proper financial distribution system, defining fan engagement. These were all hypothetical; now they're reality.



This is an edited version of the interview. For a full version scan the QR code.

**GC:** Clearly we shouldn't be unrealistic and say we hope it means no more clubs collapsing like Bury and Morecambe. But there is a path to something much better. What do you see as the next steps?

**NC:** Conversations have already turned towards the key definitions in the regulator's remit: financial sustainability, ensuring competitive balance, fan consultation. But what do those look like in practice?

There will be a governance code and a 'state of the game' report. And Greg, as you know having worked on the Fair Game Governance Code, we've got to a very good place. We've had a really promising conversation with the regulator. They're aware of the work that's gone into our code and hope they can take much of that forward. For the 'state of the game' report, we have our Fair Game Index, which hopefully addresses key questions.

On financial sustainability, we have football economists scrutinising Fair Game's financial model, for instance the financial cliff edges between divisions. The greatest day to day challenge is cash flow, ensuring clubs have the ability to survive the next few months. If you look at the problems at Sheffield Wednesday or Reading, it's that suddenly 'we can't pay the bills'. We need each club and their fans to have a guarantee of an accessible resource.

## Challenges ahead

**GC:** There will be huge challenges for the existing institutions: the FA, Premier League, EFL, National League.

**NC:** We need those four bodies thinking holistically about what is for the benefit of football. There's a sense they act simply in the interests of their members. There are huge differences in the levels of clubs' resource and expertise. We need them thinking not just what's good for Spurs, but what's good for Dorking Wanderers. Fair Game believes there's enough money around the game. Redistribution needs to be brave: some will be cross they won't get the same level of finance. But we have to ensure the whole game is financially sustainable, not just individual clubs.

**GC:** Where do you see the challenges for clubs as regulation unfolds? For instance, Lincoln City, not a big outfit, to their credit have done a lot of work to ensure they are regulation-ready. But they seem an outlier.

**NC:** The EFL and Premier League already have mechanisms for real-time financial reporting that the regulator could adapt and adopt. National League clubs though will need support from the regulator: the financial burden of the new system could break some that exist with minimal staffing plus volunteers. But the cost would just equate to a few crumbs from the Premier League. Regulation should be welcomed at all levels though: there's a recognised need for proper processes, auditing systems and oversight to help clubs run more smoothly. That will benefit clubs and communities.

## For the fans

### **GC: How will regulation feel for the fans?**

**NC:** This is partly about big definitions: what is a fan and what is fan engagement? The Act talks about fan consultation but if fans are to have a proper say in overseeing club strategy, potential boardroom access, and consultation on areas like club colours, name, badge, location, we need a process for identifying who's involved. At Spurs for example, you have loads of affiliated fan groups overseas. At Tonbridge Angels on the other hand, the fans are almost certainly going to be people living within a three to four mile radius, and that's a very different definition.

There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution, but we need clarity and a baseline, say all season ticket holders and all supporters trust members, but there could be cases for including other groups. On a different point, we've seen examples where fan advisory boards have been filled with people cherry-picked by the club as yes-men and yes-women. That's not acceptable.

## Women's football

**GC: The Act focuses on the men's game. But what about the women's game: might there be some crossover of issues? I say this on the back of another astonishing Lionesses success.**

**NC:** There is overlap: some of the men's game regulation will affect clubs that have the women's team integral to their business. Mistakes have been made where people assumed problems in the men's game were the same as problems with the women's game. They aren't. There is endemic sexism within football and society. Women's players and teams are treated as second-class citizens at grounds, their training slots, facilities, coaching, and access. These issues can only be addressed with a different regulatory regime.

We need a consultation process addressing financial sustainability of the women's game and competitive balance. I think we should move towards an effective women's game regulator following the Karen Carney review. Otherwise, we risk the game going down the wrong route and repeating the mistakes of the men's game.

## Future of Fair Game

**GC:** What's next for Fair Game, having played such a central role in developments up to now?

**NC:** We are championing a fairer future for football in Britain. We want to work with clubs, supporters, football charities and academics to identify problems, develop solutions, and work with the regulator to implement them. But there's need too in Europe and beyond, and people are watching as we move to regulation, to see whether a similar approach could help sustainability in their countries.

We don't want football becoming something for just a few billionaires. It's the people's game – that benefits society and communities across the nation, with clubs embedded in their community. It's about benefits for local towns, adding value and sitting alongside services and community services. To help us promote that vision, we could do with a lot more funding. To any philanthropists who want to help us change the direction and culture of the game and make it something everybody's proud of, let's talk!

**GC:** Thank you very much Niall.

**NC:** Thank you, Greg, and thank you Campbell Tickell for all the work you guys have done with the governance code and the other support you've given us over the years. People like you have helped deliver the Football Governance Act, which is amazing. And I love saying it. Now onto the next phase!



# Football clubs as community assets

How a fan-led review and 'golden share' have been key initiatives in preparing for regulatory change

First published in CT Brief Issue 76



**David Lowes**

Director,  
Lincoln City FC

**We welcome the Football Governance Bill as a significant moment for our sport. This is because it recognises football clubs as community assets and represents a step towards an improved and fairer system at every level in this country.**

In getting Lincoln City 'regulation ready' – ensuring we are prepared to proactively action change as opposed to reacting to developments – we wanted to be ready, not just for the mandatory elements, but also to identify areas we could go above and beyond.

This meant putting our fans at the forefront of our work. So, what steps have we taken to achieve this?

## Fan-led review

Taking key learnings from the original Fan-Led Review of Football Governance, overseen by former Sports Minister, Tracey Crouch, we reassessed our approach as to how we interact, listen and action what the lifeblood of our club – the supporters – have to say.

We formed a fan-led review working group consisting of club and fan representatives in September 2022. Our aim was to collaboratively consider how new legislation might impact our club and supporters, but also improve fan engagement and representation.

## Seven commitments

The proposals from our fan-led review group were presented at a board meeting alongside recommendations on how the review may be adopted. This resulted in the publication of our seven fan-led review commitments:

1. We will be ready for independent regulation
2. We will work to ensure extensive reach and representation of our fan base
3. We will create a golden share known as 'the fans' share'
4. We will have a nominated board-level official for fan engagement
5. We will maintain a strong relationship with the Community Trust as holders of the fans' share

6. We will maintain a strong partnership with the Fan Advisory Board in representing fan interests
7. We will be guided by a fan engagement strategy, executed through a board-approved annual fan engagement plan

As a result of a newly implemented fan engagement strategy, we strengthened communications and relations with our fan advisory board, Community Trust and supporter groups.

This was also the catalyst for positive changes within the Trust and Fan Advisory Board, resulting in more effective practices, enhanced dialogue and greater understanding. It made us reflect on what we wanted our legacy to be as custodians of this fantastic club.

## Fans' golden share

We believe the creation of the fans' golden share – a single share in Lincoln City held by the Community Trust which allows supporters to have a say on key matters – will be a big part of this. We are incredibly proud to become only the third team in England to issue such a share and it means our fans will decide on developments such as a stadium move, the team's name, badge, colours or name of the Stacey West Stand.

This is by no means 'job done' and our board including the two fan-elected directors are constantly seeking ways to further improve our fan engagement.

## Next steps

Beyond our immediate environment, the Football Governance Bill also puts us on the right path to a fairer ecosystem. I use this term instead of 'pyramid' as this is how we view the game: we are all interdependent on one another, as opposed to purely bound by a hierarchy defined by league position.

There has to be a better way to distribute finances, ensure competitive balance and address the issues which exist within the financial model of our game.



# Changing the game

It is a powerful force for good, so why are so many women and girls left on the sidelines when it comes to reaping the benefits sport brings?

First published in CT Brief Issue 54



**Sue Anstiss**

Chief Executive Officer,  
Fearless Women

**I love sport. I've been lucky enough to work in the sports sector for the last 30 years, but as those years have passed, I've become increasingly concerned about the massive disparity for women.**

In recent years, the landscape for women's sport has finally begun to shift. We've seen significant increases in sponsorship, more media coverage for female athletes and women taking influential roles as board directors, editors, coaches, officials and CEOs.

There's no doubt that sport reflects and magnifies key issues in society. The momentous shift we've seen in women's sport since 2012 is in line with the 'fourth wave' of feminism and its focus on empowering women to ensure greater female representation in politics and business.

Attitudes around women have changed. From women's bodies to women's rights, powerful campaigns have seen women collaborate and mobilise to call out harassment and misogyny, demanding equal pay and equal opportunities with the likes of #metoo, No More Page 3, Time's Up, the Everyday Sexism Project and the Women's Marches.

## **Socially disruptive sport**

Yet despite this progress, female athletes still don't get equal funding or opportunities – even though they train as hard and make the same sacrifices as their male counterparts. In many sports, women receive less prize money, fewer professional contracts, lower sponsorship revenues and a tiny fraction of the media coverage. This is a huge missed opportunity.

Sport is something unique in our culture. It has enormous potential to be socially disruptive. It can unite and divide us like nothing else. Enormous national pride results from success at Olympic Games and World Cups, alongside the weekly divisive animosity of opposing football fans.

For many people sport is their 'go to' conversation starter. Before COVID-19 struck, millions of pounds of business was done every year over a round of golf or in a hospitality box at the cricket. All news bulletins end with sport, there are sports pages at the back of every newspaper, our government and big brands invest billions of pounds in sport every year.

## Power to inspire

Sport's powerful force for good has long been accepted. It was 20 years ago that Nelson Mandela said: "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in the way that little else does."

Sport has an extraordinary, unique capacity to challenge and change society. It brings joy and hope to millions. It can positively impact individuals, families, communities and nations – improving physical and mental health, reducing loneliness and building self-esteem and happiness. It's also a multi-billion-pound commercial industry that can transform lives, businesses, nations and regions.

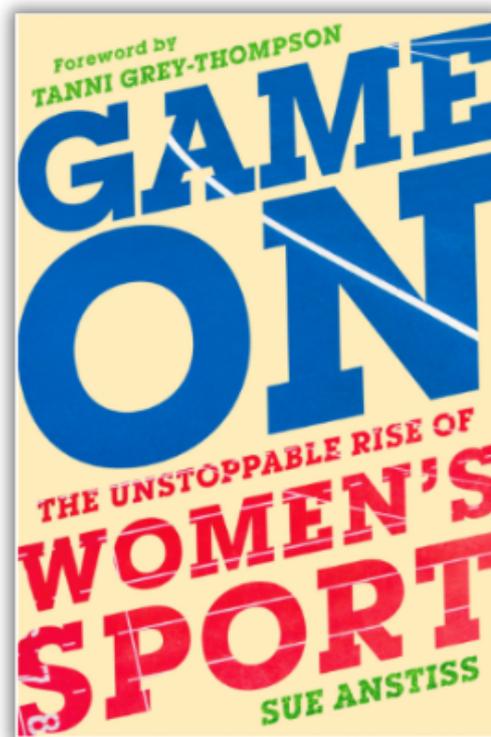
It can't be right then, that in 2021, half the population is still deprived equal access to something so culturally powerful. So many women and girls are missing out on all the joys and benefits sport offers.

## Game on

Game On: The Unstoppable Rise of Women's Sport was published in September 2021. Written during lockdown, it follows my personal journey to investigate why change for women's sport has taken so long, what's caused the positive change we're currently witnessing and how we can ensure the momentum continues.

I discover more about the history that led to women being excluded from sport for centuries, and how this still impacts society's attitudes today. I talk to the incredible game changers who have broken down stereotypes to challenge the status quo for women and girls everywhere.

I hope my book highlights that increased gender equality across sport is good for everyone and that equality in sport ultimately leads to equality in society. It's a manifesto for women's sport, providing a rallying cry to ensure the progress we are currently seeing is celebrated and maintained long term. Game on.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Sue Anstiss's book.

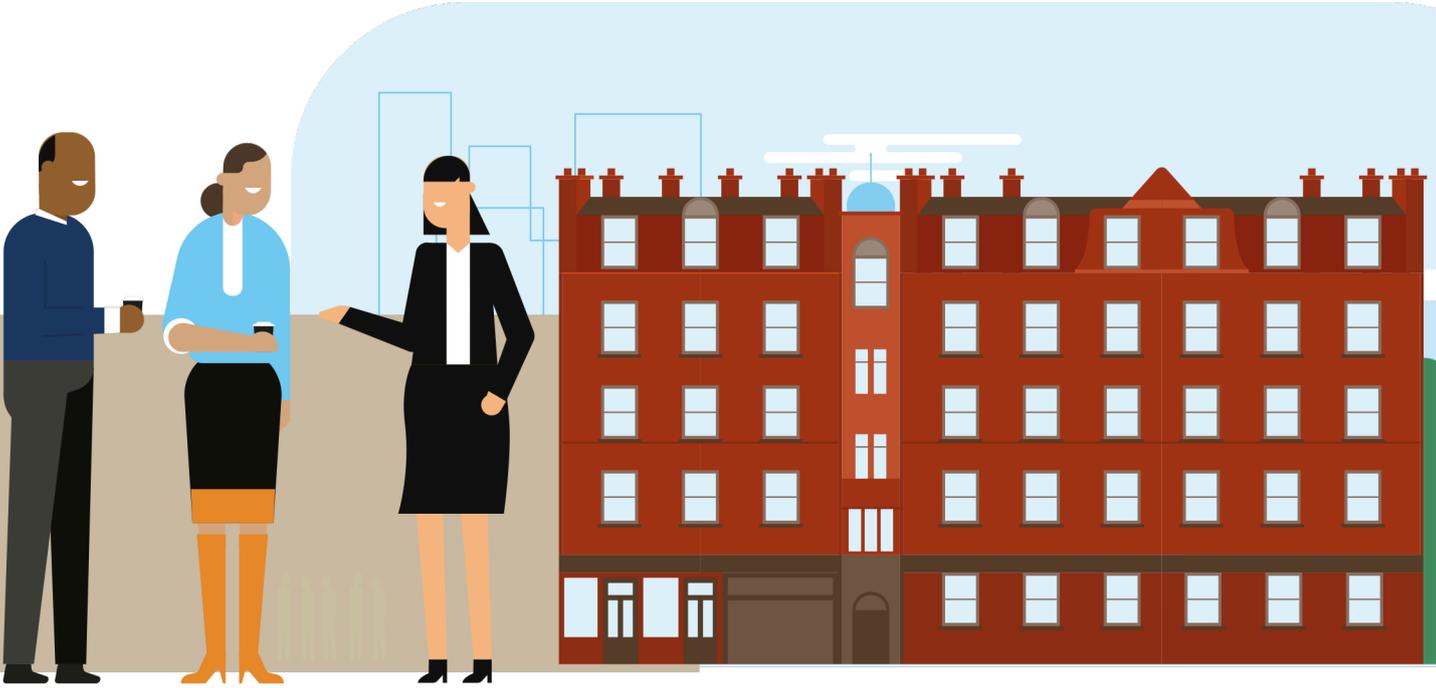
# Fair Game Code of Governance

Co-written by Campbell Tickell



Scan the QR code for the Fair Game Code of Governance for Football Clubs, co-written by Campbell Tickell, updated in 2025, and available to download.





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## English Football Regulation research: Campbell Tickell contributes

### **Nine pillars needed to make independent football regulator a success**

“The regulator must be transparent, it must have teeth, and it must be able to ensure a fair financial flow that rewards well-run clubs. It can be done. Our report provides the template. It is now up to our politicians to deliver, and ensure the game has the sustainability that well-run clubs, fans and communities desperately need.”

Niall Couper, CEO, Fair Game

## **A new comprehensive research paper from regulatory industry experts has identified nine key areas to ensure the new Independent Regulator for English Football (IREF) governs effectively and successfully.**

The paper, entitled English Football Regulation – Making it Work, has been released by Fair Game, a group of professional football clubs campaigning to improve football governance, and draws on the opinions of Fair Game’s 34 member clubs and the resources of its extensive network of academic and industry experts.

Fair Game’s paper puts forward a number of key recommendations for IREF, which is the cornerstone of the Football Governance Bill expected to be introduced to Parliament in early 2024.

The seven-page report recommends the regulator should have control of football’s financial flow, distributing broadcasting revenues in a system based on average divisional attendances and the Fair Game Index which identifies well-run clubs.

The regulator’s remit must also extend throughout the professional football pyramid, from the Premier League to the National League North and South.

The regulator should also have sufficient powers to enforce standards, including the power to commission in-depth audits, impose financial penalties, and even appoint members to a club’s board.

These recommendations, which should cover the entire football pyramid, fall under nine key pillars in the report.

### **Nine pillars for successful regulation**

The nine pillars are:

1. Independence
2. Governance
3. Accountability, transparency, appeals and complaints handling
4. Professionalism and expertise
5. Representativeness
6. Diversity and inclusion
7. Capability to act promptly
8. Authority and funding
9. Delegated authority



**Scan QR code to download  
English Football Regulation  
– Making it Work**

## Campbell Tickell contributes to new research paper on English Football Regulation

The research was pulled together by experts in a range of regulatory frameworks, including Phil Taylor, who has been an Audit and Risk Chair in the housing association sector for many years; Bart Huby, partner at LCP, with expertise in football analytics and in policy and regulation in the pensions, health and energy industries; and Greg Campbell, founding partner at Campbell Tickell, a management consultancy that has worked with over 25 different regulators in the charity, health, housing, legal services, sports and utility sectors.

The team also worked with experts who helped design sports regulatory frameworks.

Their findings were shared with Fair Game's Advisory Council, which is made up of representatives from clubs from the Premier League to the non-league game, to ensure the proposals can work in practice and deliver meaningful change.

### **Niall Couper, Fair Game CEO, said:**

“Football is on the cusp of a momentous change with the imminent introduction of an Independent Regulator. But if we are to avoid the mistakes that led to the demise of Bury and Macclesfield, and have left the likes of Sheffield Wednesday, Reading, Southend, Scunthorpe and so many others on the brink, then we must ensure we have the right regulator. The regulator must be transparent, it must have teeth, and it must be able to ensure a fair financial flow that rewards well-run clubs. It can be done. English Football Regulation – Making it Work provides the template. It is now up to our politicians to deliver and ensure the game has the sustainability that well-run clubs, fans and communities desperately need.”

### **Greg Campbell, Partner, Campbell Tickell added:**

“It's vital that the regulator looks at the sustainability of individual clubs and the overall football pyramid, while having the power to take action on both fronts. The regulator should hold clubs to account on financial sustainability, good governance, the Owners and Directors Test, and areas such as fan engagement, and diversity and inclusion. But it must also have the power to act if the distribution of finance across football undermines the health of our game. As well as the ability to impose sanctions, it should also reward good behaviour by well-run clubs, based on measures such as the Fair Game Index.”

# The Board and the Executive

Seven ways to build an effective working relationship between your board and executive team

First published in CT Brief Issue 75



**Sarah Loader**  
Consultant,  
Campbell Tickell

**For charities and other organisations that employ staff, the strength of the relationship between the board and senior members of the team is incredibly important. Here, we set out seven ways to ensure this relationship works well and ultimately supports a better outcome for the people your organisation helps.**

## 01

### **Share a commitment to the values and culture of the organisation.**

Encouraging a culture that is open and built on mutual respect helps ensure a safe space for staff to provide honest information, advice and feedback to the board. Staff should feel confident and able to say things as they are, including, and perhaps more so, when things are not going smoothly.



## 02

### **Recognise that you are 'one team' working for the benefit of those you are set up to help.**

Always remember that you are all working together towards your strategic aims. There should be a culture where constructive challenge from trustees is welcomed by staff to get to the best outcome for the charity, rather than making staff feel like they are being unfairly criticised.

## 03

### **Have clear communication channels inside and outside of meetings.**

Make it clear what the appropriate formal and informal communication channels are. It is important that there is good dialogue, but in an approved way.



## 04

### **Offer regular feedback.**

It is important that the board hears regularly how senior staff feel about their experience of the boardroom.

## 05

### **Define roles and responsibilities and the 'rules of engagement'.**

Trustees shouldn't delve into the detail or step on the toes of staff, and staff should bring the right information to the board to ensure they can make good decisions. Ensuring the difference between the roles of trustees and senior staff is clear helps ensure either group does not stray into the other's territory. Paying conscious collective attention every now and then to the 'rules of engagement', or to how the board and senior staff want to and will work together is very helpful.

## 06

### **Commit to learning and development.**

There is always more to learn and new and interesting approaches to consider. Sometimes joint development sessions can be helpful. Some organisations find that periodically exploring the different personality types across the board and senior team can be helpful to ensure understanding of the different ways individuals operate and learn.

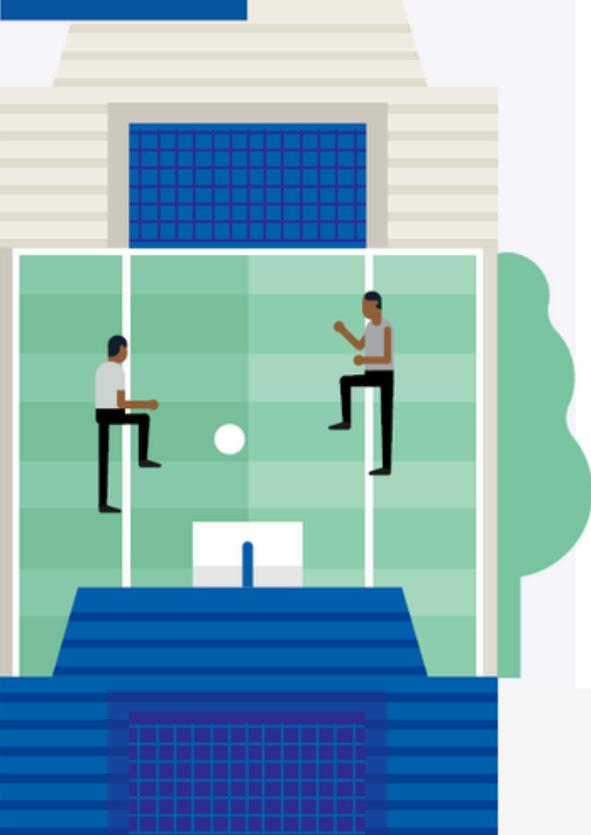
# 07

**Ensure the Chair, Chief Executive and Senior Independent Director (if there is one) have a clear role in managing and mediating the relationship.**

All three have responsibility to keep a watching brief on the quality and tone of the relationship and to take prompt action if it isn't quite as it should be.



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Co-authors of the Fair Game Code of Governance for Football Clubs.

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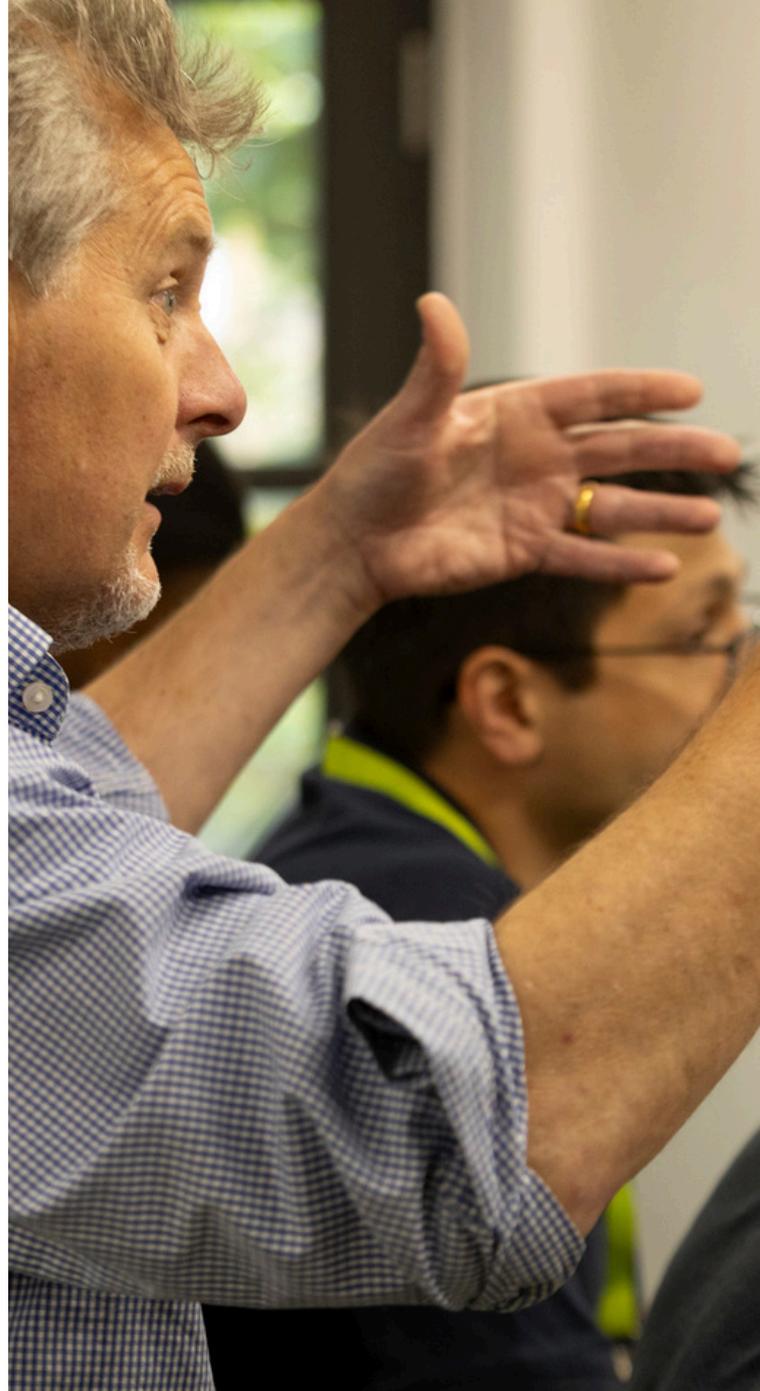
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# Contact us

 [greg.campbell@campbelltickell.com](mailto:greg.campbell@campbelltickell.com)

 Consultancy: +44 (0)20 8830 6777  
Recruitment: +44 (0)20 3434 0990

 [www.campbelltickell.com](http://www.campbelltickell.com)

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