



Loyalty Points Survey

Background

Chelsea FC's current Loyalty Point scheme was introduced in 2005. This followed a rise in ticket prices across the board and the Club's decision to end pricing differentiation for Premier League fixtures. This resulted in difficulty selling out home games against less 'popular' sides and so the Loyalty Scheme was introduced to solve both this problem and the one of distributing hard to come by tickets as success on the field increased. Initially, Loyalty Points were only available for home games, but the scheme has been expanded over the years to include both domestic and European away matches, varying points awarded to reflect difficulty /expense in attending these fixtures after input from supporters.

Survey results summary

What is loyalty?

Opinion is diverse! Several believe number of years supporting Chelsea, others that it is travelling long distances to attend home games. However, most are agreed that for the purpose of a Loyalty Point Scheme whose purpose is to provide access to tickets, the key indicator is **physical attendance** at games. The indicator most favoured by respondents as a means of differentiating loyalty is **distance travelled to away games** (44.5%), followed by the time of kick off (20.27%). However, several respondents believe that all fixtures are equal.

The majority favour **Loyalty Point accumulation on a long term basis**, rather than starting afresh each season. The most common remark was that this serves to 'even things out' whereas with the current system, a supporter could be disadvantaged because of temporary circumstances.

Loyalty or Marketing?

A clear majority of respondents believe that the **Loyalty Points Scheme should reward loyalty**, however there is widespread belief that the Club uses the scheme to sell hard to shift tickets. This is borne out by a small majority (53.6%) stating that loyalty points awarded for European Group Stage games should not be varied according to UEFA coefficient of the opposition.

Almost all agree that additional loyalty points should be awarded for early renewal of True Blue membership and Season Tickets. There are suggestions that additional points should be awarded for length of time someone has been a Season Ticket Holder or True Blue member. Most of those that commented were **opposed to the inducement of Loyalty Points to promote Club or sponsored merchandise or events**.

The majority of respondents agree that there is room for improvement in the current Loyalty Point scheme, with only a small minority believing it to be totally flawed (16.8%) and even fewer thinking it is completely fit for purpose (6.67%).

Loyalty point allocation and accumulation

Premier League fixtures

In general respondents favour the *status quo* with regard to allocation of loyalty points for home Premier League games. A similar picture emerges for the sale of home Premier League games by Loyalty Points: that is, **all of the current category AA games plus West Ham**.

The theme of distance travelled continues for award of loyalty points for away Premier League fixtures with all the London clubs attracting a single point and **the furthest away (Hull, Newcastle, Sunderland and Swansea) gaining the most**. In general, more are in favour of selling away fixtures on a loyalty point basis; London and 'category AA' clubs (Manchester City, Manchester United and Liverpool) gain the most votes.

It is noted by several respondents that the timing of matches both in terms of **KO time** and **when in the season** they are played also contribute to demand.

	Home (Median)	Sell by LP (%)	Away (Median)	Sell by LP (%)
Arsenal	1	73	1	76
Aston Villa	3	13	3	21
Cardiff City	3	13	3	25
Crystal Palace	3	19	1	41
Everton	3	16	3	24
Fulham	1	28	1	48
Hull	3	12	5	20
Liverpool	1	66	3	60
Manchester City	1	66	3	61
Manchester United	1	73	3	71
Newcastle	3	14	5	23
Norwich	3	12	3	21
Southampton	3	13	3	25
Stoke City	3	12	3	20
Sunderland	3	12	5	19
Swansea	3	13	5	21
Tottenham	1	70	1	75
West Bromwich Albion	3	12	3	20
West Ham	1	47	1	60

Cup competitions

The survey sought to establish a general rule of thumb for **domestic and European cup competitions** where, because the competition is unknown until the draw, it is difficult to establish the demand for attendance in advance.

For the award of Loyalty Points for all cup competitions, up to the semi-final stage, the majority favour 3 points for home fixtures and 5 for away.

The majority agreed that European knock out rounds (home and away), European final and domestic semi-finals and finals should be sold on a Loyalty Points basis.

Other fixtures

The majority of respondents think Loyalty Points should be awarded for attendance at Community Shield and other 'friendly' cup competitions like the UEFA Super Cup and World Club Championship. They do not think it is necessary to sell tickets for these on a Loyalty Points basis.

There is a 50/50 split between those for and against the award of Loyalty Points for Youth and Reserve fixtures.

Ticket Sales Club Policy

A majority of respondents fall in with the current Club policy with regard to publishing the number of loyalty points that will be awarded for each fixture at the beginning of the season together with those that will be sold on a loyalty point basis. Approximately 40% are in favour allowing the Club to vary this where circumstances dictate.

88% of respondents agree that the Club should give a breakdown of loyalty point ranges across the entire selling period (where tickets are sold on a loyalty point basis). This is different to the current situation where the Club calculate the next range of Loyalty Points required after each separate selling period.

Although many complain that there is exploitation of the Loyalty Point system with supporters buying tickets with no intention of going to games in order to accumulate points, the majority are not in favour of deducting loyalty points for non-attendance. There is no outright conclusion regarding who gets the points when tickets are resold, probably due to impracticality of achieving anything but allocating points to the seller.

35% agree that Season Ticket holders with an equal number of loyalty points should be given priority for tickets over members. The main reason cited is that Season Ticket holders have made a commitment at the start of the season and if they cannot attend a league game for some reason they still have to pay for their seat. 39% agree that priority should be determined irrespective of whether supporter is a Season Ticket holder or a True Blue member if they have an equal number of points. These proportions roughly coincide with the proportion of Season Ticket holders and True Blue members answering the survey so there is potentially a degree of self-interest here. However, **64% agree that tickets should not be sold to members with fewer loyalty points than Season Ticket holders.**

Differentiation between groups of supporters

Overseas and Official Supporter Clubs

The Club caters for overseas supporters who cannot realistically accumulate many Loyalty Points through their official Supporter Club schemes. For Supporter Clubs that have a designated number of individual season ticket holders or True Blue members, some tickets are set aside and a lower loyalty point threshold is required to obtain these. In the survey, the majority who said they were members of official supporter clubs agreed that it was easy to obtain tickets for Premier League, domestic and European cup games. However, 57% said it was difficult to obtain tickets for semi-finals and finals. From the comments it appears that distribution of tickets by the Club may be inequitable.

There was no appetite from the respondents for giving overseas supporters special treatment with regard to allocation of loyalty points or ticket sales.

Concessions

Only 18% of respondents qualified for concessionary tickets (Senior Citizens, disabled, juveniles or purchase concessions for someone else).

54% of all respondents agreed that where loyalty points are required to obtain tickets **a number of tickets should be set aside for concessions**. However, the majority were not in favour of lowering loyalty point threshold or awarding additional loyalty points for concessions.

Match attendance

52% of respondents said that they attended all or almost all Premier League home fixtures, but this dropped to around a third for domestic and European home cup ties. Around a quarter of respondents go to domestic away games 'frequently', dropping to 14% for European away games.

Demographics

A total of 472 people responded to the survey.

Survey respondents can be broken down into the following groups:

Season Ticket Holders (including Away season tickets)	45%
True Blue Members	38%
Members of Official Supporters Clubs (no ST or membership)	9%
Others	8%

After the first two questions, respondents who stated they were not Season Ticket holders, True Blue members nor members of an official Supporter Club were excluded. Of the remaining respondents, their location broke down as follows:

London and SE	60%
Rest of UK and Irish Republic	21%
Continental Europe	5%
North America	9%
Middle East and Africa	2%
Asia	2%
Australia/New Zealand	1%

Key issues

The following issues emerged from the survey response

Mixed message

The manner in which the Loyalty Scheme has evolved is such that the reasoning behind allocation of points is not clear to supporters. It has reached a point where midweek away final stage Cup games attract a high number of points yet are themselves sold on a loyalty point basis. Whereas before the scheme's purpose was clear – a marketing exercise to sell tickets for less popular games, Chelsea's regular participation in finals where there is a very meagre allocation has led to the Club responding to supporter requests to amend the scheme so that those that attend the most games are first in line for tickets.

The consequences of the dual purpose of the scheme gives rise to feelings among the support that system does not always reward matchgoers and their loyalty to the Club fairly. Supporters who have been coming to Stamford Bridge for decades find it difficult to comprehend how they are perceived as less loyal than someone who has the time and money to attend every European away and midweek cup game over the course of a season.

Over-complication

The number of points that can be gained for attendance at a game can currently vary between 1 and 8 points. This means that someone **attending four or even more games is potentially disadvantaged against someone who has attended just one**. In this way, the points totalled no longer necessarily reflect regular attendance. By the end of the season, where Final tickets may be on offer, this has usually evened itself out, but earlier on unlooked for complications occur such as the recent sale of Arsenal League Cup tickets. This gives rise to a suspicion that the Club manipulates points awarded and timing of sales in order to market less desirable fixtures.

Non-attendance

It is common practice for season ticket holders and members to sell on their tickets at face value if they find they are unable to attend a game. As well as Viagogo, this is done via unofficial exchanges and through friends and family. In the vast majority of cases there are genuine reasons for this, but there is a perception that a minority do this habitually in order to accrue Loyalty Points for the 'big' games. Similarly, there is hearsay that where a high number of loyalty points are on offer, people will purchase tickets with no intention of attending the game and may not even sell the ticket on, thereby reducing the potential support (the opposite of 'loyalty').

Supporter Clubs

Gold and Platinum official **Supporter Clubs are provided with an allocation of tickets** for most fixtures for sale to club members who are season ticket holders or True Blue members. The loyalty point threshold for these is significantly lower than that for other supporters. This is not necessarily an issue in itself, but it is only the officials of the other levels of Supporter Club who are provided with tickets and this has been a cause of complaint in the survey. Again, this is an example of the Club mixing marketing (expansion of supporter clubs to boost official fan numbers) with genuine club loyalty.

Members versus Season Ticket holders

A serious area of contention is the different treatment of True Blue members and Season Ticket holders on the Loyalty Scheme. Firstly, it is confusing that points for Premier League matches are loaded onto Season Ticket holders' points total at the start of the season. That **Season Ticket point totals do not reflect number of games attended at a point in time** gives rise to misunderstanding when tickets are sold on a loyalty point basis.

Many True Blue members who attend most games resent that Season Ticket holders are given priority over them for ticket sales, while season ticket holders are dismayed when the members' allocation for away games means that tickets are sold to members with far fewer loyalty points than they have accumulated to date.

Conclusions

The Loyalty Points survey is being analysed alongside information from other Premier League club Supporters' Trusts concerning their ticketing and loyalty policies. Armed with these, CST will be in a position to propose a model of 'best practice' that could be adopted by the Club. From the survey it would appear that the following provide areas for improvement:

- **Simplification** – ensure that points on offer genuinely reflect match attendance rather than conflating and inflating points totals for marketing purposes
- **Accumulation period** – taking a longer view of points accrued could help to even out incongruities and provide a better yardstick for loyalty
- **Sales process** – more information about likely points required to obtain tickets so travel arrangements can be made and friends can sit together
- **Key fixture identification** – more consultation with supporter groups/Fans' Forum

The Chelsea Supporters' Trust