

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Sport Governance, HC 812

Tuesday 13 December 2022

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Julie Elliot; Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Clive Efford; Damian Green; Dr Rupa Huq; Simon Jupp; John Nicolson; Jane Stevenson; Giles Watling.

In the absence of the Chair, Julie Elliot took the Chair.

Questions 728 - 789

Witnesses

I: George Dobell, cricket journalist; Lord Patel of Bradford OBE, Chair, Yorkshire County Cricket Club.

II: Jahid Ahmed, former Essex County Cricket Club cricketer; Azeem Rafiq, former Yorkshire County Cricket Club cricketer.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: George Dobell and Lord Patel of Bradford.

Q728 **Chair:** This is the sitting of the DCMS Select Committee. It is another hearing on racism in cricket. I welcome the witnesses today. Here we have George Dobell, the chief correspondent of *The Cricketer*, and we have Lord Kamlesh Patel, who is with us via Zoom, who is the chair of Yorkshire County Cricket Club. Welcome to you both. You are missing the very cold weather here, Lord Patel. You are in the right place.

Can I ask for any declarations of interests before we start?

Kevin Brennan: I was invited, and attended, the game of The Hundred at the invitation of Glamorgan County Cricket Club last summer.

Jane Stevenson: Yes, I attended a game of The Hundred as a guest of the England and Wales Cricket Board this year.

Q729 **Chair:** Lovely, we shall start. Lord Patel, it is over a year since we held our first hearing in this inquiry. Could you briefly give us an overview of what has happened in the intervening period and where you think we are now, please?

Lord Patel of Bradford: Thank you, Chair. Forgive me if I start a coughing fit in the middle of this; I apologise in advance.

It has been a sobering year; it has made me think about lots of things. I will set in two minutes the context of me taking on this role on 5 November last year. There was a sense of urgency and time. After taking on the role—and I did turn it down twice but felt I did need to take the role on—I realised very quickly, at about 10 to 12 weeks, the need to turn around the views of a significant number of stakeholders, otherwise the club would have been serious trouble. For example, the majority of our sponsors had left and the few remaining were rapidly haemorrhaging. The ECB had suspended all major and international matches, which meant no income, which meant a very bleak future of anything for Yorkshire at the time.

Every politician, rightly so, was demanding answers to some very tough questions and wanting to see a dramatic change before we were given cricket back. Every newspaper, again rightly so, had us on the front pages for the wrong reasons. The Equality and Human Rights Commission, the regulator of the equality and human rights law in our country, was reviewing the documentation and considering whether an unlawful act had taken place at the club.

I was faced with a very fractured staff team. Some were bewildered, some were shocked and some were in complete denial that racism or discrimination had taken place at the club. There were a small group of previous leaders who believed that nothing had ever happened on their watch, and were determined to block many changes.



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Therefore, we had to put together a comprehensive, reliable and realistic plan that met the important targets that were set by the ECB for this, 10 initial criteria that moved to 13 later. They were common issues like governance, finance, safeguarding, appointment of a new and independent board, the production of a localised EDI plan, and commissioning two reviews, one on governance and one on inclusivity. We had about eight weeks to make sure that we delivered answers to some strong questions and criteria to have the sanctions lifted.

The ECB obviously was not the only regulator scrutinising us, as in December the Equality and Human Rights Commission announced, having reviewed the documentation, that it considered it likely that an unlawful act had taken place at the Yorkshire County Cricket Club. However—and I quote from memory—given its confidence that the new management of the club was taken appropriate steps to deal with past failures, including the departure of the entire previous management team, it decided to monitor the club but reserved the right to take action if all the plans that we said that we were going to do were not being implementing.

Therefore, we had a wholesale change. In the first couple of weeks, one of the first things I did was set up a telephone helpline. This was an independent line set up and managed completely by Littleton Chambers, with Mo Sethi, KC, who was an expert in discrimination law in elite sport. I can give you more detail on that as we go along.

We introduced new policies and procedures in terms of recruitment. We used those policies and procedures and put a diverse interviewing panel together to employ a managing director of cricket, a whole new coaching squad, a whole new high-performance team that looked after the young people in the county pathway, that was underpinned by an excellent medical team. Then we went on to recruit a brand new board. That was a tough ask to do that in six weeks and the head-hunters said to me that it was not going to be realistic to appoint six new people. I am pleased to say that with some of the actions that we took and some of the journey that we were going on, we had over 600 enquiries for those six posts, with over 270 applications.

We appointed six individuals, who I firmly believe have an extremely impressive skill mix and reflect the population we serve in terms of the communities we serve. We have appointed eight independent members for the first time ever, two members from the membership. Out of those 10 people, four are women. We represent the majority of faiths, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism. We got a skill mix that was set for us by the Good Governance Institute.

We put those in place. Four of those board members are going to be board champions. For example, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson is leading the work around women, girls and disabled people. We have a board champion for our very large south Asian communities and a board



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champion for less well-off families. We have decided on those four areas because it was not just about tackling racism, it was about tackling a broader view.

We have developed an EDI plan with a slight difference. It is based on human rights values of safety, fairness, equality, dignity and respect and we have made those come alive among those four areas.

We introduced a zero tolerance policy across the piece. That was reflected in all the matches that were played, not only at Headingley, but at grounds at Scarborough and York. We introduced a respect campaign where people could report instances of discrimination, using a text message. We had a police presence at matches, we had an increased steward presence and new training. We increased the volunteers that came there. We made massive changes—and I can talk about this later—in our pathways, how young people come into the system, how they play their games.

We have opened not just the cricket ground but our hospitality venues to the community in Yorkshire for the first time ever. We celebrated for the first time ever, in 160 years, Eid, we celebrated Diwali, we raised money for the Pakistan flood victims, and in two or three days we are having a Christmas carol event on the pitch. These were represented by people of all faiths and no faiths. It was important from across the piece.

Therefore, the doors have opened up. As a result of some of those doors opening up and us showing this strong leadership, we have had the majority of sponsors return but we have also had new sponsors come to Yorkshire. Some of the new sponsors have helped us with the pathways programme for new children coming into the piece.

Chair: That is a wide-ranging update, Lord Patel, thank you.

Q730 **Kevin Brennan:** Welcome to both our witnesses. Lord Patel, do you have any regrets about the way you handled the removal of Kunwar Bansil and his colleagues?

Lord Patel of Bradford: Kunwar Bansil was not employed by Yorkshire; he was employed by Pavilion Physiotherapy. That was a commercial contract that we ended that we are still in litigation with. It was a difficult position where you have a young man who had been racially bullied, and this was factually found by a couple of investigations—

Chair: Can I just say, Lord Patel, if it is still in the legal process you should not go into the detail of the case.

Lord Patel of Bradford: It is in the legal process. I was not intending to go into the case but just to say that it was a very difficult situation but, no, I do not regret having taken the actions.

Kevin Brennan: Mr Dobell, what do you make of the journalism of *The Yorkshire Post* all around this case? Do you think that they have been fair



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in airing both sides of the debate or would you have any criticisms?

George Dobell: Good morning. May I answer the question that you put to Kamlesh first?

Kevin Brennan: Of course, as long as we steer clear of legal proceedings.

George Dobell: Sure. In terms of the people who were sacked or let go for writing the letter, it is important that the context of that is understood. At the time that letter was written, we know that a young man, a young player, had been racially bullied to the point where he almost committed suicide. That is not particularly disputed. We know that several players have admitted using racist language, and we know that the club has admitted not following its procedures and processes. Therefore, we know the club admits and individuals admit that he was racially bullied.

That letter, by a group of people, stated, "We won't accept any sanction or censure—any sanction or censure—and instead we should counterattack against a person who was bullied to the point of suicide". In that context, I find it incredible that anyone thinks that they should not have been sacked.

Q731 **Kevin Brennan:** On my question about the journalism of *The Yorkshire Post*, what would you say about that in relation to all of this?

George Dobell: It has been extremely disappointing. It has been the voice of the racist. It has provided the voice for the racist. It has intimidated and bullied Kamlesh; it has intimidated and bullied Azeem. The fact of the matter is that when you talk about the progress made, Azeem, his sister Amna, who also worked at the club, and his family have been forced to go and live abroad by intimidation and bullying. Does that sound like progress? If you ask him, which I am sure you will in an hour's time, he will tell you the No. 1 reason was *The Yorkshire Post*. *The Yorkshire Post* had a campaign to discredit and intimidate.

The problem is that these words have consequences. I had dinner with Azeem last night—Azeem and his three security guards. Why is that necessary? Because of the consequences of the words, most of the words, that come from *The Yorkshire Post*. It has made no attempt to try to understand. It has called Kamlesh immoral, among other things. Factually, it has been inaccurate and I could give you countless examples.

It does not matter what I think because I am on the other side of the argument, but Sporting Equals, the arm of Sport England, released a statement decrying it for victim blaming and institutional journalism. Kick It Out has given us a statement that talks about client journalism.

Kevin Brennan: When you said institutional journalism, did you mean institutional racism?



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George Dobell: Institutional racism, I am sorry, I did.

Q732 **Kevin Brennan:** You are a very experienced journalist, and these are very strong words that you are issuing about fellow members of your trade. Do you have any idea what their motivation might be to pursue this kind of campaign?

George Dobell: I fear that they think that they are catering for their market. I would like to think that they have their market wrong. I like to think that the people in Yorkshire are better than that. To be fair, every time there has been a vote at Yorkshire, Kamlesh has carried the day quite comfortably, so I think that they have it wrong. On a basic level, I feel a little bit sorry for the individual cricket journalist. I have been friends with him and he has been very good at his job for a long time. I think that he is out of his depth.

Kevin Brennan: For the record, what is his name?

George Dobell: Do you want me to name him? That seems a bit unfair and I would be uncomfortable doing that. I think that he has been fed information by people who are more cynical and are much more closely involved and understand what is happening. They have drip-fed him information and he has regurgitated it into the paper. His editor has to take more responsibility. His editor is the one who is meant to say, "What's going on here?"

As I say, it is not just me—Sporting Equals, Kick It Out. DCMS put out a statement about a year ago talking about *The Yorkshire Post*. You have asked me my views and I have told you, but it is not just me.

Q733 **Kevin Brennan:** Lord Patel, what has been the personal effect on you of *The Yorkshire Post* journalism?

Lord Patel of Bradford: Very significant, because we are working extremely hard. It is not just about me; it is the staff as well. We are going somewhere and then you get, almost daily at times, if not weekly, an article that just saps everybody's energy and morale. Every time an article appears, something triggers in somebody somewhere. The majority of Yorkshire people have been amazing. If I may, I can read you a couple of letters to give you a sense of what it means.

Kevin Brennan: If you could briefly, just excerpts.

Lord Patel of Bradford: Just quickly, this letter was received not from a Yorkshire person but a few days after I arrived. It gives you a sense of the other side of the argument. "Dear Chairman, whoever it is at the moment. I am a Lancastrian and I am not into cricket, but that is by the way. I have been reading in the press about all the ballyhoo of a 'P', alleging whatever he did when he played for Yorkshire about 10 years ago. I think this county has gone crazy. I can't remember what I have said 10 years ago but all this has been let loose about alleged remarks, et cetera, while playing with teammates. Now he's walked off with



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£200,000, not bad for a day's work. All that must have to come from Yorkshire County Cricket Club. Then I think I read they are £50 million in debt. Now someone has put this guy, surname Patel, in charge to sort things out. Another coon. No offence but it's in the Oxford Dictionary. Seems he's an Indian, and Indians and Ps can't stand each other, so he'll be taking Yorkshire County Cricket Club to the cleaners, I believe. I like a whisky—after reading all this about remarks 10 years ago has made me take to the bottle. It's all so ridiculous, all out of proportion. If you can't call somebody a P who is a P, then what can you call them?"

We have had members saying—

Q734 **Kevin Brennan:** Is that an example of the other correspondence that you have received?

Lord Patel of Bradford: Yes, I have a bag full of that stuff. Every time *The Yorkshire Post* puts an article in, social media would happen or letters like this would happen, people calling me "public sector jobsworth", "I only got the job because I am Asian", "I am immoral"—complaints about a whole host of stuff.

I can counter that with the thousands of Yorkshire people who have been supportive, but it does impact. It impacts on you personally, it impacts on your family and it impacts on the people who work with me.

Q735 **Kevin Brennan:** I need to ask you one or two more questions. Are you still in contact with Colin Graves?

Lord Patel of Bradford: No. I had a long-term relationship with Colin when I was on the ECB and worked very closely with him. I felt very saddened that throughout this process we have—I do not know if falling out is the word or not. I took a course of action and he clearly did not agree with me.

We had a problem because I was clearly told that Colin could not be associated with governance of this club by the ECB. Colin heard differently, applied to be a member of the board, was unsuccessful through the interview process and unfortunately a number of people—Robin Smith, Tony Vann, Martin Butterworld and others—have taken it upon themselves to wage a campaign, whether it is PR or whether it is procedural roadblocks, that have been at incalculable costs.

Q736 **Kevin Brennan:** Has any part of that campaign involved lobbying by MPs on behalf of Colin Graves?

Lord Patel of Bradford: I contacted all Yorkshire MPs because I felt that it was my duty to do so. Many got in touch with me, and MPs outside of Yorkshire as well. Nigel Adams was in touch with me, but we never managed to meet. I know that he was a big supporter of Yorkshire. I met him with Colin many years ago.

Kevin Brennan: Is there anyone specifically who has been pressing Colin



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Graves's case, that you are aware of?

Lord Patel of Bradford: Not with me, no.

Q737 **Clive Efford:** Can I start with you, George? One of the things that has frequently been said to me by reporters—too frequently—is that a lot of the allegations that were made here in this Committee were uncorroborated. They were not corroborated and were not backed up by any other evidence other than Azeem's personal statements. What is your reaction to that?

George Dobell: It is factually inaccurate, but it is understandable. It is worth saying "thank you" to DCMS, because without this Committee a year ago, when Azeem got to speak and you got to speak to him, it had felt for the couple of years that we were just shouting into the wilderness. It did not feel like the game was listening. To put it into perspective, it is 63 months since Adil Rashid and Azeem Rafiq first made their complaints of racism at Yorkshire—63 months. All that has happened is that neither of them have played a first-class game for the county again and we are still waiting for hearings.

There have been various reports; there have been lots of reports. There has been an employment tribunal, at which racism was admitted by various people, including players at Yorkshire. There has been the Squire Patton Boggs report, which has only ever been leaked—I think that you have it but huge extracts of it have not been seen—and there have been various inquiries by other people and there are the ECB hearings. However, for various reasons they have not happened, probably because the CDC, the Cricket Disciplinary Commission, is not fit for purpose. That is one of the things that most reasonable people would conclude after this process. As I say, it has been 63 months. However, in terms of the specific allegations that Azeem made, every one of them that has been investigated has been proven. I am trying to think of—

Clive Efford: Let me help you, because I have a list here—Matthew Hoggard apologised; corroboration of former players and coaches of how they were treated; the apology that came after the Patton Boggs report; witnesses who witnessed the comments that were made by Michael Vaughan; there was the person—

George Dobell: It is worth saying that there were four Asian players in that side. Three of them have given statements to say that they heard Michael Vaughan make those comments. It should not be all about Michael Vaughan, to be fair.

Clive Efford: Definitely not, it should not all be about Azeem either.

George Dobell: The fourth has now said that they heard someone say it, but they do not think that it was Michael Vaughan. All four heard the comment.

Clive Efford: Then there is the apology from David Lloyd and one from



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Gary Balance, and the UK equality watchdog that said Yorkshire racism was likely to have been unlawful. All of that independently verified a wide range of allegations that Azeem made here and in other places, yet what we seem to be getting from a section of the media—and *The Yorkshire Post* is foremost in that—is a constant refrain that it is just Azeem on his own.

George Dobell: That is absolutely right that they try to suggest that it was just Azeem, to minimise the extent of the problem. However, this is what institutional racism looks like. It is when the systems of power stand shoulder to shoulder to prevent change, to prevent justice. The systems of power include the media, absolutely they do.

Q738 **Clive Efford:** How do you think the cricket establishment has stood up over the last years?

George Dobell: It has not. I am encouraged; most of the time I am quite encouraged. It feels like we have made a bit of progress. I believe in Kamlesh, I believe in the new management of the ECB and it is a substantial upgrade. There are good people and good things happening.

However, the fact is that one of the signatories of that letter that Kamlesh was talking about earlier is in the English dressing room now. Does that suggest that they have taken it seriously? Does that suggest that the issue is taken seriously? There is a culture of secrecy, or camaraderie, perhaps, or chumocracy, where well-known people are not criticised by other well-known people because no one wants to dare rock the boat in the way that Azeem has. Look what has happened to Azeem. Look at what happens to whistleblowers in cricket. He has had to leave the country had had round-the-clock police protection.

I can sort of understand it, but 63 months in, we have not had a hearing. Therefore, when people complain about trial by media, they have a point, but without the media and without DCMS, to be fair, nothing would have happened. If that Squire Patton Boggs report had not been leaked, everything would have gone back to normal at Yorkshire. Everything would have carried on as normal.

Q739 **Clive Efford:** Thank you very much. Kamlesh, you have come under a lot of personal attack in your role as the chair of the board at Yorkshire. Do you feel that you have had enough support from the cricketing establishment in what you are seeking to achieve?

Lord Patel of Bradford: It is a difficult question to answer. On a personal level, there have been a couple of individuals, the likes of Martin Darlow who was on the board, who challenged but then supported. There was an executive or two who were there to support. However, as George has eloquently said, every time there is an issue, every time people needed to stand up and support you, they did not.

That was sad because I was part of the ECB for five and a half years. I was there working with these individuals, but if I was attacked in the



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press or if cricket leaders or previous cricket leaders had made unsubstantiated statements, nothing was done. I asked in writing, and I have e-mail after e-mail and letter after letter saying, "You asked me to do this, I've done this, please support me" and I have had no response to any of those letters or e-mails. Therefore, it was very distressing.

Like George, I am looking forward to the new leadership. I hope that Richard Thompson—the few meetings that I have had him seem positive and it feels like it is going forward, but in these last 12 months the answer has to be no.

Q740 Clive Efford: Do you think that they get it? You have read out examples of racial abuse that you get every time there is an article printed. Do you think that they understand the pressure that you are under and the pushback that you are standing up to?

Lord Patel of Bradford: There is a bit of a dichotomy. I think that if I was an individual who was not a Member of the House of Lords, who had not had any leadership experience in cricket or worked in lots of different areas, you would just walk away. I do not know where Azeem gets the strength to carry on. You would just run because people do not understand this. Because of the position I have, they think, "Well, he can handle it."

In the public eye, just like you, Clive, and everybody else, we get flak. That is what we expect to do. I have worked in the prison service, I have worked in the mental health sector, I have worked with drug users, so you expect a certain amount of flak. This is relentless and this is from an area where you do not expect it. This is sport, for god's sake. This is something that we enjoy, we love, and it brings people together. This group of individuals, this group who have made a very concerted attack, I do not think that people do understand.

I do not think that the ECB has got it. It is reacting to the headlines where it is said, "You haven't done enough for this area," "Yes, we'll do something, then," "You haven't done enough with women and girls," "Yes, we'll do something, then." It is not a wholesale systematic approach to say that we must have a root and branch review. We have to look at the whole culture of cricket and get under the skin and really have a look at this.

My understanding with the ICEC report is that over 4,000 people that have come to it. That says something. That is not just Yorkshire, that is something sadly wrong if people have had to wait for an independent inquiry to come along and 4,000 people had to come out to say something.

Q741 Clive Efford: Do we have the right structure in running cricket? Is it time for an independent regulator? It has been called for in football. Do we need something similar?



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Lord Patel of Bradford: I have been the regulator of two Government bodies. I was chair of two, the Mental Health Act Commission and Social Work England. I have been a member of three other regulators, so I understand regulation quite well. In an ideal world an independent regulator would be excellent. I suppose that if I am realistic, the time that it would take to put in primary legislation, to set up a system, we would end up navel-gazing for years to come about an independent regulator.

However, should the CDC and the ECB change? Absolutely. Having gone through this process—I could talk for a long time on this—the regulatory approach that the ECB take with the CDC is completely flawed.

George Dobell: May I give you a quick example of an investigation? A year or so ago, or 13 months ago, I did a piece with Maurice Chambers, who was a cricketer of African Caribbean origin—a black cricketer. He played with Essex and Northants, among others. He had examples of racism at both clubs. Essex put together an inquiry, which is ongoing but it has done the right thing. He messaged me on the anniversary of the piece and said—this will only take 30 seconds or so—“I haven’t heard anything from them. I’m starting to think they’re trying to brush it under the rug. I haven’t heard anything from Northants at all”.

I forwarded the message to the chair of Northants and I said, “Morning, I received this from Maurice Chambers this morning. Surely, surely, Northants have tried to investigate and speak to him.” They replied, “Hi, George. Yes, my CEO messaged Maurice very soon after the article. Winter well.” I replied, “Maurice says you didn’t. He says he’s had no contact and there’s been no investigation”. He replies, “I checked with Ray this morning and he has the WhatsApp message on his telephone, so not sure why it wasn’t received. However, if he wants Ray to speak/contact him again, very happy to do so.” I reply, “Forgive me for saying, but one WhatsApp message, which hasn’t been answered, doesn’t sound like an especially concerted effort to clean up racism, does it?” I then passed on his email address. Maurice, by the way, is another person who has moved abroad because he did not think there was opportunity here and he was traumatised by what he has been through. Another person forced out of the country basically.

Azeem’s family came to the country as refugees. It is shameful that they have been spat out again in the way that has happened, but that is an investigation from Northants County Cricket Club. Meanwhile, the player who he alleges used the “N” word to him has been given a long-term, very lucrative contract. The game is not serious and the only thing that will make them change is media pressure and you people. They have had their opportunity for 63 months.

Q742 **John Nicolson:** Thank you very much indeed for coming in. Mr Dobell, the ECB has set up a whistleblower helpline. I am very keen on whistleblowers, as a journalist in my previous profession. We often get



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good information sent to us here directly as Members, knowing that we will always keep people's confidences when they write to us.

What do you think that ECB has done with any information that it has been given? To what extent do you think that it can protect those who in good faith tried to whistleblow in order to expose some of the dreadful stuff that we have seen?

George Dobell: That is a brilliantly pertinent question. It is interesting that all these hotlines have been set up, but no one can provide one example of an individual who has been brought to justice through any of these hotlines. The only cases that are ever going to be heard are the ones that have been brought to attention by the media.

Why is that? I will hypothesise an answer. A lot of people, a lot of players, coaches, umpires, administrative staff, have phoned me in the last couple of years over these issues, and I mean a lot of people. Very few of them have wanted to go public. Partly they saw what happened to Azeem in particular, where there is a concerted attempt to discredit him and just make up stories about him. I am not going to pretend that he, like any of us, is perfect, but most of the stories that in the media at the moment are just lies and will demonstrably be proved to be so.

Q743 **John Nicolson:** Can you give me an example?

George Dobell: Yes, I can. There was a story—it may not be the most serious but it is one of the most absurd—that he supposedly had taken money from Sport England and had not paid it back and had not run the project. I got told this fairly early on and I investigated it. Sport England produced a statement that said, "This is nonsense. There was going to be a scheme, it didn't run, so he refunded the money and we've got no problem."

Q744 **John Nicolson:** That is a libel. Often people will write to you on Twitter and elsewhere to ask you why you do not sue. I get that quite a lot. Of course, the answer is that you need a lot of money to sue. Around this table none of us, and none of you sitting there watching today have the kind of money necessary to sue for libel.

George Dobell: I do not know about that but it is more—

John Nicolson: It is enormously expensive.

George Dobell: Of course it is, and a waste of time and energy, which is part of the thing. They try to drain you. Kamlesh is enormously drained. He has done fantastic work, but it has taken a lot out of him. He has told you about his experience in prisons and mental health and stuff, yet he is finding this the most difficult thing he has done. It is a cricket club; it should not be that way.

However, some of these things are written quite intelligently, such as that Sport England thing. Thirty paragraphs of, "What a disgrace this guy is.



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He's taken this money and hasn't set up the scheme." Then you get the statement at the end. If you bother to read the 32 paragraphs, you will find out that this is not a story at all, but the headline is pretty bad. Therefore, it is more cynical and orchestrated than that.

To go back to the whistleblowing thing, the counties asked players to come and talk to them. Sometimes they did the right thing, sometimes they said, "Look, we're really sorry, we want to make things right. Let's get you involved in the pathways, the coaching, or let's even pay you off." That has happened on a few occasions and that is fine. My worry is that they are doing it to keep it in-house, to stop people going to the media so much. Azeem had been offered a payoff before but it was always contingent upon a non-disclosure agreement, but we need to talk about it.

Q745 John Nicolson: You mentioned, and it was shocking, that when you had dinner with Azeem last night he had three bodyguards to protect him. What a way to live. You also highlighted the explosive testimony that we got just a year ago. Has anybody been held to account, anybody at all, since that testimony?

George Dobell: Not really. There is the court of social justice, if you like, but no. Cricket disciplinary proceedings sort of drag on. However, I would be reasonably confident that they are trying to make it so unpleasant and difficult for Azeem that he quits and they can say, "Oh no."

Q746 John Nicolson: We are doing our very best on this Committee to make sure that that does not happen.

Let's look at the collapse in representation that we have seen. Only 1% of professional cricketers now are of Afro-Caribbean heritage. In the 1990s a third of the English team were. While 30% of those playing cricket are Asian, only 3% make it into the leagues itself. You would have hoped that one result of this enormous controversy would be that it would have encouraged and allowed those from BAME communities to enter the sport, because the people responsible for the sport would have been doing everything possible to try to address some of the damage by encouraging them in. In fact, the opposite has happened.

George Dobell: You would think so, would you not? Again the question is very pertinent.

One of the reasons that I am optimistic—I may not sound it but I am—is the solutions are at hand. The solutions are at hand. There is a scheme called the South Asian Cricket Academy, which has been funded mainly by Birmingham City University. It has cost £55,000 to run through this year and it has taken people who have missed out on professional contracts and given them specific training. I think five of them—three players and two coaches—have now moved back into the professional game on full-time professional contracts. It has shown what could be done. As I say, it has cost £55,000—nothing to do with the ECB. That is



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£5,000 less than Tom Harrison paid consultants before coming to speak to you, is it not, to have advice? All he did was sit in front of you and sweat.

Therefore, they could have the solutions—what time is it—by noon. For £60,000 they could have this scheme and they could improve the representation of Asian players in county cricket within weeks. However, there is not the will. Why not? Probably because there are individuals at the ECB who think that it would affect their position and there has not been the power to say that it does not matter, there are more important things at hand.

There is another example. When cricket had its issues with match fixing and doping, entirely new codes of conduct were written, which was sensible because people were able to get out of things in loopholes and say, “I didn’t understand I wasn’t allowed to do this.” Therefore, the game has to write a code of conduct for cricket and for inclusion, and discrimination in particular. It has done that. A firm of lawyers, Mayer Brown, did it pro bono and provided it to the PCA, the union. The game has not even had to pay for it, and the ECB is reluctant to adopt it. Why? Because it wants it to be nebulous, it wants it to be stretchy, it does not want to be compelled to act.

Q747 John Nicolson: Thank you. Lord Patel, can I ask you the same question? To repeat the figures so that everybody has them, only 1% of professional cricketers now are of Afro-Caribbean heritage. In the 1990s a third were. While 30% of those playing cricket at the moment in England are of Asian extraction, only 3% make it into the professional leagues. Why have the cricketing authorities failed so dismally to try to address the problem of racism in cricket? You would have thought, after the enormous controversy, that they would have done everything possible to stretch out to minority communities and to make sure that they get better representation.

Lord Patel of Bradford: That is an important question. In the public sector, we are usually trying to attract black or Asian people through the service, through the doors. Cricket has never had that problem. Like you said, 35% of all recreational players in cricket are of south Asian descent. They are knocking down the doors. However, they come to the shop window, some look inside, some pop in, walk around and cannot buy anything because it is not for them. Some just leave and never come back. We have done lots of things and lots of initiatives but nothing systematic.

If I give you an example of how it has changed fundamentally at Yorkshire, in terms of the pathways, 2% of people coming through the system in the county age groups were from south Asian backgrounds or diverse backgrounds. We have taken away all costs. This is not just about south Asian communities; this is about those who are less well-off and cannot afford it. We have provided free coaching, we have stopped private one-to-one coaching with coaches, we have introduced a non-



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biased assessment process with all the observations for anybody to come—

Q748 **John Nicolson:** Sorry, if you do not mind, just summarise for people who do not follow cricket closely why it is not working. Why is the representation of minority people so scandalously scant in the professional game?

Lord Patel of Bradford: At Yorkshire it is working. We have gone from 2% to a third of young people in the system now, in six months. We have managed to make it work, but there was a will to do it and it was expensive. That is going to cost us near on £500,000 to ensure that those children have access to free coaching and kit.

John Nicolson: Thank you, Lord Patel.

Q749 **Dr Rupa Huq:** We are lucky to have two of the good guys. In a way, we know that you get the argument and you are on side. I was not on the Committee last year when the original testimony came out. However, at the highest level all sorts of people—Sajid Javid, for example—said that heads should roll if the ECB does not fix it and is not fit for purpose. Everyone is saying the same thing, that it has been disappointingly slow progress. Apart from Lord Patel's appointment, not a lot seems to have changed. Do you think that the lack of ethnic diversity among chairs and chief executives leads to these problems, that things flow from there?

George Dobell: To go back to the previous question, there is a line in "The Simpsons" that applies to cricket. Above the snooty shopping centre in Springfield it says, "Our prices discriminate because we can't". That is what cricket does. Cricket forces people out.

A lot of this is about class and finances as much as it is about colour. If you did a Venn diagram, there would be an awful lot of crossover there. I am probably not qualified to tell you which is which and where it distinguishes. It is not just at chief executive level. If we look at the first-class counties of the MCC, there are 19 chief executives, 18 are men, one is a woman—all of them are white.

The problem is that beyond that it goes so much further in the game. There is not enough leadership of people of colour at coaching level either. There has been a bit of recognition that this has to change but it is very slow. What that has meant is that people who have struggled previously or might have felt that they were not understood or even been discriminated against in more obvious ways have not necessarily felt that there was anyone who they could go to or who would understand.

We are always tinkering around the edges. We are always talking about schemes but it has to be a cultural change. At this stage, I think that anyone who does not realise the extent of the problem is part of the problem.

Q750 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Lord Patel, would you agree with that? There is a class



issue in that it seems a thing of village greens and is elitist. It is not the people's game in the way that football is. You cannot imagine taking the knee in cricket, can you?

Lord Patel of Bradford: There is a real class issue. This is not just about Asian communities or African Caribbean communities; it is a class issue. We have proved that if you can remove some of those barriers, it does work.

Leadership is important. We cannot get away from the fact that you need to have good leadership and strong leadership, but my anxiety about saying that Yorkshire has an Asian chair so it is okay—that does not work. Or we employ two or three people. They become the identified people who have to do it. This is not about that, this is about a full cultural shift, an acknowledgement that even for somebody with the backing that I have, it is hard work. This is not something that just because I am black it will sort things out.

Ironically, going back to the last question about the pathways, our biggest success is that seeing young children of all backgrounds coming through the system was led by my deputy chair, who is a white guy. It is because of his skillset. He is strategic, he thinks, he coaches, he supports the staff and he has driven this thing. It has had the biggest impact on inequality in Yorkshire cricket. Therefore, it is about the full skillset, it is about looking under the skin in terms of culture, it is about a whole-system approach, not just tinkering at the edges. We have had more children from state schools coming through now, not private schools anymore, so it is that whole piece.

We had an Asian woman who was a chair at Leicester. She did not survive. We have to understand, and the governing body has to understand, that if you want to bring people in you have to support them, more than just kind words. You have to be there when you are attacked wholesale, in terms of dramatic change.

We have had massive upheaval at Yorkshire. We have had to change it. We have blown things up and reset it again. That is not what is going to happen. It is going to be a gradual change in other places, but that has come at a cost.

Q751 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Is it true that a lot of this stuff seems to be done in house, the ECB stuff? There is no equivalent, I do not think, of Kick It Out, which is very well established and well known. There was something called Knock Racism for Six. George, do you know whether that still exists? Tony Banks set it up in the 1990s.

George Dobell: Kick It Out exists in cricket—I am on the advisory board—but it has just started. It has given us a statement yesterday, which is largely about media coverage in *The Yorkshire Post*. It is doing some academic work on the correlation between negative news articles and attacks, either online or physical. We talk about the social media



attacks. Azeem has had people outside his house; he has had people outside his parents' house. It is much more physical and direct.

It has been very helpful, and will hopefully be able to give you a report in due course, and the correlation between negative media coverage and specific attacks, because, as I say, words have consequences. Kick It Out is involved in the sport and very welcome too.

Q752 Dr Rupa Huq: That is good news. Duncan Stone has written a book called "Different Class" about the class issues that you raised. He says that it is a game stuck in the 19th century. It is promising what Lord Patel has said about the changes afoot, but how do we reset the culture? There is a quote I have here also from Stephen Fry from the MCC. It was trying to do away with the traditional Eton and Harrow game, but it got reinstated at the last minute. He says that: "Don't you want it [cricket] to lose that image that it sometimes still has—a turgid image of snobbery and elitism?" How do we get away from that when change seems really, really slow?

George Dobell: Duncan's book is very good, but there are lots of decisions that the game has made that are basically all pragmatic and financial and short term. For example, going behind a paywall for broadcast rights prevented a lot of people falling in love with the game, and presumably would hit people of lower socioeconomic incomes worse because they might be able to afford subscription TV less readily.

A lot of decisions, going back to selling off the school playing fields, would have affected people again of lower socioeconomic status greater, because they would not be able to compensate in the same way. Duncan's book is a very good resource for people to learn about these things. We should say again and again that the link between those race problems and class problems is very, very close.

One great stat is, as Kamlesh just said, is that at Yorkshire 2% of the pathway is ethnic minorities. Bearing in mind that over 30% of the recreational game is played by Asian people, that is stunning. By the way, it was referred to by *The Yorkshire Post* as all was harmony, because they did not want non-white people coming in and changing things. They do not. They do not want to stop having meetings in the pub, they do not want to stop the banter, they do not want to change. Our game has to be more welcoming and the first step of that is realising the extent of the problem.

Kamlesh's decision to do away with the cost of coaching and kit is absolutely vital and should be the template that other clubs should follow. None have yet, although some are going along the way. For example, if you are a talented kid playing cricket and you are invited to coaching—you could be 10 years old and they say, "Brilliant, you're in the county pathway, exciting. We're going to need £250 for kit and £250 for coaching". Straightaway, you are limiting your opportunities. That has happened at most clubs for quite a long time.



Dr Rupa Huq: Lord Patel?

Lord Patel of Bradford: That is exactly what has happened—that cost. Interestingly, we have made a big decision, and some people would say, “What a silly decision. You’re financially in trouble and you’re taking away £450,000 out of the club’s kitty to enable these young children to play.” I think that it is the best decision that we ever made. We made the decision first, we have seen the changes and now we have the first ever major Muslim sponsor who has come in and sponsored a large chunk of that, and an Indian sponsor who has sponsored a large chunk of that. Therefore, it has brought in new partners who have said, “You are doing what you say you’re going to do.”

If people had confidence that the governing body on the first-class counties would genuinely open the doors and work with them, I do not think that there is a shortage of people who would come and partner and work with us. We have seen it at Yorkshire. We had lost every sponsor. We now have more sponsors than we have ever had in the history of Yorkshire, and new sponsors. That says something. That says that people see there is a purpose, see there is a journey to go on and want to effect change and want to be a part of that change. However, there is a small group of people who do not want that to happen.

Q753 Dr Rupa Huq: There are economic barriers but there are also attitudinal barriers. The Duncan Stone book talks about from the 1990s there was—one of his interviewees talks about informal apartheid in the social scene afterwards, the stuff Azeem was talking about, the pressure to have a drink, the social rituals that go with it. Is cricket’s entire culture toxic?

George Dobell: Toxic is a strong word. Interesting. I would have to think about that. That is the honest answer.

The research by the guy who set up the South Asian Cricket Academy—because he did a PhD and then tried to find solutions for the problems he found, Tom Brown—found that you were 13 times more likely to become a professional cricketer if you were privately educated rather than state educated. However, if you go to a public school and you are white, you are 34 times more likely to become a professional cricketer compared to being a British south Asian in a state-integrated school. Those statistics were from 4,000 people in the ECB pathways, so it is a good amount of data.

Yes, probably you are right, it is toxic and it has been a system of apartheid. It has not particularly been intentional. It has been short-sighted and economic-led and, yes, short-sighted, but it has been allowed to establish. At this stage we all know that it is happening and we have to do something about it. The game has been, as you say, terribly slow to act and no one has been held to account.

Dr Rupa Huq: Yes, it does feel that it has been in denial. Is it toxic or is it a meritocracy and open?



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Lord Patel of Bradford: We also have to remember that it is the game—and I have enjoyed it since I was a little boy—that has made so many people understand each other better. It has the power to do that. This is the one sport that will bring very, very different communities, ages and men and women together in playing it.

My big worry and concern, and I think you hit the nail on the head, is the recreational game is something that we have not looked at. If I had a worry, if I thought that there was a ticking timebomb anywhere, it is the recreational game. I get calls every week from people who are playing in the recreational game. Most of it is good news, it is great. However, there is racism, discrimination and misogyny weekly. We have to spend some time and effort and energy and money in this huge space where we can make some really good advances.

Q754 **Chair:** Before I bring in Damian Green, Mr Dobell, the stats you quoted there, was there any backup on that as to how many state schools taught cricket at school compared to privately funded public schools?

George Dobell: I do not have them, I am afraid, but it is obviously very few. There is very, very little access to cricket in state schools, sadly. When there is, it is often very reliant on the good will of inspirational teachers.

Q755 **Damian Green:** Apart from being shocking, what we have been hearing this morning, I also find it extraordinary, as a lifelong cricket lover. I do not understand how you can be a cricket-loving racist. I grew up watching Viv Richards and Michael Holding and Kapil Dev and Sunil Gavaskar and Imran Khan and so on and I have never understood it. In that context, what you say, Mr Dobell, that *The Yorkshire Post* is doing seems very extraordinary. Most newspapers argue fiercely that they know their market, they know their readers. Therefore, it seems to me pretty unlikely that they would adopt what appears to be a very, very outré position if their readers, or at least a significant chunk of their readers, did not agree with it. That is the way that newspapers operate.

George Dobell: The logic in what you are saying is absolutely sound. If you go back to the first bit, I agree with you about that. I have thought the same thing. I grew up watching Somerset, and Joel and Viv are my heroes.

However, a couple of years ago, during this whole process, I got a call from either John Holder or Ismail Dawood. They were the two umpires of colour who tried to take the ECB to task. They pointed out to me that there had been no people of colour appointed to the first-class list—that is basically professional umpires—since 1992, and I had not noticed. That is my fault, is it not? I am embarrassed that I did not notice. Part of the reason for that is I am in a press box with lots of people who look like me and have had my experiences. A lot of discrimination will not start out as conscious, but that is why we need to have more diversity across the board, including in the media.



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To go to the specific point, as I say *The Yorkshire Post* cricket writer has been drip-fed information that is incorrect. I will give you a very good example. The Squire Patton Boggs report concluded that Azeem was not telling the truth about the use of the word “Kevin”, which was used as a slur for anyone of colour, because at the time Gary Ballance denied saying it. He admitted using the P word but he denied saying that and they said, “Well, why would he do that?” Gary has now admitted it. He admitted it in the employment tribunal, and I believe he admitted it in the ECB hearings. So he was lying and Azeem was not, and that is one of the basic tenets of what *The Yorkshire Post* has been saying, that the Squire Patton Boggs report—a nonsense report, it is a shoddy piece of work—had decided that Azeem was not telling the truth about that. Well, he was and it is now established.

Some of what they have concluded is factually wrong, but also, they had their sources and their sources are the people who have been kicked out of Yorkshire Cricket Club because they have been found to be at least responsible in one way or another for the culture that was there. This is the thing; people are not accepting that the culture needed to change.

Kamlesh may remember that I got on quite well with Roger Hutton, his predecessor, as chair. I thought he was in an impossible position, and he was a good man in a very difficult position. He made mistakes and I remember he said, “You know, I think I can take these people on a journey” and Kamlesh said at his first press conference, “I am pretty sure I can take these people on a journey” and I made a point of saying to him afterwards, “That is what Roger said, and they got him in the end.”

We must think of racism as a cancer. You do not negotiate with cancer. You do not take it on a journey. You cut it out and that is the only way we can do it. I stand by my views on *The Yorkshire Post*. I think they have been the voice of the racist. I am not sorry that I have said strong things there about them. I think the editor is an utter disgrace and I want them to reflect on the fact that they have forced a young man, a whistleblower, out of the country, and his family. They have forced them out of the country. It is shameful.

Q756 Damian Green: Lord Patel, do you agree with that analysis that you cannot take the Yorkshire cricket establishment, or indeed the wider cricket establishment, on a journey? You just have to take them on?

Lord Patel of Bradford: I have had this discussion with George. I have spent all my life trying to take people on the journey. At heart I am a social worker, so I must believe people can change, or the fundamental tenet is there is going to be an ability to change. I have agreed more and more with George as time has gone on. There are some people who completely and utterly deny that anything is wrong, and racism exists, or discrimination exists.



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Yorkshire has just begun the journey. We are on a long journey and a lot of people are going to have to get off the bus along the way. There is no question about it.

It is a network. You start at eight or nine years old, and you stay until you are 70 or 80 and you live in that family. You become a player, you become a coach, you become a head coach and you become a commentator. It is just the way things are. The way things are needs to change. I do not know how conscious it is and I do not know if this is relevant, the first time I became a member of the ECB board I was the first Asian, but it did not matter. I was appointed because I knew about regulation and governance. The first question I was asked on Sky TV was, "Oh, Lord Patel, you passed the Tebbit test?" Why would you ask me if I had passed the Tebbit test? I said, "No, I do not because if we had a tournament tomorrow, I would not support England or India; I would support the West Indies because I grew up in an era of these 12 men giving all black people hope in the country." Why would you ask that? It was not meant in a nasty way, but you know.

Q757 Damian Green: The various things you said—two things shocked me. One was the letter you read out, Lord Patel, which was obviously just disgusting, but the second was I think you said that one of the 16 people at Yorkshire sacked is now in the England dressing room.

George Dobell: I said that, yes.

Damian Green: Who is that?

George Dobell: Should I name him? Azeem likes the guy. I am told he is very good at his job and all the rest of it. I never wanted to make it about individuals but the fact is that one of the signatories of that letter, which I consider racist bullying for the reasons I explained, yes, he has been employed straight away and he is in the England dressing room. He is back room staff, but what does that tell you about the game? They say, "Oh, he is a good fellow. He did not mean it. He is one of us. He is all right." There is no responsibility and no repercussions.

Damian Green: I am surprised as a journalist you do not want to name him. I get the point—

George Dobell: I will tell you something interesting on that. So I received the Squire Patton Boggs report, I do not think anyone else had it, and a story leapt out. In fact, I wrote it; I just never published it. The reason was that in this incredibly biased and shoddy piece of work they had still managed to uphold the complaints against Michael Vaughan, as it happens. So I wrote the story and I thought, "If I go with this story all that will happen is Michael Vaughan will be vilified." That is all that will happen, really. The other story, the better story in the end, I think, was the story where someone admitted to having used the P word often and he had been exonerated because they said it was banter. "Exonerated" is probably too strong a word, but the complaint against him had not been



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upheld because they said it was banter, and akin to using Zimbo for instance in Zimbabwe, which they accused Azeem of using, which by the way is made up, which Gary would now tell you. It was made up, just nonsense.

So I wrote that as a story because I thought then the focus would be on the institution that decided that using the P word was banter. I have never wanted to make it about individuals. I think that is unhelpful. It is about the whole system being rotten, to be honest.

Damian Green: But if you sack 16 people it is about those 16 individuals.

George Dobell: No, I think it was about trying to change the culture of the club and they would not go. They just would not accept that there was a problem. As I say, they said in their own letter they would not accept any censure against any member of staff. If you have a culture of racist bullying, someone is going to have to have their hand smacked, and they were not accepting that.

Kamlesh had weeks in which to save that club. They had lost their international status; they had lost all their sponsors and they are about to go into receivership. If they had gone into receivership guess who would have taken ownership? Colin Graves because he is the chief creditor. He had to act very quickly; he had to change the culture of the club. These people made it pretty clear they did not think there was a problem and did not want to change, and instead wanted to counterattack so he made the decision that he did. I do not think that is about individuals. I think it is about changing the culture of the wider club.

Q758 **Damian Green:** Lord Patel, do you have any optimism about cricket more widely, not Yorkshire specifically? Do you feel that things are now moving in what you would regard as the right direction?

Lord Patel of Bradford: The optimism I have is probably laid in the independent equity commission report. I am hopeful that that report will identify some of these solutions, and I hope that that report will tell us how to do systematic change across the piece. I am hopeful that Yorkshire provides a bit of a template on how others can do it. I am hopeful because the ECB has new leadership who have very clearly said what they want to do and the direction of travel. I think it is going to be a long journey because hope does not carry it all the time. Some really tough decisions must be made.

To go back, Yorkshire was never about me. It has become about me. It was not about Patel. It was a club that needed structural change. It needed good governance; it needed simple things like appraisals and reviews and just good practice. Things that were wrong you would change if they were wrong. People made it about individuals. It just happens I am not white, so it almost put a spotlight on it.



Q759 **Giles Watling:** A quick one, because I am going to ask this question again later and I think you more or less covered it just now, George. By the way, George and Kamlesh, thank you so much for your very compelling and fluent evidence today. It is really important.

You said at one point that they do not want to stop the banter, so this is to George initially. In my experience in an actor's dressing room or a rehearsal room or a changing room in sport there is always banter. The important question is when does banter become racism? I think you touched on it just now, but you do not want to take the banter out. You want to take the racist aspect out. Is that the case?

George Dobell: That is fair, and I accept that there is a cultural change and things that were said years ago that we thought were acceptable, probably were not, and they are not now. Anything that is excluding, anything that is making someone in a minority of one or two in the team feel as if they are in a minority of one or two in the team is unhelpful. That is why this code of conduct would be so useful because then it would allow the PCA, the union, to conduct training as they do for other things at the start of the year, and young players would understand what they could and could not do. They would have much more specific opportunity to learn. The key thing is not to make people feel excluded.

Lord Patel of Bradford: I completely agree. All the young people who are coming into the pathway now are getting training with more than just cricket. We are making them into good human beings with values, we are giving them training on life skills. Women have been forgotten. The fact that our women's team won the final, yet they do not have their own changing room, that is going to change. They do not have their own space. That is going to change. It has just been something that you do. We would not use the N word or the P word now all over the place. There is a distinction between banter at one end and systematic attacking of somebody.

Giles Watling: I take that on board, so there is a journey but without the ending. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: That concludes the questions for this session. I thank Lord Patel and George Dobell for giving evidence today to the Committee and coming along. We will have a brief break for five minutes while we change over panels.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jahid Ahmed and Azeem Rafiq.

Q760 **Chair:** I welcome Azeem Rafiq and Jahid Ahmed, both former cricketers. Welcome back, Azeem. I am going to start off with a very similar question to the one I opened with, with the last panel. It is now more than a year since you first came to see us. A lot has happened in that



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time. Could you very briefly give us an overview of what has happened and where you think we are now?

Azeem Rafiq: Driving down yesterday I felt a sense of sadness that I am having to do this again. The last year has been pretty challenging at times. It has been up and down and the impact has been quite great on me and my family. First, I want to take the opportunity to thank all the people who have been in touch to support me. People have been in touch, as you will see in the document that I have handed in, to corroborate a lot of what I have said. People have been in touch to apologise, and that on a human level has meant the world to me. I have also had a platform and opportunity to speak and hopefully help these things to be eradicated and hopefully make better throughout society.

The downside and the difficult bits have been that my family has been the target of abuse, threats and attacks. Recently at my family house, there was a bloke in broad daylight who basically walked in and out of the garden, on the phone, before defecating, bringing a loo roll and it looked all very planned. We had another incident where a gentleman late at night was circling with what looked like a chain in his hand. If I was looking 13 months on from me opening up my heart, all that has changed is that my family and I have been driven out of the country and that is the sad element of it.

Q761 Damian Green: You make an interesting point that you have had a lot of messages of support. Have any of them come from unexpected people, people from high up in cricket, people in the ECB? Have any of them reached out to you?

Azeem Rafiq: There were some statements of apology made throughout the game. I was invited to meet the ECB board, which I did, and like I said it was really on a human level and meant the world to me. Although everyone has made this about me, it is not about me. I spoke out to make cricket a better place so that my kids could play, and 13 months on I would have loved to not have to come here in the first place, but also would have loved to come to tell you how great things have been, how much cricket has changed. Unfortunately, what it feels like is that cricket is very much in denial. My experiences have been vindicated, corroborated, time and time again through various organisations as is in that document, yet I sit here 13 months on, two and a half years on from when I first spoke out, and there is still a group of people out there that feel like cricket is the victim in this.

Q762 Damian Green: Do you feel that this will carry on? It is almost the last question that I asked Lord Patel: do you have any kind of optimism?

Azeem Rafiq: We live in hope. I always see the glass half full. The difficult thing for me is what I see is—you do the same thing, and you get the same result. There was an action plan in 1999. There was an action plan last year. The same PR initiatives are being rolled out, the same



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community faith organisations are being activated, but it all feels very superficial at the top. The recreational game has not even been looked at.

The protection or the lack of protection for whistleblowers, one of the reasons I spoke out is so that other people did not suffer in silence. We are going to hear from Jahid and a lot of others that have felt empowered, but the way I have been attacked and abused, why would you? Why would you speak out? I have a little hope in the new leadership, but it is very little.

Q763 Damian Green: Jahid, the same question. Do you feel that anything has moved? You have added your voice to the complaints.

Jahid Ahmed: I do not think much has changed. I have been very frustrated for over a year now since I have spoken out. So far, I have received no support whatsoever from anyone really, from the ECB to the PCA to Essex, even. I am a victim. I do not feel as if I get any support from anyone at the moment. Whether they care, I do not know. It seems like I have not received much support from it.

Damian Green: I know others are going to ask detailed questions about the Essex case, so I will hand back to the Chair.

Chair: Thank you. Over to Giles Watling.

Q764 Giles Watling: Thank you both for coming in today and reliving some of the horrors that you have been through. I am sorry that you have to do that but let us see if we can get some good out of this.

First, on the attacks that we have heard you have had from *The Yorkshire Post*, how do you feel about that? Have you responded and have they been in touch?

Azeem Rafiq: Where do I start? Pretty early on *The Yorkshire Post* took a position through their correspondent. I have some sense of sympathy. He has known these people for well over two decades and he has been fed lies and he has believed them. It has been difficult and challenging. For example, they keep reporting snippets out of the Squire Patton Boggs report but they fail to report the central conclusion that I was a victim of racial harassment and bullying. There have been match reports written on a Yorkshire championship game with digs at me. The wider impact of that, as George said, is that for me the editorial control and the senior editors and the leaders at *The Yorkshire Post* have a lot to answer for.

The impact locally has been quite big. Every time there is an article it has created a wave of online abuse. These are some of the things I talked about earlier. I got shouted at through a shop window. It has been so sad that a place I have called home for 21 years and at times I have walked down the street fearing for my life. The effect is quite big. Leaving the country is not an easy decision.

Q765 Giles Watling: Has *The Yorkshire Post* made any moves towards you and offered you a platform to respond?



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Azeem Rafiq: We had to get in touch with them a couple of months ago because when we went through the articles, the best part of over two years, 300 articles with a lot basically attacking me at all opportunities, I do not feel that at any point they have had any balance. It has been disappointing and the impact of that. I spoke out and I knew that I would be targeted, but the way it has impacted me and my family—my family especially—is something that *The Yorkshire Post* should be held responsible for.

Q766 **Giles Watling:** We heard earlier from Lord Patel about some of the reforms and many wide-ranging reforms that have been made. Are you satisfied with what is happening, or are you satisfied with the direction of travel?

Azeem Rafiq: I came here last year. I talked about accepting, apologising and showing a real will to do things in a different manner. I have seen that through Lord Patel and the new leadership at Yorkshire. Are they perfect? No. Have they made mistakes? Absolutely, but they are trying. You can genuinely see that they are trying to ensure that no other kid is called a Paki within the Yorkshire dressing room. That is all we ask for. We are not asking for anything other than equal fairness. Kamlesh talked about a lot of governance stuff and a lot of the paperwork stuff, which is all great, but I think the best thing they have done is cutting the cost for kids, which is one of the biggest barriers for entry within the game. You can see the difference that it has had on representation.

Q767 **Giles Watling:** That is very good. You mention cutting the costs. Are there any other further reforms at Yorkshire that you think should happen?

Azeem Rafiq: The one thing that is very clear at the moment is that it is a very much a Lord Patel-reliant organisation. I can see he is pretty drained out. My worry is that as and when he leaves it, that it could go back to business as usual. That is where the governing body and the game more widely needs to change the attitude. We need to change culture and that does not happen through paperwork.

Q768 **Giles Watling:** Perhaps these hearings are doing that.

I would like to move on to Jahid now. When your story came to light the Essex chief executive, John Stephenson said that he had reached out to you to offer his full support and hopes that you feel encouraged and comfortable to be a part of the investigation. Your barrister then said that you had tried entering into a dialogue with Essex County Cricket Club, but they did not respond to the request. What happened there?

Jahid Ahmed: The first time I spoke out, John Stephenson just messaged me and left a message on my phone as well to say, "Sorry to hear what you went through," and so on. Since then, it was just brushed under the carpet in my opinion because I have had nothing from Essex to check if I am all right or not. I spoke to my lawyer Amjad Khan about it



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and asked what is happening. We have had interviews with the barristers for the investigation and that was the only thing I had from Essex.

Amjad Khan approached Essex to have a meeting to talk about the things I have faced through my time at Essex, and that we want to talk about all of that and have a meeting about it. They had a bit of an exchange with the e-mails and then apparently they lost the e-mail that we sent. I find that amazing, because how do you lose an e-mail? Apparently, it went to a junk e-mail or something. I check my e-mails all the time and I even check junk e-mail to make sure there is not something that I am missing out on, so how can you lose an e-mail like that?

Regardless of whether you did lose an e-mail, all it takes is to reply back and chase it up to say, "We have e-mailed you but we have received no response from you." All you have to do is e-mail again or just make a phone call.

Giles Watling: So they have not reached out since?

Jahid Ahmed: We are the ones who are approaching them to get a meeting to have a chat, and finally we did manage to get one, however it has not gone—

Giles Watling: It had to be you reaching out to them?

Jahid Ahmed: Yes, it is always us.

Q769 **Giles Watling:** Did you follow the complaints procedure?

Jahid Ahmed: I was very young back then, so I did not know what the complaint process was. I came into an environment where all of these slurs and racial things were just normal in that dressing room. I was just a small fish among the big characters there. The only thing I did was to speak to some of the Asian guys who were there, who used to play cricket there. I approached them and asked them things like this, calling me curry muncher for example and I was not sure what that meant, and I used to approach them and say, "What does that mean? Why do they call us a curry muncher?" and the advice I received was ignore it, just concentrate on the game, and do not worry about it.

Q770 **Giles Watling:** Which you did for a while, but then you did eventually come forward. What made you come forward at the end? It was last year that you raised the concerns. What held you back?

Jahid Ahmed: It was because Azeem came out and spoke out about it and gave his testimony, and I listened to his story. I felt like I had to come out and speak about it and support Azeem, because it is not him alone in this. We all went through similar sorts of things growing up playing cricket in the professional set-up, and I felt I had to come out and speak about it and support that cause and his testimony.

Q771 **Giles Watling:** I am going to re-ask the question that I asked both



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George and Kamlesh earlier about banter. In the rehearsal room when I was in another business, the banter would be quite extraordinary and generally not offensive, and that is the way it works. In a sporting changing room I know that banter goes backwards and forwards. When does banter become racism? How do we define this? How do we police it, if we do at all?

Azeem Rafiq: I hate the word. I think for me one man's banter is another person's demise. Where does it cross the line? There have been lots of attempts to downplay what I went through. Just to put it into context, I was called a Paki not just in the dressing room, but in public places, in bars.

Giles Watling: But it gets brushed off as banter.

Azeem Rafiq: Yes, and in the end, as I was reflecting over the last 13 months or two years, in the end bar staff at places were calling me the P word, a Paki. It is just not banter. It really is not, and banter is used as an excuse to make someone feel isolated.

Giles Watling: I see Jahid nodding away there. Do you agree?

Jahid Ahmed: That is exactly the way I feel. It is an excuse to make themselves popular in the dressing room, by using those slurs and laughing about it. I had that a lot through my whole career when I was playing there, and every time they made any slurs or jokes about myself and were very personal about it, you could hear the other guys laughing with them, which made me feel very upset about so many things. Things like asking me, "Would you bomb the club?" in front of everyone. People were laughing about it.

Giles Watling: As George said it is about isolating people and that is what it does.

Q772 **Clive Efford:** Thanks for coming and giving evidence this morning. Azeem, do you think there has been an attempt from sections of the media to focus on you and make you the issue, to avoid dealing with the wider issue in cricket of racism?

Azeem Rafiq: It feels very much like the cricket establishment needs to make this about me. I think much of it was to stop other people come forward and it achieved that. There has been a lot written about me over the last 13 months. I have made mistakes in my life. One of the first things that came out a couple of days after the Select Committee was antisemitic messages that I had made. I did exactly what I asked everyone else to do, which is apologise, accept and go—well, the journey bit, but try to make some learnings as to why I made those comments.

Q773 **Clive Efford:** When you talk about the establishment, what do you think is establishment? I asked you about media. Are you saying the cricketing establishment within the structures of cricket?



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Azeem Rafiq: I think it is a structural thing. I think the way it is set up is jobs for the boys. It is a boys' network. You have a friend of a friend who wants to protect—I talked about David Lloyd in here last year and I walked out of this room, and I received an apology and I spoke to him on the phone. We talked about it, and I thought it would have been a great message, because David wanted to make sure that he was part of the solution. I felt Sky Cricket made probably as bad a decision as anyone has through this last two years, where they got rid of him. I think what that has created is a lot of his friends and people, you have influential people right at the top of the cricket establishment who are former players, and what I found is that for them to feel like they do not get implicated is to attack me, and I have felt that throughout the last 13 months.

Q774 **Clive Efford:** The way it has been reported, particularly by *The Yorkshire Post*—I am the MP for Eltham where Stephen Lawrence was murdered, and I know how the media treated Eltham as a name and place. They created an environment where racists felt empowered. They thought this is Eltham and this is where racists live, ignoring the fact that racism is everywhere and it is an issue that we must deal with across the whole of society. It is an understanding of this issue about what environment *The Yorkshire Post* creates with the way it writes about the story of race around Yorkshire Cricket Club. I think you have said it already, but I will just tease it out a little bit more, do you feel that the way the words are used and the way it is reported is creating that environment in Yorkshire that means that you do not feel safe when you walk down the street?

Azeem Rafiq: Yes, we talk about all these hotlines and whistleblowing and a lot of organisations will come forward to talk about it, but what environment have we created for the whistleblower? I have not felt supported at all. In the last couple of months, and I want to thank the ECB on this, I have received 24/7 security from the ECB, but a lot of time through the last 13 months I have been attacked and that has created arguably the hate towards me and my family locally that has led me to leave. If I were to pick one reason why all this has happened, unfortunately I would have to say that it is *The Yorkshire Post's* writing.

Q775 **Clive Efford:** You mentioned that the ECB are providing you with security, but do you think that they are doing enough to push back against elements like *The Yorkshire Post* and others?

Azeem Rafiq: The simple answer would be no. I think the providing of the security—at times it has felt like there are going to be real risks—has been really good throughout but there is no protection. At times I have felt that even the ECB has been involved in the leaking or the planting of some of the stories that have come out against me. My medical information has been shared at different times. My data has been openly shared with a lot of people and that for me is very alarming.

Q776 **Clive Efford:** To follow up on that, since you appeared before this Committee last year you are saying that from within the ECB they have



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been involved in leaking stories to undermine you?

Azeem Rafiq: Yes, and I have made that point to the new chair. I have felt at different times any chance there has been to try to discredit my experiences—bearing in mind the experiences in that document that have been corroborated, substantiated over and over again—I felt that the ECB have tried to do that.

Q777 **Clive Efford:** Would you name anyone who has been involved in that?

Azeem Rafiq: No, because for me, as I said last year, I do not think it is about individuals. I think the structural problems within cricket are a lot bigger and that is what needs to be looked at. If we go on to individuals, all that does is allow the conversation to go on to that as opposed to dealing with the real issues.

Q778 **Kevin Brennan:** Mr Ahmed, can I ask you about the Katharine Newton investigation? What are your views about that? Do you have faith in that process?

Jahid Ahmed: It has taken longer than they promised. When I reached out to find out when the reports would get released I was told it would be in September and then it just kept going. It was going to be finished by October and now I have been told it is going to be finished by the end of December, possibly early New Year. It just keeps dragging on. Again, I do not know why they are taking so long to get the report out there.

Speaking with Katharine, I do think she is doing a good job. I think she is doing a fine investigation and a good job. I feel like she is listening to what I have said and is taking that quite seriously, but I do not know what Essex are doing to support that, whether they are doing anything to help the investigation I do not know. I am assuming they are investigating and speaking to the ex-players or the previous guys who played cricket before who were in that dressing room. I do not know whether it is Essex helping with the investigation to speak to those ex-players to say, "Co-operate with these guys to make sure we get this out there" so I am not sure if they are doing that.

Q779 **Kevin Brennan:** It has been over a year since the report was commissioned. We expect it soon, possibly, from what you are telling us. Have you had any assurances in relation to the report about if it will be made public and available for everyone to see in a transparent way? As you know, a lot of the issues at Yorkshire came out of the club's reluctance to issue an "independent" report that had been commissioned into some of what Mr Rafiq has told us about in terms of racism at Yorkshire. Have you had any assurances in that regard?

Jahid Ahmed: No.

Kevin Brennan: What do you expect to happen when the report is finalised?



Jahid Ahmed: I do not know what action they will take if I am being honest with you. There is a current player who has abused me who has racially slurred and used a lot of things to bully me throughout my whole career and they are still going. I do not know what action they will take against that person. He is not just a small person; he is a big fish and I do not know what they will do regarding that.

Kevin Brennan: Do you think the report should be published in full when it is finished?

Jahid Ahmed: Yes.

Q780 **Jane Stevenson:** I would like to talk about the ECB's progress since last year. Do you feel significant progress has been made? I was reading about the South Asian Action Plan and the African Caribbean Engagement Plan and things like that. Do you think there has been any progress or good progress?

Jahid Ahmed: I work with a charity called Platform Cricket. We provide coaching sessions during schooltime, and we help a lot of kids to engage in cricket and also move on to the club system and so on. Since the issues have come up, we approached the ECB. Unfortunately, we have had no support from them to support what we do in that charity. Again, they have spoken about these 12 points, and I do not feel that ECB is doing anything about it so far. I do not know whether they are going to look into the issues that I have put out there with the ECB guys, but I do not feel they are showing any support at the moment. It is dragging on a long time and still has not resolved a lot of the issues that we spoke about.

Azeem Rafiq: As I said earlier, I would love to be able to sit here and say that this, this and this has happened and this is where the changes will happen. Unfortunately, I feel as if there are a lot of superficial things at the top. Like I said earlier, any PR activity that can bring a little bit of good PR is what is done.

After I spoke last year, the first thing I would have done is gone to the recreational game to really understand and get to the grips of the issue. The ICEC report is going to be a pivotal moment for the game. At that point, the game has a choice, and I hope that is seen as an opportunity.

Three things straight away that I would have done is a clear reporting mechanism, which did not work in my case and has not since. I have been contacted by several people since that have gone through the same type of problems. Jahid spoke about earlier the onus being always on the victim to keep pushing, to keep pushing and it is draining.

Secondly, I think an education element—but that is not just to do some questionnaires so that we can say that 35% more people have done training this year. The recruitment of leadership positions throughout the game—how that is done is important. At the moment, what I see is that



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representation is really important but that alone is not going to solve anything. Some of my most incredible support has come from white people within this last two and a half years. It feels to me that because as a south Asian, as a Muslim, I have spoken out, there is a PR drive to make it look like there is a lot being done for that community. I think Kamlesh talked about it earlier, I feel that there needs to be a genuine, heartfelt commitment to making cricket a place for everyone, and that goes for working class, state schools, and people from all sorts of backgrounds. I do not think I have seen enough of that.

Q781 Jane Stevenson: Thank you. Do you think the ECB has enough power to punish people when there is a case of discrimination, or do you think, as has been suggested for football, it needs an independent regulator overseeing these sorts of issues? Jahid?

Jahid Ahmed: I think they do have power. I feel there should be independent regulators. As a victim so far I have had no support from ECB. It is great that we talk about cleaning up the mess regarding the games, but as a victim I have had no support from it. That is why I believe there should be independence.

Jane Stevenson: Have you spoken to anyone?

Jahid Ahmed: I am the one who has approached the ECB guys about the reports and everything.

Jane Stevenson: You have regularly sought to talk?

Jahid Ahmed: Yes, I have and the person who was investigating the case halfway through moved on from the case, which I had not been told, and then I had to call up to find out what is happening with the case. They said, "Sorry, but that person has left so I am in charge of that case now," and I said, "When were you going to tell me about it? I do not know what is going on. I am asking about the report, you guys tell me it is going to happen, but you have not." I am the one who keeps pushing and pushing to get something out of them, but no one approached me directly to speak to me, to give some support, "What can we do for you, Jahid?" for example. Nothing has been done.

Jane Stevenson: Azeem, do you think it needs an independent regulator?

Azeem Rafiq: I think it became very clear within my case in the first bit, but it has evidently become clearer. I think they have a difficult situation where in one sense you are a promoter where you need to show the game in a good light, and then you are regulating some tough things that do not make the game look good. Just doing the simple, "He's bowled a couple of beamers," or, "He has the wrong size bat," is something they can deal with, but I think it has become clear that issues of this stature are something that needs an independent regulator to be brought in for. As I said, I feel that structurally even if they want to deal with stuff, the



structure does not allow them to, and it always comes across as the victims are pushing and there is always an excuse not to act.

Q782 Jane Stevenson: As a final follow-up we briefly touched on the women's game at the end of the last panel. Do you know if there are similar incidents within the women's game? I hope you are going to say no and that we are much too civilised.

Azeem Rafiq: Not being involved in that, it is difficult for me to comment. The one thing I would say, I have been contacted from people across the game. Over the last 13 months, this year I was contacted by a coach from a county club whose director of cricket was mocking Ramadan by holding his beer up to him. I have had some contact from the women's game from parents around how some of the girls have been treated, but it is not something that I am as informed of, so I would not want to say that it is exactly the same but I have had some communication around it.

Q783 Jane Stevenson: I met with some Jewish groups yesterday who were full of admiration for the way you did address the issues that came up around antisemitism and you continue to be in contact with them. Who is the best placed body to deliver education when things go wrong? You like to feel that people need the chance to correct things and educate themselves.

Azeem Rafiq: Absolutely. I cannot thank the Jewish community enough. They have brought me in, they have shown me a lot of love and the one thing out of a bad situation is I have made friends for life. I am thankful to them.

I have been fortunate. I have had communication with a lot across the board. Some people have publicised it; a lot have not. March of the Living took me to Auschwitz and it was the most harrowing experience, but an experience of education that I feel everyone should have. I would encourage anyone to get in touch with them and go on their trips to learn more about Jewish people.

Q784 Jane Stevenson: Jahid, who do you feel should educate people in this area and where should it start? Should it start at local club level or in schools?

Jahid Ahmed: I believe it should come from the school system. I work in schools myself, so this is where it needs to be taught from the start from there and that moves on to county. When I was playing cricket, we never received any training and it was never mentioned. You just turn up and play cricket. That was the only thing we did. I wish there was a system back then where everyone should be educated into everyone's culture, religion, whatever it was, and what can and cannot be said. It is a very sensitive area, and it should have been taught there. Unfortunately, that was not there, which is a shame because I would have thought PCA would have looked into that back in the day, and the ECB, to educate people about that.



Azeem Rafiq: I will add a caveat to that. As I said, because I spoke out as a south Asian and Muslim, there are a lot of organisations, and I have spoken to Sport England about this, that do a lot of this education work. I feel like the funding element of that takes over and ends up then becoming part of the system. There was a situation earlier on in the summer where we read stories about Crawley Town and about how the manager there had discriminated against people and called Muslim players terrorists and stuff like that. A lot of these organisations do not feel empowered or do not have the courage to condemn that type of stuff, because they are funded by the system. Again, and I have spoken to Kick It Out, which are the good ones that need to be brought in? A lot of them unfortunately from my experience are doing more damage than good.

Jane Stevenson: I could probe, but I know we are pressed for time. Thank you.

Q785 **John Nicolson:** Thank you for coming back, Azeem. Along with fellow members, I asked you questions last year and I found it very affecting and I know people who watched did as well.

I will go back briefly to an answer you gave earlier, where you talked about David Lloyd, former cricketer and I have just been googling what happened, after your evidence. He lost his job at Sky. You told us about racist comments he had made. He then contacted you and apologised, is that correct?

Azeem Rafiq: Yes.

John Nicolson: But then he lost his job, and you think it is a mistake for Sky to have sacked him. Can you explain why?

Azeem Rafiq: He made some comments. He rang me straight away, as soon as I got out of here. He sent me a message; we had a good chat and I felt that he could be influential with his profile, and how loved he is. He could play a big part in us moving the conversation on to a positive. I compare it to the way the Jewish community did with me.

Q786 **John Nicolson:** So he could say, "I am sorry. I have learnt," and encourage other people to say sorry and to learn, but by sacking him what has happened is that Sky, presumably, has discouraged other people from saying sorry because they do not want to get the sack themselves?

Azeem Rafiq: That is exactly my point. The person who apologised lost his job. That is not going to encourage anyone else to come forward and accept that they have got things wrong. We must get this conversation to a place where people are allowed—we must take the fear out of these conversations as well. This is where leadership and braveness come in. It is not just a one-way stream. It is something I want to talk about more openly down the line, the uncomfortable conversations both ways. I just



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felt at the time if they had stuck with him, possibly 13 months on today the conversation could have been a little bit better.

Q787 **John Nicolson:** Are you sorry you named him?

Azeem Rafiq: To be honest, when I spoke last year, I just came in and I wanted to speak from the heart and whatever I was asked I answered. From that point of view, I am not sorry about anything I have done.

Q788 **John Nicolson:** You talked last year when I asked you about the impact on your family and that was very moving and disturbing. A year on and you have given us some really deeply disturbing evidence today including—and I saw the faces of my fellow Committee members—that somebody had come and defecated in your garden. That is beyond disgusting. What has the last year been like for your family?

Azeem Rafiq: Challenging and difficult. I think everybody saw that I am quite an emotional person, and the one thing I wanted to do was to come here and not be as emotional. I spoke out, but the impact on my mum and dad, my wife and kids—that is the only thing that has changed. I have left the country. I do not really want to go into too much of the details of it, but there was a point in the summer because of the constant pressure, at times we were getting hounded six to seven times a week by the press, stories, same allegations, ever-changing details. One day I was batting, one day I was fielding. It had a huge impact on everyone. Moving abroad is not an easy thing, especially when you have ill parents, and it is difficult.

Q789 **John Nicolson:** You have been critical and blunt about *The Yorkshire Post* today. If the editor of *The Yorkshire Post* were here, what would you say to him?

Azeem Rafiq: I had one conversation with the editor of *The Yorkshire Post* before I came to the Committee and I offered to give him and show him all the proof of what I was saying, and I was never contacted again.

I am a glass half full person. I would like to have a conversation and hopefully get them to understand the effect of what they have written and the effect of that in society, and that is really it. I think I have said pretty clearly it has had a huge impact on my and my family's life. It has driven us out of the country, but as I was with the Jewish community, as the Jewish community was with me, I would be incredibly willing to sit down, have a conversation and hopefully help them be part of the journey.

Chair: That concludes our questions. Jahid Ahmed and Azeem Rafiq, thank you for being with us today. Have a safe journey back and I bring this meeting to a close.