

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Cricket follow-up, HC 526

Tuesday 20 February 2024

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 20 February 2024.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; Dr Rupa Huq; John Nicolson; Alex Sobel.

Questions 1 to 161

Witnesses

[I](#): Cindy Butts, Chair, Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket; Sir Brendan Barber, Commissioner, Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket; and Dr Michael Collins, Commissioner, Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket.

[II](#): Richard Thompson, Chair, England and Wales Cricket Board; Richard Gould, Chief Executive, England and Wales Cricket Board; and Clare Connor CBE, Deputy Chief Executive and Managing Director, England and Wales Cricket Board.

[III](#): Harry Chathli, Chair, Yorkshire County Cricket Club; and Colin Graves, Chair nominee, Yorkshire County Cricket Club.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Cindy Butts, Sir Brendan Barber and Dr Michael Collins.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. Today's hearing follows the work that this Committee has been undertaking since 2021, when it first heard testimony from Azeem Rafiq on his experiences at Yorkshire Cricket Club. Azeem's evidence led to a groundswell of submissions to the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket, which was established by the ECB.

I am very grateful that we have Cindy Butts, Chair of the ICEC, alongside Sir Brendan Barber and Dr Michael Collins. Thank you all for being here today for our first panel as we look at your work and the responses to it.

Before we begin, I need to declare my interest, which is that my husband sits on the board of Hampshire Cricket Club. Does anyone else have anything that they need to declare?

Damian Green: I am a member of EMCC and of Surrey County Cricket Club.

Q2 Chair: Thank you very much. Cindy, can I begin with you? Back when it started looking at this in January 2022, this Committee concluded that there is a deep-seated issue of racism in cricket. Your report found that not everybody at the ECB agreed. Has that changed?

Cindy Butts: When you say, "not everybody at the ECB agreed"—

Chair: That there was a deep-seated issue.

Cindy Butts: Since we launched our report, the ECB has accepted all of our findings. Our findings were that racism, sexism and class-based discrimination is both widespread and deep-rooted. The ECB has subsequently accepted the majority of our recommendations and indeed our sub-recommendations, so there has been an acceptance of the issues that we found. In fact, soon after we reported, Richard Thompson, the chair, made a public apology—as we requested—to all of those who have faced and continue to face discrimination at the hands of the game.

I would also go on to say that in fact the majority, 17 out of the 18 first-class cricket counties, accepted our report's findings and committed to ensuring that the game makes the necessary changes. There was only one county—quite unsurprisingly, Durham—that did not put out a public statement, but all other first-class counties did.

Q3 Chair: That is very welcome. That is great. You must be very pleased to see that hugely widespread acknowledgement of everything that you recommended and a real commitment to tackle it.

One of the things that came out of the report was you calling for identity holders to no longer be the ones driving change. Are you beginning to see evidence across the game that that is being tackled?



Cindy Butts: It is a bit too early to say. The reason we made that recommendation is that we had done some quite detailed work to look at where the ECB had made improvements in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. We were able to track that where it had made improvements tended to be where there were identity holders who were driving that change, which was something that we were concerned about, because of course we believe that these issues should be the responsibility of all leaders—and indeed everybody within cricket—to drive through the necessary change. I think it is a bit too early to say, but, as I understand, it has been recognised that that is something that really ought to change.

Q4 **Chair:** One of the proposals was regarding strengthening equality, diversity and inclusion sanctions in County Partnership Agreements. That was rejected by the ECB. Why did you feel that that was important and what did you hope to see change as a result of that recommendation?

Cindy Butts: We thought it was important because at the moment there are not enough standards that could be called upon in the event that there was a breach. We decided that the ECB needed to extend the range of sanctions that were open to it. The ECB responded that it thinks it has the sanctions piece right and that, ultimately, it has a sanction whereby it can withhold 100% of a county's funding.

We felt that that was a nuclear option that in practice would not be used because withholding funding could result in a club going bust so, quite rightly, the ECB would be reluctant to use it. We said that the ECB ought to extend the range of sanctions that are available, but it has rejected that. We think it should think again.

Q5 **Chair:** What conversations have you had subsequently on that issue?

Cindy Butts: We finished our work eight months ago. We are only still going because of all of you and the fact that we have not been able to have this session. We have had some discussions with the ECB about the extent of the changes that it wants to put in place—not extensive, but we have had some discussions. We did discuss sanctions. As I say, the ECB decided that it did not think it was needed.

Chair: Do either of the other panel members have anything to add on this particular part of the questioning?

Sir Brendan Barber: Not just now.

Chair: Okay. I did not want you to feel left out.

Cindy Butts: Yes, please. There is a real danger of that, otherwise I will just keep yapping, so please do come in.

Sir Brendan Barber: Just to elaborate a little bit on the point about a range of other possible sanctions beyond the nuclear option of, in a sense, putting a club out of business, if we look at other games, you see



a range of different potential penalties if there are breaches of regulations, a sliding scale of fines, to things like points deductions—I know more about that than I would like to because of the experience of my football club, Everton, in terms of the points deductions it has received—or not being able to participate in some of the key competitions and so on. There are a range of things that could be done to reflect the concern over a breach of standards and to limit yourself just to the almost putting a club out of business option did not seem to us to be realistic.

Q6 Chair: Moving on to the issues of sexism that the Commission raised, the ECB has not committed to a range of your recommendations on tackling structural sexism. Do you feel that this is an organisation that is overly focused on the men's game?

Cindy Butts: Yes. We say that clearly and starkly within our report. We are very clear that the women's game is treated as subordinate. They are treated as second-class citizens. We believe that there are a number of structural issues in relation to the women's game, such as their access to cricket and their opportunities to play, as well as the fact that they only have eight regional teams.

There are a number of structural issues in relation to that, as well as the fact that we talk about women not having enough power, influence and voice in the game and not being adequately reflected in the decision-making structures, both at FCC level but also at the ECB level. That is very much something that we were concerned about, and we made a number of recommendations in relation to that.

I think it would be unfair to not acknowledge the significant progress that the ECB has made in respect of investing in the women's game. It invested a significant amount of money back in 2020 and more recently. It has motored on and turbo-charged progress since we launched our report, including equalising match fees for men and women and increasing funding and salaries within The Hundred. It has made good progress. It has a lot more to do, not least to try to address the historical lack of funding and investment in the women's game. It has a lot to do, but it has made a good start, and we are particularly pleased at the progress that it has been able to make in relation to the women's game.

Q7 Chair: The ECB said that it is working to understand what gender-based budgeting would mean for cricket, and of course there are a variety of views about that. There are a variety of views within the ECB, within society and within this panel. What do you think is the impact of not doing so?

Cindy Butts: I think to not introduce gender-based budgeting would mean that there isn't an opportunity to have a process that allows you to fairly assess the levels of funding that you are putting into the men's game in comparison to the women's game. It is a very good process that is not novel. It is tried and tested. A lot of G20 countries use it in order to



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ensure that women's issues and the issues of funding of women's cricket are considered whenever decisions are being made about funding. I am pleased that it is at least going to explore it, but I am concerned that it may not introduce it. I think it would be a mistake not to do that.

Q8 Chair: Sir Brendan, do you accept the justification that it could harm other investments?

Sir Brendan Barber: No. I don't think it need be at the expense of other investments. As Cindy has said, it is a tried and tested methodology that we see in use across other major economies in these kinds of areas, so we are disappointed that, up to this point, although it is examining it in further detail, the ECB has not made that commitment.

Dr Collins: Just to flesh out some of the wider issues, it is important to focus also on the recreational game and the talent pathway here in this context because women and girls' cricket is systemically discriminated against at those levels. The resources available to women and girls to play while improving, for sure, are drastically unequal. This could mean just access to training facilities and access to pitches to play.

That is compounded by the nature of the talent pathway, which—as you will probably know—emerges into a women's regional team structure, which creates a lot of indirect costs in terms of travel and time. All along the way, when girls are starting their cricket journey, there are structural inequalities that need to be taken into account.

Another point that is relevant here is that our Commission has the word "equity" in the title and that word was chosen by the ECB. Equity means taking active action to bring people up to an equal kind of standard in terms of resourcing. With that in mind, one has to think about the historical context here; one has to think about the way in which women have been treated within the game of cricket over a 100 to a 150-year period.

Indeed, it is still a fact today that the England women's cricket team has never played a test match at Lords, but the boys of Eton and Harrow still get a guaranteed fixture in the schedule. From top to bottom, there are these quite deep structural inequalities that need to be thought about.

Chair: Cindy, did you want to add to that?

Cindy Butts: Just picking up on what you said about whether or not it would harm other investments, I wondered whether you were referring to other investments in the women's game. I say that because it is an argument I often hear from men, but also from women cricketers as well, "Oh, we shouldn't focus too much on pay equity for professional players because that means we are taking money away from developing women's cricket and girls' cricket at the grassroots".

Why does women's cricket have to take the hit? Why isn't it that the ECB and cricket are looking at the entirety of the resources they have and



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asking questions about, “Where is it right and proper to place our funding based on our priorities?” as opposed to, “If we take it from women here, they will have to pay the price elsewhere”? I think that is the wrong way of looking at this.

Q9 **Chair:** You are basically advocating slicing the cake differently?

Cindy Butts: Absolutely: slicing the cake differently. The same issue extends to equalities as well. Sometimes I do get the impression that somehow different areas of equality are pitted against one another, “Oh, if we apply additional funding to black cricket or to cricket in south Asian communities, it means that we cannot invest in women’s cricket or disability cricket”. I think it is the wrong approach and I would encourage the ECB to think differently.

Chair: That is very helpful, thank you. Did you want to add something?

Dr Collins: Just quickly, when it comes to funding women’s cricket, obviously a lot of people bring up the commercial revenue angles here, but, again, we are starting from very different bases. The ECB is fully aware of the commercial potential of the women’s game, but men and women are starting from completely different positions here, so investment in the women’s game has great potential for future revenue.

Q10 **John Nicolson:** Thank you and good morning. I realise it has been a wee while since obviously we wrote our report and I take your point about the delay, but in a way that delay is quite useful because we have had an opportunity to assess whether people have listened to you, paid attention to your very good recommendations and are improving in the way that we might have hoped.

You have called for it to no longer be the responsibility of those experiencing discrimination to be the ones who take the lead. I think that is a very important point. Ms Butts, in the period between when the report was produced and now, do you get the sense that there has been movement on that?

Cindy Butts: I would have to refer you to my previous answer to a similar question that the Chair asked. I think it is too early to say. I think the ECB has accepted the points that we make on this issue.

Q11 **John Nicolson:** Reluctantly or enthusiastically, do you think? That is a pregnant pause, isn’t it?

Cindy Butts: No, sorry; it wasn’t intended in that way. I think it has fully accepted that point. Only time will tell whether or not the change that we recommend will—

Q12 **John Nicolson:** Okay. Dr Collins.

Dr Collins: I will give you a specific example. We placed a great deal of emphasis on the historical injustice—I think is the right words—that were suffered by the African Caribbean cricket community in England, starting



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from the 1970s in terms of their treatment in the media, coming right up to the 1990s with the closure of the Haringey Cricket College. We made some specific recommendations around that.

We requested an apology, but an apology is only a starting point. We also referenced the ECB's own commitment to set up a black cricket action plan or community group of some kind. Nine months on, there is no evidence of that happening. I would like to see now much greater focus on correcting those wrongs and taking direct action to make the changes now. I think that is a very good example of where the emphasis still seems to be upon black communities themselves to do the work and do the organisation.

It is fair to say of course that the ECB has funded the Ace programme, but the Ace programme was set up by black communities themselves, mainly Ebony Rainford-Brent and also Richard Thompson when he was at Surrey, but not at the ECB. Greater action on black cricket would be very welcome at this point.

Q13 John Nicolson: That is an interesting point, not least when I look at the audience behind you as well. I think it is good to cite specific examples. A number of people have pointed out to me—and I make no pretence of being an expert at cricket—that Colin Graves is back in Yorkshire. Botham dismissed the report, as chair of Durham, and David “Bumble” Lloyd continues, I think it is fair to say, to brief against Azeem.

I noticed after the last hearing that David “Bumble” Lloyd blocked me on social media, which is bizarre. I never contacted him. To be honest, I didn't know who he was before I started work on this, and it simply seemed to be because I was asking sympathetic questions. Of course he had apologised after Azeem's first DCMS appearance, as the Committee was then called. Looking at all of that, some people might say, “What has changed?”

Cindy Butts: If I could specifically address what you have said in relation to Yorkshire. We absolutely appreciate and recognise that there is a lot of disquiet in relation to what has emerged in Yorkshire. I think, quite understandably, there have been a lot of concerns raised by individuals, including Azeem Rafiq, and—

Chair: We are coming on to talk about Yorkshire in more depth, yes.

Q14 John Nicolson: We are. But just on that point, he told my team yesterday that his family home had been attacked again last week, as it happens, which is shocking.

Cindy Butts: Awful.

John Nicolson: Sorry, please continue.

Chair: Yes. We will cover Yorkshire then in a bit more detail.



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Q15 John Nicolson: Is there anything more you want to say about that or are you happy to wait?

Cindy Butts: No, I am happy to wait on that. I don't know if you are covering the issue of Ian Botham, because you mentioned Ian Botham as well. What I would say is, look, Mr Botham—

John Nicolson: Lord Botham now.

Cindy Butts: Sorry, I should say Lord Botham—

John Nicolson: Let's all bow down!

Cindy Butts: —has a right to his opinions. I wrote to the editor of *The Times*, who ran the article, following his comments that he made during a podcast, where he said that he read the report: he thought it was a load of rubbish; threw it on the floor; nobody had consulted him; no one he knew had spoken to us. I felt it was important to correct the record on a number of different fronts.

First, we did invite Lord Botham to give evidence to us. He didn't respond. The county in which he chairs, Durham, contributed to our call for written evidence and we have thanked it for that. He said he did not know anybody who had contributed to our report, when in fact a number of well-known named cricketers, such as Heather Knight, responded and gave evidence to us.

There were a number of untruths that he spoke about the report, but I think the most disappointing thing for me is that Lord Botham is the chair of a first-class cricket county. Those within the county who may suffer racism, sexism or class-based discrimination, in coming forward and being able to talk about their experiences—what confidence can they have that something will be done about it? I was personally disappointed, not least because he is a sporting hero of mine.

In fact, I would say the impact that Lord Botham had on me as a young working-class woman growing up in Shepherd's Bush was quite profound, to see his blossoming relationship with his arch-rival, Vivian Richards, and the way in which they were both rivals, but they had a deep respect for one another, and their friendship and their love was clearly displayed for all to see. That had a profound effect on me: Viv Richards, fiercely black and consciously black, and Mr Botham was archetypal working-class white, and being able to bridge those divides. To me, that spoke to the power of sport and the power of cricket, so I was personally disappointed at that in particular.

I know time is short, but if I can say one other thing. I was disappointed that the ECB did not call out Lord Botham. As chair of a first-class cricket county, his words carry weight. The ECB did not see fit to come out and say, "This is wrong". Not only did it stay quiet, but it also resisted calls from stakeholders and people who were concerned about Mr Botham's comments and chose to stay silent. I think that the ECB should have had



a moral backbone on this issue. There are other issues on which I think it is right and proper, with issues of cultural salience, that it speaks up and speaks out loudly and clearly.

Q16 John Nicolson: That is very powerful testimony. Before I hand back to the Chair, I just noticed Dr Collins had his hand raised.

Dr Collins: I absolutely echo what Cindy said there. It was a deafening silence. I also want to point out the missed opportunity. Lord Botham was not just a working-class hero and rebel of his time; he was also a state school cricketer. We make a great play in the report, and we place considerable emphasis on the need to fund state school cricket, with the potential to really democratise the game through investment in state school cricket and making it a truly national sport once again. Lord Botham could have taken the opportunity to speak up for those things, having lived through that himself, but missed that chance. I guess it is not too late.

Q17 Clive Efford: I think that is a good segue to my questions. Welcome and thank you for coming to give evidence. Your inquiry found that the structure and operation of the talent pathway remains a barrier to equity and inclusion. What needs to change to improve that situation?

Dr Collins: Shall I take that?

Cindy Butts: If you would. He is our lead on TP.

Dr Collins: A whole number of things, Clive. The talent pathway in cricket—this will potentially sound a little bit granular, but it is very important—is a very good example of what is sometimes referred to as structural inequalities. The inequalities that arise in the cricket talent pathway are not always based on individual prejudices or the perspectives of coaches and selectors. They are kind of baked in.

To start with, the structure of county cricket makes it quite difficult to access resources for players—particularly from state schools, as we have seen and detailed in the report. Selection processes often favour kids from private school backgrounds. Kids from private school backgrounds necessarily have significantly greater access to resources. Commentators on how cricket runs in private schools have referred to it sometimes as an arms race, where private schools will use their cricket resources as a way to advertise to prospective parents. All of these things are in play.

One of the key details here is the age of selection. Cricket has a very early point of selection and talent identification. In some of the bigger counties, it can be as young as under-nine. Most of the sports science research tells us that until children pass through puberty, it is very difficult to understand their technical and sporting potential.

As you can imagine, if you are selecting kids and putting them into a county pathway at the age of nine or 10, those children are then immediately afforded extra benefits—extra coaching, extra time, extra



confidence—everything that comes with extra resource. You can see that the selection point age, say nine or 10, is something that structurally disadvantages kids from state schools, most of whom have never picked up a cricket bat in their life. If they have, it is probably a Chance to Shine plastic bat and ball, so when they are being selected or trialled for county, it is not a level playing field in any way, shape or form.

We have proposed a range of answers to what is a complex problem, I fully accept. We have looked at better training and understanding for selection criteria. We have looked at the possibility of helping coaches and selectors think about the kinds of terminologies they use. One example here that I think is pertinent: the ECB coaching manuals and many of the county cricket talent pathway guidance documentation in the past—I am not sure if this pertains today—have referred to something called “character”. They like their cricketers to have character. I ask you to find a more subjective selection criteria than character. What exactly does that mean and how might that play out again with the public school versus state school dichotomy that goes on in cricket?

So, training and awareness around that, restructuring selection criteria, but the radical solution that we have proposed is to not tinker with selection at the under-14 age, but effectively to remove selection so that county cricket under the age of 14 would be a much more inclusive pathway; a very broad pyramid base that tries to get as many kids involved as possible and avoids the production of these representative cricket teams.

It is called representative cricket. That means you go off and you put your blazer and your cap on, and you play a match for Surrey or Dorset, or whichever county it might be. This creates, on the basis of quite flimsy sports science selection criteria, quite toxic hierarchies within the system at a very early age. Some kids are anointed as being absolutely excellent, the best, the top 11 or the top 15, and the other kids in the pathway are then deemed to be second class.

That all changes as they grow. Some of those kids who were brilliant at the age of 10 go through puberty and lose interest or they cannot bowl in the same way that they used to. What we have recommended is a structural shift, to not just mitigate but remove those selection problems that operate at the earlier level. I was very pleased that Mike Atherton in the Sky Sports responses and coverage to our report endorsed that particular recommendation. I thought that was good coming from him; a person who knows the game extremely well.

Q18 Clive Efford: That touches on my next question, but I will ask it anyway. The ECB has not accepted your recommendations. It has gone for its no barriers approach.

Cindy Butts: Oh, that is—

Q19 Clive Efford: Let me finish. I will ask the questions. How does that differ



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from what you have just set out and what do you think needs to change?

Dr Collins: The ECB has, in its initial response to the report, referenced the particular age of selection, and I am very pleased to say has effectively endorsed that new structure, subject to consultation with the counties. That is in the nature of cricket. You have the ECB, but then you have all of the counties, not just the first-class counties but the national counties as well.

It is probably too early to say whether the ECB is going to deliver on this new structure, but I think this is one example of a very positive response on the part of the ECB.

Cindy Butts: I would agree with that in respect of changing the age of representative cricket. As far as I can tell, the ECB has embraced it but is saying that it is subject to further discussions with the counties.

The issue that it has not accepted—which we are extremely disappointed with—is the cost, making the talent pathway free for all. It has rejected that recommendation, and we think it is a massive mistake. What we know is that the cost of the partnership disadvantages people from working class backgrounds, be they from minoritised communities or white working-class kids, it acts as a real barrier to inclusion.

What it has said is that it will consult with the game and look to implement some means-tested approach. We want the full-fat approach. We want it to be free for all at the point of delivery. If there is anything that this Committee can do, I would like to think it would be to support us in that recommendation and urge the ECB to think seriously again.

Dr Collins: I am sure you understand this, but cricket is an immensely expensive sport. It did not use to be. Kids in this country used to play cricket on the streets with a tape ball and a stick. No longer. When you are trying to enter the pathways for cricket, the amount of money that is spent on equipment, and equipment that makes a serious difference to how you perform. I coached cricket at club level for five years. I have seen kids turn up with £300, £400 cricket bats. This makes a material difference in terms of how you then perform on the pitch.

The cost is huge, but it is not just the direct cost of the pathway. Time is a massive factor here. Having to take your kids on a representative match fixture, which might mean travelling from Buckinghamshire over to Shropshire or something for a game far away. These things put immense pressure on working parents. If you have the time and resource to take your kids to these things, it makes a tremendous difference. A lot of people drop out of cricket pathways, first because of the direct costs—as Cindy has just said—but also because of all the indirect costs that make a huge difference.

Keeping cricket local, not having those representative matches at the early age, keeping it local with no particular branded kit required. You



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would be shocked if you saw how much requirement there is sometimes for kids to spend money on kit: playing wear, training wear, tracksuits. Hundreds and hundreds of pounds of kit. It is not like football. You do not just turn up with a ball and play. You have bats, helmets, all the protective equipment. It is a very expensive sport.

The ECB needs to address that for the first-class counties and the national counties as well. Let's remember that half the country plays its cricket at the early pathway stage in a national county. That means the Devons and the Cornwalls, and places like that, that are not county championship.

Cindy Butts: We do recognise and appreciate the fact that some of the smaller first-class counties rely on their charging for the talent pathway in order to keep themselves afloat. They rely on it as a source of revenue. I think that is one of the reasons why the ECB said that it would not adopt it.

We would encourage ECB to think about ways in which it can support those smaller counties that do rely on it for revenue to diversify their revenue streams so that they are not dependent on it, because it is so important for advancing equity and inclusion.

Q20 Clive Efford: This is a problem that has existed for a long time in many of our sports. Rugby is similar, tennis is similar, Olympic sports are similar, in the sense that public school pupils have a greater chance of representing the country at the highest level. Cricket is the worst. It has the highest proportion of people who have been to private school in the English cricket team at that level. That has been the case for a long time.

Does that not suggest that the ECB is not interested in recognising the problem because it has existed before your report and then it has dragged its feet, particularly on this entry issue of cost?

Therefore, shouldn't other authorities be putting more pressure on the cricket board, like how we fund cricket and how funding grants are given to cricket to ensure that they are addressing these problems and dealing with the root causes?

Cindy Butts: I agree. One of our key findings is that the ECB has not made any concerted effort to address the issues that exist in respect of—

Clive Efford: It is institutionally classist, isn't it?

Cindy Butts: That is what we have said. We have said that the ECB has ignored the issues. That it has not put in place a proper plan to address the barriers that exist for those from lower socioeconomic groups. That is why we recommended that it put a strategy in place. I understand the ECB has developed an oversight group with people such as Ed Balls, and so on, that are sitting on the board, but we are yet to understand what the remit of that group is, what it is intending to achieve via that group.



I think there has been quite a bit of disquiet—I am sure, Michael, you can attest to this—out in the stakeholder community that there is not enough transparency about this group, its make-up, what it is supposed to be doing. That is before we even talk about the early outcomes.

Dr Collins: Unlike black cricket, there is apparently a state schools action plan, but we have not seen very much information. There seems to be a task force. We do not know how it was set up. There is a lack of transparency around it, as Cindy has implied. We would like to see a lot more detail and a lot more about the action in the action plan.

I want to add one more thing. On women and girls' cricket, I think that there is a drift towards believing that private school dominance within the growth of women and girls' cricket is something that everybody has to accept. That would be a terrible mistake. The growth of women and girls' cricket right now, the exciting opportunity that is presented to all of us who love the game, should take advantage, broaden the base and drive women and girls' cricket in state schools as part of a wider plan of action.

It is a unique, once in a generation, opportunity to grow the game in state schools and not just rely on private school girls, who already play hockey, turning to cricket. I am sorry to say I think that speaks to what has come up time and time again, which is that cricket has a tendency to be a little bit lazy, to rest on historical laurels and just turn to the private school system because it keeps churning out players—excellent players many times—and not thinking about the bigger picture. Not thinking about what we can achieve for our national game.

Remember, this is our national summer sport; it is not supposed to be some kind of niche sport. If you go back to the 1950s and 1960s, everybody in this country played cricket, work and pub teams across the country. It was a much more working-class sport in the 1950s and 1960s than it is now.

We need concerted action. We must not become lazy and fatalistic. That means bringing the Government in. It means bringing the counties together as well, not just saying, "Well, we have always done it this way so that is how we have to continue".

Chair: Thank you. Can I encourage you all to be as concise as possible with your answers? Thank you very much.

Q21 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Some more questions on the same theme. Your "Holding Up a Mirror to Cricket" report even said that any considerations need class at their heart. Obviously that cross-cuts black and south Asian communities, women, white working class. Do you think that cricket has a bit of an image problem compared to other sports? That it has this elitist, slightly stuffy, as you said, public school thing? Do you think it is behind the beautiful game football is seen as? They all have their problems but a bit less maybe elitist, sexist, racist.



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Cindy Butts: I think it has and that that was very much on full display when one watched Freddie Flintoff's brilliant series. When a lot of young people from a variety of different backgrounds, ethnicities, working-class youngsters, talked about cricket being a posh person's game, do not see cricket as a game for them, I think it does have an image problem. The historic matches between Eton and Harrow do not help. It perpetuates this sense of—

Dr Rupa Huq: Oxford, Cambridge, Eton and Harrow.

Dr Collins: Exactly.

Q22 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Do they still have a place now? Should we not be doing away with those shibboleths, putting lords at the top of the pyramid, all that stuff?

Cindy Butts: We should, which is why we recommended that those matches cease. Unfortunately, the MCC has rejected that recommendation, but we absolutely think that they should no longer exist. They do not represent modern Britain. They act as a barrier to people wanting to get involved, young people wanting to get involved in cricket. We think it is outdated and we very much encourage the MCC to think again.

Dr Collins: That is not just for the sake of it. Symbolism matters in politics and society for sure, but what we have recommended is that the historic fixtures are replaced by an open state schools cricket competition to incentivise state school children, along with a wider action plan to play the game.

I do not want anybody to think that was a tokenistic, "Let's do away with the historic fixtures". We would like to see more space in the diary for women's cricket and for state school cricket.

Cindy Butts: Absolutely. We are not anti-tradition. We are anti-tradition when that gets in the way of encouraging inclusivity and stands in the way of what was our ambition and the ECB's ambition, which is to make cricket the most inclusive sport in the country. When tradition gets in the way of that, I do not think it has any place.

Q23 **Dr Rupa Huq:** The other one I have heard is Duncan Stone, who wrote a book called "Different Class". He says that there is a whole load of these cost-free cultural things that could change the image. Do we have to play "Jerusalem"? I do not want to look like some anti-woke person, but it has some very traditional ideas of Englishness. He says things like that could be done away with and it would help the image being a bit more forward looking and inclusive. Do you have a position on that?

Dr Collins: I think there is much lower hanging fruit than "Jerusalem", to be honest. I would rather start with the structural things. People can interpret "Jerusalem" in very different ways.



Sir Brendan Barber: All this is about a cultural challenge facing the sport. It is a sport where I think there are many perceptions. That it is posh. That it is rather exclusive. It is certainly expensive, as we have talked about. In the testimony that we received—and we received 4,000 responses in the survey we did and so on—there was graphic testimony about young people in particular feeling excluded because they came from the wrong social background. They were wearing the wrong kind of tracksuit. They did not fit in with the posh boys and so on. There is a real cultural challenge facing the game, and we devote a chapter to some of those issues in our report.

- Q24 **Dr Rupa Huq:** According to figures I have seen, a third of recreational cricketers come from diverse communities, so we do need to be more inclusive—all the stuff you said about the talent stream of private schools. You had a tangible conclusion that socioeconomic status should be included in the cricket anti-discrimination code. Are there examples of other sports where they have done that?

Cindy Butts: I am not aware of it having been done in other sports, but I am aware of it being included in policing. The policing standards include unlawful discrimination for the protected characteristics that are covered under the Equality Act 2010. It also adds in provision for unfair discrimination to capture the socioeconomic issues. I think there is much that cricket can learn from the way in which policing does that.

- Q25 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Usually these changes at grassroots level take a long time to feed into the professional game. What could be done to speed up or accelerate these changes in leadership structures?

Cindy Butts: The first thing I would say is that the importance of leaders taking responsibility, leading from the front and modelling the behaviour that they want to see in others is important. In respect of the recreational game, as we know, volunteers are the lifeblood of the recreational game. Without them cricket just would not be played. There are 42,000 or so volunteers within cricket. We pay homage and we give credit for all of the hard work that they do within the recreational game.

One of the things that we believe is that they can be better supported and assisted to be able to play their part in improving the culture within the recreational game. Again, that is one of the areas where we felt that the ECB need not reinvent the wheel. There is lots of good work that goes on in the charitable voluntary sectors, working with volunteers, lots of resources that we encourage the ECB to tap into and to develop a volunteer strategy. It has accepted that, which is good news.

Dr Collins: A couple of quick points. We should also recognise that, in terms of cricket, the class differences are different between the north and the south of England. Cricket remains a cross-class sport much more so in places like Yorkshire and Lancashire, which has historic cricket and professional leagues that were played. I think that is very important. I do



not want anybody to think that we are ignorant of those distinctions. We are very much cognisant of those issues.

However, it does not eradicate the problems around private school dominance, things like scholarships to private schools, which we have not touched on but which we could touch on. The other issue is leadership, as Cindy says.

Quickly on the MCC. Alongside the deafening silence, vis-à-vis Lord Botham, the ECB can speak out and show moral leadership on the issue of the historic fixtures. It does not have to remain silent on the matter. It does not have control. The MCC dates back to 1787. It is a private members club, but it is a private members club with a public function. It says it on its web page. The ECB is within its rights to comment and show leadership on those discussions.

You asked us what could catalyse change. I think intervening on those types of issues. They would only change a small part of this equation, but it would show symbolic leadership in an important area.

Q26 Damian Green: I want to pick up the subject of money and how the various desirable changes can be paid for. One of the distinctions you draw that I want to tease out a bit more, because I am not sure I understand it, is the ECB asserts that, of course, it is commercially sensible to have as diverse a game as possible, because there are large audiences out there, and if cricket does not utilise them then cricket is doing itself down.

You seem to disagree with that and are saying that the ECB assumes commercial growth and EDI always go together, but that is not always the case. When would it not be the case? I am genuinely puzzled about that. If you want to expand interest or maintain interest in minority communities or working-class areas where the game has been dying, I would have thought there was complete alignment between that and commercial imperatives because you have a bigger audience.

Cindy Butts: I am not entirely sure I understand where you are coming from, sorry.

Damian Green: You argue that "In many cases, EDI and wider commercial goals will complement each other. There are dangers, however, in assuming—as the ECB has tended to do—that they will always align". I do not understand what that danger is. It is a quote from your report.

Cindy Butts: I am sure it is. I am not discounting that. I think it is talking about the concerns that we had around the ECB's dual role as the promoter of the game, as well as the regulation of the game. What we were saying is that we uncovered instances where we felt that the two were in conflict and, at times, the ECB was doing what was right in order to promote the game and generate revenues and sponsorship. That did



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not always align with what was the right thing and the priorities in respect of EDI issues.

Q27 **Damian Green:** They take a short-term commercial view rather than a long term.

Cindy Butts: Precisely. We found that there is the potential for that conflict to happen. That was very much the reason why we recommended that there was clearer blue water, if you like, between its role as a promoter of the game and its role in overseeing the regulations.

Q28 **Damian Green:** Brendan, you are aching to come in there.

Sir Brendan Barber: Yes. There has clearly been a perception that there has been a tension sometimes between the regulatory responsibilities of the ECB and the commercial promotional responsibilities. The need for a clear separation between those two functions was something that we very strongly argued, and having a regulatory machinery that was clearly independent from the wider ECB and clear dividing lines to separate the two areas

Q29 **Damian Green:** You want to see an independent regulator basically.

Sir Brendan Barber: We considered making a recommendation for a statutory regulator. We did not go quite as far as that, partly because of a concern, frankly, whether there would be the political will to bring about such a legislative change. We did not want to make a recommendation that was just hanging there going nowhere. Also, because we recognise that if the ECB genuinely committed to delivering that degree of independence and that clear separation that could be an appropriate, workable solution.

Q30 **Damian Green:** Do you think it is doing that?

Cindy Butts: There was not the political will. I had a number of meetings with Ministers about this very issue and with a shadow Minister. There just was not the appetite for it. We were also concerned, given the nature and extent of the changes that need to happen in cricket, we thought very much that cricket would get bogged down in what kind of model they want to see and navel-gazing and would detract cricket from focusing in on a full range of important issues it needs to address.

That is why we did not recommend it. We did say, just as this very Committee has said, that we think that should be in the back pocket as a nuclear option in the event that the changes that we recommend do not come about.

Dr Collins: To build on Cindy's point about EDI and commercial objectives not always aligning, the south Asian action plan, which was quite transparently driven by Lord Kamlesh Patel and was clearly based on a business model that the growth potential of the south Asian community in Britain, created obvious commercial incentives to focus on this area. That was very compelling.



The case with African, Caribbean, black cricket in England is quite different. The game is not played in that community in the way that it was in the 1980s and the 1990s, and the reasons for that are quite complex. Put bluntly, there is not today an obvious commercial incentive to focus on that particular community, but I would suggest that the ECB itself, as an institution, has a moral obligation to address the historical neglect of black cricket, which it has admitted in its response to our report. Again, I would like to reiterate that earlier point about action on that area.

Cindy Butts: One other thing, and I think it is important. In the context of our work, we very much focused—that is why we were there to identify problems—a lot on the problems, and there are some problems and issues with some of the recommendations that the ECH has not accepted in full or drawn very narrowly. I think it is right and proper for me to say that I do have confidence in the ECB's leadership, who are new, relatively speaking, in terms of the chair, the chief executive, a relatively new board as well.

I think it is right and proper that they are given the opportunity as new people at the top of the helm to make the changes that we recommend. In the event they do not, then something else should happen. I do think it is important to say that all of the indications we have had—and we have seen some of the evidence in terms of some of the things that they have already introduced—gives me optimism that things will change. The proof of the pudding will obviously be in the eating, and there is some time to go. But I think it is important to say that they should be given the chance to make the changes that we recommend.

Q31 **Damian Green:** I was interested by what you said earlier—that there should not be trade-offs between the women's professional game and the women's grassroots' game and we should not say that that means we could not put money into disability cricket and so on. Also, you want to make the talent pathway free for everyone, for all the reasons you have explained. Which slightly makes me wonder: is there enough money in cricket to do all of this? Have you identified funds that are sloshing around, not being used properly, that could be used for these purposes? There is a danger of the best being the enemy of the good here, I fear.

Cindy Butts: We were tasked with looking at the issues, diagnosing the problem and coming up with solutions. That is what we have done. We were ambitious for the game. In my very first meeting with my commissioners, I said to them, "Let's give them more than the ECB and cricket think they can handle. They are in crisis, and my experience tells me that it is at the point of crisis, when you push hard, is when you are ambitious, and you want to drive the game to make positive changes".

We have been ambitious for the game. We have set them a hell of a lot of recommendations and sub-recommendations. It comes with a price tag. Not all of it. Some of it is completely free. Treating people with respect and dignity.



Q32 **Damian Green:** Specifically on the money aspect.

Cindy Butts: Specifically on the money aspect, it does require significant investment. We are not asking them to do it all overnight. We have set some timescales for how and when we think they should deliver. Some of it will be shorter term, some medium term, some longer term. We are not asking them to do it overnight.

The other thing to say is cricket has funds. How it chooses to spend those funds is up to cricket. We have said what is needed to do in order to make cricket the most inclusive sport in the country. It is over to cricket now to decide how it spends its funds.

Dr Collins: It is not just a fixed pot of money, is it? Any business is investing to grow, and all of these recommendations are about growing and democratising the game, increasing interest in it. Out of that will flow future revenues. I think anybody can see the common sense of that.

In terms of where the money comes from, let's push hard and think about all the different avenues. I am aware, for example, of a private group of people who would like to retrofit state school sports halls and have a director of cricket for state schools. That would be essentially a public-private partnership. There are lots of things out there that need to be explored. What we have to stop doing is saying, "There is a fixed pot of money, we cannot do anything". We have to use this moment to catalyse a change that can then grow the future interest in and revenues of cricket.

Q33 **Alex Sobel:** We touched on John's question around resistance from first-class counties. The majority of 15 of the 18 first-class counties are member-owned. In your report, you expressed concerns about small but powerful cliques in memberships, the resistance to the changes needed both for good governance in relation to EDI.

Durham, which is the one we talked about, is privately owned. I am personally in favour of mutual ownership and membership. Having said that, do you think that membership-based clubs are able to change and what would be the methodology there?

Sir Brendan Barber: I think members have to be brought on the journey with the leadership at every level, both from the ECB and within the counties and those structures. I am very familiar with membership organisations, given my background, but the leadership is key to winning that support for change.

I think we set a number of challenges in terms of looking at the profile of membership across the game. Whether that is as representative as we would like it of different communities, those are things that we want to see the leaderships actively now thinking about and seeing what they can do to develop a much broader base of membership to support the change that we recommend.



Q34 Alex Sobel: You mentioned the ECB. If people are not going along the EDI pathway, they are not on the journey, at what point should the ECB intervene?

Sir Brendan Barber: The ECB has a number of ways in which it interacts with the rest of the game, the first-class counties and the other structures. It must use those mechanisms to try to help promote this change. It has County Partnership Agreements with the first-class counties. We want to see EDI standards clearly enhanced and reflected in that dialogue that takes place between the ECB and the counties.

There are mechanisms. We would like to see a number of changes within the ECB's own structures. For example, we recommended that women should be equally represented alongside people from the men's game, in all the different elements of the ECB structures, their committees and on the board. We have yet to see quite how that is going to be taken forward. There seems to be some movement by the ECB, but not perhaps as much movement as we have recommended.

We have made the case for somebody with executive lead responsibilities for the EDI agenda also to be reflected within the ECB board. At the moment, the ECB, it appears, is not supporting that recommendation, arguing that it is the responsibility of everybody within the different structures. The problem is too often you look at areas where, if everybody is responsible, in effect, it becomes nobody with a clear, direct responsibility. If that voice is not actively taking part in the room with a clear sense of commitment to this agenda one fears that it goes by the board.

There are a number of specific changes that we think could be made in the governance structures to help promote this agenda. We continue to hope the ECB will look at all of these recommendations and take them forward.

Q35 Alex Sobel: Where does the buck stop? We have obviously just seen an AGM at Yorkshire and a reversion to an earlier leadership of Yorkshire returning. I am the MP for Headingley, but I am not a member, to keep myself distant and impartial in the issue.

When the announcement of the return of Colin Graves was made, Sporting Equals published a letter and they said, "His reinstatement would send a message that emboldens those who perpetuate the myth that racism is simply banter, that it is enough to pay lip service to policies and procedures. It would make a mockery of the suffering of ethnically diverse players across the country. It would be a rejection of the ICEC's report's thorough investigation and well considered conclusions". Obviously, that is your report. You have ownership of that. Do you agree with the tenor of that letter?

Cindy Butts: I absolutely understand and recognise the level of concern that exists out there. I had a number of people individually make representations to me. I am aware of the concerns that have been raised



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by Kick It Out, Sporting Equals—indeed this very Committee—that there is a concern that it undermines our work and the progress that has been made thus far.

I do completely understand that there is concern around this issue. What I would say is I am not intimately connected to what the financial position is in respect of Yorkshire. What is clear, is that it is in a difficult position. I do not know the intricacies of that. I am aware that Lord Mann has raised concerns about the lack of rigour in terms of considering other bids that were on the table. I do not know how true that is. That is perhaps something you can cover with others.

Alex Sobel: On EDI we are concerned.

Cindy Butts: I do understand that. What I would say though is that I am aware that since his return, Mr Graves has apologised for having made comments previously undermining Azeem Rafiq's experience as being just banter. He has apologised for that, accepted that discrimination does exist, and has vowed to make sure that Yorkshire is inclusive and welcoming.

He has also said publicly that he supports our work and all of our recommendations. Words can only take you so far. I think the proof of the pudding will be in demonstrable change. I think that the ECB has a vital role to play in ensuring that it scrutinises Yorkshire, hold Mr Graves to his words, and I think this Committee has a role to play too.

You have played such a pivotal role in relation to shining a light on the issues of race and discrimination more broadly. In many ways, you have assisted us in our work. I think that there is an important role that you can play in respect of Yorkshire but, dare I say it—if I am going to be cheeky enough to say—I think in terms of scrutinising and overseeing cricket going forward. I know there is lots that you have in your remit, but I do not think now is the time to relent.

I think now, more than ever, cricket needs the support as well as the scrutiny to ensure that this work that we have all done, that took us two-plus years that we put our heart and soul into, that provides a blueprint for change for cricket and, indeed, for other sports. I think you have an important role to play in ensuring that that happens.

Chair: Thank you very much. Can I thank all of the panel for appearing in front of us today? You are now free to go. Thank you for your work.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Richard Thompson, Richard Gould and Clare Connor CBE.

Q36 **Chair:** Our second panel this morning is the England and Wales Cricket Board, as we consider its response to the ICEC report and wider issues



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within cricket. We are joined by Richard Thompson, the Chair of the ECB, Richard Gould, its Chief Executive, and Clare Connor, Deputy CEO and Managing Director of England Women. Welcome to you all.

You have heard the evidence from our first panel. Thank you for being here for that. I would just remind you all that you do not necessarily have to all contribute to every question, but if someone has said everything that you wish to convey yourself, please feel free to say so.

I am going to start. You are largely a new leadership team at the ECB over the last year and a half. What is different about your approach? What has changed? What will be your driving motivational force for your tenure in leadership? Richard Thompson, would you like to start?

Richard Thompson: I would say, given that Richard, I and Clare, have been in the game for many years—obviously we are relatively new to the ECB. Richard joined just over a year ago, and I am in post 18 months, but we had a history at Surrey, where we established our credentials.

Given some of the challenges that Richard and I inherited at Surrey in 2010, we recognise that to bring about real change requires a change of culture and values. Our focus from day one has been about a change of culture. When I became chair, which was six months before the report was issued, I felt that I had to try to identify what cricket's North Star should be. For me, that was to try to make cricket the country's most inclusive sport.

It is what I tried to do very hard with Richard and Ebony and other people at Surrey, and I felt what had happened in cricket over the previous two years, its great strength of reaching diverse communities had suddenly become its weakness. The point for me was that, unlike other sports, cricket can do things that other sports cannot do. It can reach communities that other sports cannot do.

My life has been defined by cricket and, in some respects, I was reluctant to take the chair position on because I recognised this report was due and I could sense it was not going to make comfortable reading. In the sense of knowing the game, I felt that this is probably the best opportunity I am ever going to have to bring about genuine, long-lasting change to a game that I love and that has defined me. I think cultural values is the key answer to the question as to what we have tried to bring.

There are other things as well, Chair. Of the board of 12 there are eight new board members. We have the highest number of women on the board now at 42% and the highest ethnicity on the board we have had. I have tried to make the board more inclusive, more representative of the game in that sense. To some extent, we were waiting for the report to be published but we tried to get ahead of that report. It cannot just be about the report. It needs to be about the culture of the game that drives change, not just the report.



Q37 Chair: One of the features of the ICEC report was about trust. It identified that authorities were not always trusted to act when there were reports or complaints. How are you tackling that whole aspect of trust? Do you feel that that has changed as well?

Richard Thompson: I will pass some of that to Richard and Clare, but to answer some of that question. It is key because ultimately you lead by consent. We are a governing body, but we require the consent of the game to do that. If you lose trust, then you have lost your authority. It was very important that we establish that early. It is for the game to answer that question, but I would like to think that by a lot of the steps we have taken, driven in no short term by this report, we have started to materially improve that trust. That is an ongoing journey, but there are some specific things we can touch on there, too.

Richard Gould: For people who have suffered discrimination, sometimes they have not felt able to speak out—sometimes for years—and that is clearly not right. When there is discrimination, we need to be able to identify it and act on it quickly. That is why the report has been so helpful for us to give us so many recommendations to pursue. We are hoping that by the end of this year we will have fully delivered 60% of the recommendations, and of the recommendations we think we have found a route to deliver 94% of them.

One of those includes the anti-discrimination unit. This is basically a hotline for anybody in cricket at whatever level. When they experience discrimination, they can contact the ECB. It sits within the cricket regulator, so it is independent of myself. Those issues then get dealt with. The anti-discrimination unit was set up just over a year ago. In 2023 it had 590 calls that came through, mostly online through the website.

Of those, there were about 230 that did not require immediate action because they were not focused on discrimination, but sadly there were about 300 that did require action, 242 of which were dealt with at a local level and then about 120 were dealt with by the anti-discrimination unit working out of the cricket regulator. We hope that by those solid actions we can start to build the trust that we know we need to earn.

Clare Connor: Can I add one point to that? In addition, we have committed to reporting transparently. Every year we will publish an annual progress report against what we have said we will deliver when we published our response last September to the report, and then maybe a slightly longer-term horizon. Those before us spoke about the time that some of this will take to put right. We have said that we will be publishing a full state of equity in cricket report in 2026, which will be an independently assessed piece of work. That transparency and a total willingness to report progress and where we have not made enough progress that is really there.

Q38 Chair: With this new approach to making it easier to make complaints or



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raise concerns and the transparency around it, are you seeing an increase in the volume of complaints or any difference?

Richard Gould: I track it monthly to understand what the scale is. Clearly, in the summer months there is a higher number than in the winter months. We have not seen any specific spikes connected, certainly over the last 12 months, but it has only been 12 months. Therefore, we do need to take some time to fully assess that.

Q39 **Chair:** When the ICEC report came out, I think some were surprised by the ECB's response to it, in that you were very open-minded in your response to the report. Some in and around the game have been deeply critical of the ICEC's report and in some cases resistant to it. Where are you finding that resistance is coming from and what are their main concerns?

Richard Thompson: It is a good question. Genuinely, we are not finding resistance. When I tried to create the North Star of defining cricket ambition to become the country's most inclusive team sport, you had to get buy-in. I asked all the first-class counties what their view was on that and whether they believed this was something they want to sign up to. Every county emphatically said yes, as did the national counties. The reality was that we had to bring the game with us. We are a group of 41 counties. That is the game. That is what the ECB represents and governs. There may always be the odd naysayer, but fundamentally this report has been embraced and endorsed by the whole game.

Q40 **Chair:** You will have heard Cindy Butts' frustration and, frankly, very tangible disappointment at the ECB's silence over Ian Botham's attempts to rubbish the work of the ICEC. What was your response to that?

Richard Thompson: My first response was to phone Lord Botham and question why. I guess the ECB could have taken one of two views over that. My feeling was that we are trying to reconcile, we are trying to move forward and heal. Lord Botham is entitled to his views. I did not agree with them. I made it very clear to him that I did not agree with them. But we live in a democracy, and he is allowed to say those things.

I could see what Durham was doing as a county and would happily share their EDI reports and their action plans. It was pretty clear that Durham was doing a very good job at reaching communities, reaching all sorts of minorities that other counties were not reaching. Whatever Lord Botham said, it was not representative of what Durham was doing as a club because it clearly was embracing the report and doing what it could to become the country's most inclusive sport.

Richard Gould: This is a report that was commissioned by the ECB, so it was not something that was forced upon the ECB in that regard. I think that there has been some hesitancy as to what the report was going to include, and there was a lot of worry around the game. I get to travel around schools, clubs and cricket centres and the one thing that people are trying to do is to make cricket the most inclusive team sport. The



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ICEC report has embedded itself in a short space of time throughout the sport. It is the focus of everybody.

Q41 **Chair:** Neil Davidson wrote in *The Cricketer* saying that the ICEC report could undo a lot of good work in recreational cricket. Why do you think he felt that?

Richard Gould: I don't know why Mr Davidson made those comments. He is the owner, I think, of *The Cricketer*. *The Cricketer* itself has been a very important voice in bringing a lot of the issues to bear. George Dobell has been an active and welcome voice bringing those things to relevance, but I am not aware why Mr Davidson would make those comments.

Q42 **Chair:** You do not share his concerns?

Richard Thompson: No.

Richard Gould: No, I don't share his concerns there. He is chair of a cricket club, I understand. He has previously been chair of Leicestershire some years ago, but no, I don't understand why he would, Chair.

Q43 **Clive Efford:** Thanks for coming to give evidence today. Can I move on to the equality, diversity and inclusion curriculum? The ECB has committed to an EDI education curriculum by February 2024. When it is rolled out, how will you ensure that people at all the levels intended take part?

Clare Connor: I will take that, Clive, if that is okay. We have just under 400 cricket senior leaders now who have nearly completed an inclusive leadership training course. It is a six-module course that looks at all areas of discrimination and bias and understanding other people's experiences. When that is complete, which will probably be in March or April, we will be rolling out a new programme of education around racial literacy. When we meet with counties, they all report on where their senior leaders are in those programmes.

In addition, with the PCA we are running similar programmes with all our professional men's and women's players. We are just over 500 players now who have been through similar courses. We do some of those in partnership. Nujum Sports has been helping us on faith inclusion. We are working with Out4Cricket for LGBTQ+ inclusion.

What we are seeing when we run the census—we have just run the third census across cricket last year—is a 20 percentage point increase in people who feel that in working in cricket now they have a better understanding of EDI issues. We are tracking that and making sure that we will deliver what we have said we will in our response.

Q44 **Clive Efford:** My question was about how you ensure people engage. We have had people in the past—like Andrew Gale—refuse to participate in the CDC inquiry, and they have carried on with their careers unpunished. How do you ensure that people engage properly with this?



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Clare Connor: By tracking the number of players and coaches and support staff and senior leaders.

Q45 **Clive Efford:** Yes, but tracking numbers is just a numbers exercise, if you will permit me. What do you do with those people who do not engage?

Richard Gould: In terms of employees within the cricket network, we can ensure that they do engage. In the leadership programme that is currently going on the numbers have been fascinating. The number that Clare mentioned, an increase of 20%, was how confident people felt being able to deal with those issues. That number has gone from 40% to 60%.

It is still not a great number, but it shows you that when people have to deal with these issues they do not have the confidence, and that is where the education comes in. It is the sort of thing that we can use within a County Partnership Agreement. These are the sorts of things that we can explore going forward to make sure that it really does work and people do engage. If people are employed in the game, they have to engage.

We also rely on a large body of volunteers. We have about 75,000 volunteers across our 5,500 clubs. That is more difficult, but these are people who are working within their communities to deliver cricket and to deliver community benefit. My experience with our volunteer base is always good. They are people trying to do the right thing and that is up to us to be able to then as a governing body scale training opportunities that are accessible to all.

Q46 **Clive Efford:** Yes, but if it is going to work, ultimately people have to engage with it if it is part of the requirements of being a coach or whatever. They have to engage with it, don't they, and there has to be a sanction at the end of it? Is there no plan for a sanction if people flatly refuse? This is where it all started, isn't it?

Richard Gould: There is always the availability for sanctions, particularly with employed staff. When we are dealing with volunteers, who are our lifeblood, an amazing force throughout the country for us, that is where coaching courses is an example. We have four different tiers of coaching and EDI is a feature of those courses. These are things that can be built on.

Q47 **Clive Efford:** I am still not clear about what the ultimate sanction will be if people refuse to engage. For instance, Andrew Gale—the example that I gave—would he be allowed to continue in his role in cricket if he refused to engage with this education process?

Richard Gould: Andrew Gale was charged by the cricket regulator in connection with issues at Yorkshire. The charges were upheld, and Andrew Gale was given a four-week suspension from coaching if he returns into the ECB-regulated cricket. He currently has not. He was also issued with a £6,000 fine. In addition to those sanctions, there was a



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strong recommendation for him to undertake an education course. Our ability to enforce an education course only came into being in 2019, but I think you will see in the four-week suspension and a fine that we do have sanctions that we can maintain if he chooses to come back and work in cricket.

Q48 **Clive Efford:** If he chose to come back he would have to participate in this education process, and if he refuses to?

Richard Gould: If he does not comply with the sanctions that were laid against him by—

Q49 **Clive Efford:** That is a different answer. I am asking about the enforcement of this particular area of this education curriculum, and I am asking whether there is a sanction at the end of it if people refuse to engage with it.

Richard Gould: On that particular sanction, no, there isn't because it was not something that was in the regulations at the time. That has since been changed to ensure that we can insist that people undergo training.

Q50 **Clive Efford:** If he came back, you could insist, so would you?

Richard Gould: Of course we would, yes.

Q51 **Clive Efford:** Okay. So, there is a sanction?

Richard Gould: There is a wide variety of sanctions. It is probably worth reminding the Committee that we have a whole level of different sanctions. We have the cricket regulator, which was introduced back in November as a direct result of the ICEC report, which provides us with an arm's length regulatory system. That regulator enforces the regulations that we as a game agree, and we change our regulations from time to time. When we get excellent feedback from the ICEC or any other area we can then change, improve and sharpen our regulations and then they can be upheld.

Below that, we then have the County Partnership Agreement, which is the contractual agreement that we have talked about in the past. Yes, we can withhold up to 100% of a county's finances. I do not necessarily agree that we would only use that as the nuclear option, as I heard before. We do use that in a more tiered approach, depending on the issue that we are dealing with, to ensure that we get the right action that we want to see in the right time.

Q52 **Clive Efford:** Okay. I think we have gone as far as we can on that. Can I ask you about the role of the independent regulator? What progress has been made on the setting up of the independent regulator?

Richard Gould: The independent regulator was subject to, I think, six recommendations and we have delivered on all bar one of those. It provides us with an arm's length regulator that neither I, Richard or Clare



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have any access into or any leverage over. It acts independently in accordance with its regulations.

Q53 Clive Efford: In terms of the regulator being fully operational, are we in that position now?

Richard Gould: Nearly. I would say it is not completely there. In order to accelerate the process, we brought in interim leadership in November. Dave Lewis has been brought in to stand that organisation up. It is effectively operating now, and with the season upon us in six or seven weeks it will be, I suspect, 100% by then.

Q54 Clive Efford: What difference will we be able to see then once it is fully operational?

Richard Gould: A lot of it is about the confidence to ensure that when the cricket regulator is bringing charges, or not, it is being dealt with at arm's length and completely separate from both the ECB board and the ECB leadership.

Q55 Clive Efford: Finally, of the ICEC's recommendations, which are you furthest from implementing?

Clare Connor: There is a small handful that we are probably not going to achieve or deliver exactly as written in the report. One of those, for example, would be equal conditions of employment—or working conditions, I think is the wording in the report—for men's and women's domestic professional players.

The reason for that is that we are in the process of establishing a brand new women's professional system. The panel before, Cindy and her panel, talked about the women's regional structure at domestic level. We are overhauling that to a new three-tiered domestic structure for the women's game, which will include every single first-class county—not just the eight regions that we currently have.

That would be an example of one of the moves that we are making in a very positive direction, but which mean we are not ready yet to equalise working conditions for men and women simply because the structure and the contracting structure will not be in place until 2025.

Another example, if you want another, is that we are not equalising women's pay in The Hundred as immediately as 2025. We are committed to getting there and we have made a massive move on salaries for 2024 with the highest paid earners in the women's competition now earning £50,000, which started three years ago at £15,000. We are not quite ready in the commercial model to equalise.

There are a few others I could talk through. There are six or seven. Do you want them all?

Clive Efford: I do not think we need them all now.



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Q56 **Chair:** Richard Gould, with regard to the independent regulatory body, how will it demonstrate its independence on the basis that it is established and appointed by the ECB?

Richard Gould: There is a recommendation that the independence be assessed annually, so we will be working perhaps with Sport Resolutions or similar to ensure that we can provide that confidence.

Q57 **John Nicolson:** Thank you very much, panel, for joining us. I was quite shocked by that figure you gave of 590 calls citing discrimination. That suggests that there is still a huge problem. Over what period were those 590 calls made?

Richard Gould: That was over a 12-month period.

John Nicolson: That is a lot.

Richard Gould: Of those 590, 230 were discounted with no action. They were more inquiries and queries and guidance.

John Nicolson: Yes, I heard that detail, but it still leaves us with—

Richard Gould: Yes, it leaves us with about 360 complaints across the country annually.

Q58 **John Nicolson:** Are you surprised at that number?

Richard Gould: I did not know what number to expect, in truth. This is one of those elements where the report again is extremely helpful for us because it has given us recommendations that we can act on. It gives us more information, so we will now be able to judge that either in or out of season to understand what other impacts are having on the number of issues that get reported.

Q59 **John Nicolson:** Can you give us a sense of what these calls were about? What were people telling you?

Richard Gould: I do not have all the details because that is dealt with within the cricket regulator.

John Nicolson: Just an overview.

Richard Gould: Often they will be based within recreational clubs, and they will be issues of discrimination that have come to light often on the pitch, remarks being made about race or other characteristics. Those are the things that make up the majority of the complaints.

John Nicolson: People being abused?

Richard Gould: Yes.

Q60 **John Nicolson:** There is obviously a problem. I know that the Commission has criticised you, hasn't it, for not recognising and naming structural racism as an issue? Based on what you have discovered from



those calls, do you think that structural racism is an issue now?

Richard Gould: I don't think we have ever said that structural racism is not an issue. In commissioning this report, the ECB understood that there were wide-ranging and far-reaching impacts. The evidence that was given in the previous session shows that historical and structural issues exist in cricket, in many sports, in many parts of society. We are all here to demonstrate our determination to try to improve that and to lead not just cricket but to have a bigger impact on society as a whole.

Q61 **John Nicolson:** Thank you. Forgive me, I am not an expert on cricket, so I am just asking basic questions. I have followed this closely but from a standing start as a member of the Committee. As we know, many organisations have equality, diversity and inclusion officers. Do you have one of those who works for you?

Richard Gould: Yes, we have a director who was appointed in June. She had previously been working with us on an interim basis and she reports directly into Clare.

Q62 **John Nicolson:** Perhaps, Ms Connor, you could tell us what she does daily and monthly.

Clare Connor: Sure. She was in an interim role, and we appointed her into the permanent role at the back end of 2023. She was interim from June. Her first few months I think have been pretty much focused on building a team. We have put significant resource into that area, as you would expect, in order to be able to deliver our response.

She has a team now of four people looking at collecting data so that we better understand the position of where we are and where we are getting to and where improvements are being made and where they are not across the whole game. These are not just ECB-focused roles, they are very much game-wide.

We have two people working in the EDI education department now, underneath Kate, who is our permanent EDI director. They are looking closely at how we upskill the ECB staff and the whole workforce in better understanding and being better educated in this area. She oversees the full system, which is a live, online, Smartsheet system that we have developed over the last few months. We have a live view of our progress on all the areas of our response.

In response to the ICEC report, we have 12 new workstreams. Those workstreams feed into this system so that the EDI team can see live whether we have risks, what progress is being made, and where we might be falling short of some of our targets. With all that information, the team works with the EDI leads and the HR teams across all the county organisations.

Q63 **John Nicolson:** Okay. That all sounds great, but on a human impact level, when we learn that Azeem is having his home attacked yet again,



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that must make your heart sink.

Clare Connor: Yes, of course. Of course it does. Everything that Azeem and his family have been through over a number of years has been part of the catalyst for why we are in the position we are in and why we are doing what we are doing.

John Nicolson: This happened again last week.

Clare Connor: Yes. I did not know that until you mentioned it earlier. With all respect, it is not the job of the EDI team at the ECB to protect against that incendiary behaviour or assault. It is the job of the EDI team now at the ECB, and working with the game, to make sure we deliver on all the assurances we have committed to.

As Richard says, we hope that by the end of this year we will have delivered on almost 60% of what we have said we are going to do, whether that is on the talent pathway interventions, the state school action plan, equity for women and girls, or tackling discrimination. There is a vast amount of work. As we have acknowledged, we are late on some of this.

Q64 **John Nicolson:** Okay. When you hear some of the things that Lord Botham has said, again that must make your heart sink. I take your point, Mr Thompson, that you spoke to him. Is that the last gasp of an old dinosaur, or do you think his words and actions still count, not least since I heard somebody—I think it was you, Mr Thompson—say that he is free to say what he likes, it is democracy?

It is ironic, given that he is in the House of Lords, which is not a democracy. He is there for the rest of his life. We cannot get rid of him. He can never be replaced. It is a lifetime sinecure. Does it matter what he says still, Ms Connor?

Clare Connor: Yes, it does matter what he says. If anyone holds a position of responsibility and authority and influence in the sport, it matters. He is an outspoken individual with strong opinions, and I think it would be idealistic to expect that every single person with opinions and with influence is where we need them to be.

Q65 **Damian Green:** Good morning. I want to deal specifically with women's pay as a starter. I watched The Hundred at the Oval and if I go along as a customer I buy a ticket for a package, which is a women's game and a men's game. You have just explained that you are not going to get to equality even for pay in The Hundred until next year. I am slightly unclear why. As a paying customer I am paying, as it were, presumably half each for each game. Why can you not equalise the pay in that specific area?

Richard Gould: The women's professional structure in cricket and in other sports is a long way behind. This is why, again, this report has been so valuable to allow us to understand historical issues that have led to



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this. We are now investing significantly and heavily and investing ahead of revenues in order to ensure that we can try to make up some of that lost time.

If you go back as—I was going to say “as far as” 2018, but it is only six years ago. Then, we had only 18 women professional cricket players in this country. With the structures that we are now bringing in, and four weeks ago we launched a process to bring in new tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 women’s teams, we will have north of 130 professional players by next year.

In terms of pay, we are trying to accelerate that as quickly as we possibly can. It will take some time and, as you will have heard, with the structural commercial elements that we work within, in order to get that money to where it needs to get to it will take some time not just to redirect it but to earn it. Our revenue comes in from cricket sales, sponsorship and broadcasts, and we want to make sure that we can create a vibrant, long-standing and sustainable market through all those elements and drive the women’s game forward.

Richard Thompson: You made a point earlier, Damian, in the sense of money. We have sold our media rights until 2028. That represents around 90% of our income. Until we re-sign or go back into the market for those rights, where we would hope to get significantly more for the women’s game, that would create more opportunity.

There is absolutely an ambition to equalise women’s salaries and do more there. We do not want to follow. We would rather be leading. Within this period, we are slightly hamstrung, but we want to get there faster.

Q66 **Damian Green:** Within the various media deals you do, does that mean that effectively the broadcasters are paying more for men’s Hundred matches than women’s Hundred matches?

Richard Thompson: I think it is packaged.

Richard Gould: Yes, our rights are sold in a collective manner. They are all sold together and that gives us the ability to invest where we think the future markets are going to be. We do think that the future market will be women’s cricket and women’s sport. It is the collectivisation of those rights that gives us the ability to get money where it is most needed.

We are investing around £25 million ahead of revenues currently. If you look at the commercial revenue for the women’s game, it is around £10 million or £11 million. We are investing about £35 million or £36 million into the women’s game at the moment. That is something that we want to be able to keep doing.

Q67 **Damian Green:** The 130 professionals, they will be able to make a living out of it? They will be full-time, is that the ambition?



Richard Gould: Yes. At the moment we have the regional structure, which we are then going to change and put out into the network, which will then allow us to commercialise the women's regional network as well.

You asked about our commercial income in totality. Yes, we have a lot of money coming into the game. It is around £330 million a year that comes into the ECB. If you put that in relation to a football club, Spurs is probably £700 million to £750 million, Manchester would certainly be at that level. We are at a different scale to football, but we are determined to lead sport forward.

We want to make sure that every woman and girl who wants to be a professional athlete selects cricket as their sport of choice. To do that, we know that we are in a market to try to bring that talent through.

Q68 **Damian Green:** Given, as you say, 90% of your income is essentially from broadcasting, does that mean that we only get to equality between men and women when the broadcasters say, "You know what, we can get as many eyeballs in front of a women's test match as a male test match"?

Richard Gould: We would rather not be reliant on that particular metric because that metric may not meet our ambitions of timescale to deliver. That is where we may have to continue investing ahead of revenues, which is what we are doing now.

Clare Connor: One thing that we will be achieving next year—which is almost in line with the ICEC recommendation on this—is that from 2025 a woman earning her first domestic cricket contract will be paid the same as a man earning his first domestic contract. We are equalising that entry level of salary for those circa 120 or 130 women when they first earn a professional contract.

Trying to work out where to best place fixed revenues is not always easy. We are investing £3 million more this year into England women's match fees by virtue of the equalisation of those match fees and, as I have mentioned, nearly a million more into The Hundred salaries. We have a whole infrastructure to redesign and better invest in the women's game.

Knowing where to invest that precious money, when we also want to reach more ethnically diverse participants and we want to increase the number of children playing in state schools and we want to sustain our whole infrastructure that already exists, are decisions that we have to take strategically as to where we think we will make the most impact.

Q69 **Damian Green:** I have one last question on a slightly different subject. I said at the start that I am a Surrey fan, but I am a member of the MCC. It is not, I feel, the MCC's finest hour that we have not had a women's test match at Lord's yet. Would you as the ECB encourage it to crack on with that?



Richard Thompson: Very much so. We would certainly hope that by 2026 in the India test series England will be playing a test match at Lord's then. I wish it had happened sooner. We are very keen to put that right.

Q70 **Chair:** Amen to that. What steps are you taking to reduce central overhead so that you have more money, as you say, to spend?

Richard Gould: It is a key point, and it is one that our stakeholders regularly ask of us. We have recently committed an additional £25 million or so into the network. None of it is going into central overhead. This is from increased revenues that we are expecting to be able to raise from 2025 to 2028, which is our next cycle.

We need to run the leanest possible ship at the centre at the ECB, accepting, though, that there are very serious responsibilities that a governing body needs to be able to lead and comply with. There has been additional investment in both the EDI space and the cricket regulator over the last nine months directly as a result of this report.

Richard Thompson: Our largest overhead is, in fact, The Hundred, so that is a very significant commitment to the women's game and to broadening the game generally. The reality of what we are trying to do as well is allocate funds. We allocated another £2 million at the end of last year to each county, so they got £50,000 each and the national counties slightly less, to invest directly in EDI.

Ultimately, we do not want there to be a tick-box approach to EDI. We want each county, all 41, to look at ways in which they can do things at a local level that are more effective. We are trying to channel money into very specific functions to bring about better outcomes.

Q71 **Chair:** How do you think the effective privatisation of The Hundred will impact that?

Richard Thompson: We are keeping the tournament. We believe that a governing body should be there to provide annuities and we certainly would not want to be selling a chunk of the summer. We need to control the schedule as much as possible, but we think that there is a unique opportunity for the teams to raise extra capital that can be reinvested into ageing infrastructure, bringing debt down and reinvesting into grassroots that all 41 counties benefit from. We definitely do not want to lose control of the tournament, but we would like to do something to capitalise on the value of the teams.

Q72 **Dr Rupa Huq:** You were listing the ICEC recommendations that will not happen. We mentioned in the last session the Eton versus Harrow game and the Oxford versus Cambridge game. Are those going to happen or not?

Clare Connor: The decision on Eton-Harrow and Oxford-Cambridge, which are staged at Lord's, is for the MCC.



Q73 Dr Rupa Huq: Can you apply pressure on them as well? No man is an island. You said some are never going to happen. Is that one of those?

Clare Connor: I would never say never. I was president of the MCC in 2022, I think it was, and during that time a decision was taken that probably was not handled brilliantly in terms of communication with members. However, a decision was taken and announced at the AGM that year that those matches would be replaced.

There was then a fairly small but vocal minority of MCC members who challenged that. MCC's current position is that it remains in place for another two to three years, I think, and then will be reviewed.

What has happened—and Michael Collins referred to this not being a tokenistic thing—is that the MCC has included in its fixture list annual women's cricket and Oxford and Cambridge women playing as well as Oxford and Cambridge men.

Q74 Dr Rupa Huq: It is still the same institutions, though, isn't it, our two oldest universities? I think that it would send a powerful signal.

Clare Connor: I agree that it is not meritocratic, yes.

Dr Rupa Huq: A cobweb-busting thing, get rid of those.

Clare Connor: What it has also included is the national final of the MCC Foundation Hub state schools only programme. That is a brilliant day in the middle of the summer that is now being played on the main pitch at Lord's. I think that MCC is trying to tread a difficult line with being a members' club around the wishes of the members versus wanting to make sure that the games that are played at Lord's are as inclusive as possible.

Q75 Dr Rupa Huq: Is there a funny relationship between the two of you? They are your landlord, effectively, so you would not want to upset them if your rent is going to go up.

Richard Gould: We don't mind upsetting people when we need to.

Q76 Dr Rupa Huq: I think that you should be bolder on this one. What about the Commission's call for socioeconomic discrimination to be included in the anti-discrimination code? I know you have not ruled it out, but we are still waiting. You are considering it. Do you know what those considerations are going to conclude with or how they are going?

Richard Gould: On the socioeconomic, it is not something we measure. We do not look at socioeconomic issues or background when people are coming into the sport. It is certainly something that we could look at, but the first thing we need to do is to obtain that data. Then we can understand the base case and work from there.

Dr Rupa Huq: We have heard that the police do it, so it is done in other institutions. It is not impossible.



Richard Gould: No, indeed. We have 2.4 million players across the country, so understanding that data across the community is more difficult. However, we do understand the point that is being made and that is why we are trying to invest so much into our state school programmes. We get into about 7,500 schools across the country annually with a relatively small amount of money.

This is where we do have an ask of Government to help us to get sport and cricket into the state school sector because that is one of our issues. When we go around state schools—I was at a primary school and a state school last week—understanding and seeing the provision that they have for sport, in both time and facilities, compared to the private schools, it is like chalk and cheese, sadly. That is a very strong link into the socioeconomic argument, and we want to try to bring things forward.

Q77 **Dr Rupa Huq:** We heard in that last panel this proposal to have a talent pathway completely free of all costs so that finance is not a barrier. What is your position on that? How can we make that happen?

Clare Connor: What we have committed to, as I think the panel before mentioned, is that we have a working group that is looking closely at all the talent pathway recommendations because they are not straightforward.

The interplay between the talent pathway recommendations and state school access and children from lower socioeconomic groups is very much an intersectional set of challenges. We are committing to making the talent pathway free at the entry level for assessment so that no child is disadvantaged in those initial assessments, those talent ID moments, trials or any other selection opportunities. They will be completely free, so that is one move that we are making towards delivering on that recommendation.

In addition, we have completely taken the recommendation on board about broadening the access and reach of the talent pathway. We will be introducing an early engagement phase, which will be free to access across the game, from under-10s through to under-12s, and as I think Michael Collins referred to, the representative stage of ECB county competitions will be delayed to under-13 or 14.

Q78 **Dr Rupa Huq:** In 2022 when the ECB appeared at this Committee, we heard about the resignation of Leicestershire's Mehmooda Duke. She had all sorts of allegations. We were told at the time, "We will get back to you" and that was by a Tom Harrison, who then himself was gone three months later. Do we have any update on that?

Richard Thompson: That pre-dated our involvement. The cricket regulator would have dealt with that, and the cricket regulator would be able to answer that question better than we could because that would have been dealt with at an arm's length to the board.

Q79 **Dr Rupa Huq:** There has been a bit of churn. You two—congratulations—



are relatively new. The Rooney rule, you apply it to coaches. It is part of the south Asian action plan that there should always be someone of colour interviewed. Two Richards came recently—congratulations, both. Do we know who else was interviewed and shouldn't this Rooney rule apply not just to coaches but at all levels of the game?

Richard Thompson: What, for chair and CEO?

Dr Rupa Huq: Yes.

Richard Thompson: I was not privileged to know who else was interviewed in the process, but I would imagine every effort was taken. People were not queuing up to do either job.

Dr Rupa Huq: They were not?

Richard Thompson: No, because cricket was not in a great position.

Q80 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Where are you advertising it? Maybe you should be—

Richard Thompson: No, the point is we want to improve the game. We are here to change things. We are part of the future. In that sense, people recognise the challenges of leading a game as complex and challenging as cricket.

One of the big issues is we both came from within the game. You tend to find leadership comes from within the counties generally, and we are doing an awful lot to change the profile of directors and ethnicity within the counties. When it comes to the next chair or CEO, there will be far more women and people of colour to choose from.

Richard Gould: The Chair is right in terms of encouraging and bringing more people into the game. When we look back to 2019, we have about 450 leaders across the game in non-executive posts, most of them volunteers. In 2019, ethnicity was represented in only 5% of those. We have gone through a complete revamp of the systems to bring more people and new people into the game.

We are not where we want to be, but 18% of our leadership now is ethnically diverse. In gender balance, we were at 11% female representation among those 450 main leaders. We are now up to around 35%. It is not where we want to be, but in two to three years it is pretty good progress. We just need to keep that metric going.

Q81 **Dr Rupa Huq:** This is the last one from me. It is an honour to be before Clare Connor. You have a very distinguished history of playing for many years, and your CBE and everything, and a long history with the MCC, as you said, and the ECB. However, the devil's advocate argument could be: shouldn't we have some people who are a bit less status quo to oversee the ICEC world if you were part of that establishment?

Richard Thompson: The England women's captain and the England men's captain and I are all state school kids. There was a mention earlier



that cricket is institutionally classist. Well, I am not sure many governing bodies are run by a state school kid and their two captains are, too.

Q82 **Dr Rupa Huq:** If it is the same old, same old, do you know what I mean, people who have been in the institution, then you are institutionalised.

Richard Thompson: We know the problems and that is one of the reasons that Richard and I have lent in. We know what the challenges are, and we are going about it with a real commitment to change. It starts with the culture and the values. That is why we applaud the ICEC report because that gives us our opportunity to change.

Dr Rupa Huq: Okay. I look forward to the day that 100% is implemented.

Q83 **Julie Elliott:** The commission has called for a radical overhaul of the talent pathway. Do you agree with that level of reform being needed? Is the wider game willing and able to respond to that challenge?

Richard Gould: Yes, the talent pathway does need an overhaul and it is undergoing an overhaul. If we go back to data again and if I specifically focus on the boys' academy, the academy is 16, 17 and 18-year-olds. They are the next cabs off the rank. They are the next professionals. If we go back to 2017, only 7% of the boys in that network were from ethnically diverse backgrounds. That number is now 27%, so in four years we have gone from 7% to 27%. That demonstrates that the ICEC report is correct, but I hope that it also indicates that we are making progress to try to get it to where it needs to get to.

Clare Connor: Can I build on that a little? As I mentioned to your colleague a moment ago, those are a complex set of recommendations in terms of the talent pathway and how we bring people into it, how we remove bias from selection decisions and coaching and talent ID decisions, how we remove finance from being a barrier—we heard earlier about how costly it is—and the actual overhaul in age groups of representative cricket, we are addressing all that. We have a long way to go, we know that, for the talent pathway to be representative across all protected characteristics, particularly those from poorer, lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Some partnerships we have announced recently. We are funding the ACE programme significantly. It started in London under the former work of Richard at Surrey with Ebony Rainford-Brent. The ACE programme to engage more children from African-Caribbean backgrounds is now in seven cities up and down the country. We are working with the South Asian Cricket Academy to try to transition a lot of particularly south Asian boys into the professional environment, where we see a huge drop-off.

We are using its expertise to do that, and we are funding two PhD students to help us become better informed in that area. We are bolstering the investment into Chance to Shine and the Lord's Taverners, two of our key charity partners—particularly in schools where more than



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40% of children are on free school meals. We launched that work last year and it is seeing huge dividends in terms of the number of children accessing cricket for the first time.

We realise that we certainly cannot do it all at the centre and some of our counties do not at the moment have those relationships with their communities to do it, but we think that partnership working and funding those charities to the tune of an additional £3 million over the next year should start to see improvements in children getting a chance to be on the talent pathway.

Q84 Julie Elliott: If we look beyond the remit of the ECB, what discussions have you had with the Government on measures to increase state school provision of cricket?

Richard Thompson: There are a lot of conversations going on and in an election year even more so because we like to be in some manifestos. Ultimately, the Government ask for us is to at least mandate two hours a week of PE because that is clearly not being mandated. We want to give every child access to at least an hour a week of cricket during the season and special status for PE teachers.

We think Ofsted should be more involved in this and sports treated with more prominence. We want to harness the power of two world cups that we are hosting in 2026 and 2030. We are an Olympic sport. We are the fastest growing global team sport. It is an extraordinary time for cricket, and we want that to play out in what the men and women are doing and in their success. We want people to choose cricket at a recreational level or as a professional career. We recognise that the next five to six years are unique for the game and we want to capitalise on that.

Q85 Julie Elliott: We obviously need more teachers and coaches. My kids are in their 30s and 40s and none of them played cricket at school, so this is a long-standing problem. What more can you do to make sure that children have the opportunity to play cricket?

Richard Thompson: As Clare has mentioned, the charity partners that we have, Chance to Shine, particularly ACE, African Caribbean Engagement, the Ebony Rainford-Brent charity that started at Surrey, the Lord's Taverners and the MCC Hubs, are going into schools and providing that provision, particularly state schools.

Q86 Julie Elliott: Are they going into schools across the country?

Richard Thompson: Yes, they are, particularly the hard to reach schools.

Clare Connor: It is worth mentioning that I know the MCC has had a bit of a bad rap this morning, but the MCC's foundation, so its charitable arm, has created a national hub programme just for state schools to try to give state school boys and girls the chance to have more coaching and more match play where they are not getting it.



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There were 77 hubs up and down the country last year. As of January, on the back of ECB and MCC funding to the tune of an additional £1 million over the next two years, they are now in 125 hubs with a target of 150 by 2025. The target there is that 50% of those children will be girls. They are currently at 30% for gender representation. As we have mentioned, the finals day for that whole programme is now a fixture at Lord's.

Q87 Julie Elliott: Do you know what percentage of state schools are getting this going into their schools?

Richard Gould: It is about 10% of state schools. We would like it to be more.

Q88 Julie Elliott: How are you going to get that 10% to be 100% or near enough?

Richard Gould: We would like to encourage Government to get involved in allocation of time and resource to ensure that sports and PE is a stronger feature than it currently is on the curriculum.

Q89 Chair: Do you agree that there should be a minimum two hours of sport a week in the school curriculum?

Richard Thompson: Essential.

Q90 Alex Sobel: You are introducing minimum EDI standards in partnership agreements. Do you expect that Yorkshire will be able to comply and what will the impact and sanctions be of not doing so?

Richard Gould: The EDI plan that Yorkshire embarked on two years ago is very strong. We know that because we speak to them and see them regularly. We have a team that works out of the ECB that goes around all our counties at least annually to go through a variety of the contractual requirements within the County Partnership Agreement. You can imagine that EDI is a very strong focus for us. We do that across all our counties.

In the event that a county is falling short, our first reaction is encouragement, in truth; encouragement, education, and to try to get them back on track. If that does not work, however, we do have the ability through the County Partnership Agreement to either withhold finances or put additional pressure through other means on the leadership to ensure that they do.

Q91 Alex Sobel: What other means?

Richard Gould: Sometimes it is encouragement. Sometimes it is leadership from us trying to explain what is required and what needs to be done. I take the point that the financial element is sometimes the last resort. It has to be the last resort for us because many of our clubs are trying to survive in quite difficult economic circumstances. We are the only sport not to have lost one of our clubs in the community. We have been going for 150 years and we have not lost a club yet and we do not want to lose one.



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Q92 Alex Sobel: We will come to that, yes. The County Governance Framework also requires chairs to serve no more than six years in office and limits board members to 12 years.

I wrote a letter to Harry Chathli on 16 January about the proposed changes and in it I wrote, "Point 6 of the resolution gives special extraconstitutional powers to the board to give three additional years of board membership". In his response to me, and he was the chair at the time obviously, he wrote, "That's correct". I also said, "Is this to extend Mr Grave's term limit beyond the constitutional remit of Yorkshire?" and he said, "Yes, that's correct". "Colin Graves previously served on the club's board from 2002 until his resignation in 2015", which is 12 years, "and during that period was chair between 2008 and 2015", which is seven years.

Effectively, he is already in one sense beyond the framework and in the other sense at the edge of it. Will you allow Yorkshire to breach the framework?

Richard Gould: No, clubs are not allowed to breach their framework. There is a variety of frameworks that we expect people to operate within. The first one is the Companies Act in the first instance. Everything rolls down from there. Thereafter we have our directors and officers test, which all directors need to comply with. We then have the ECB articles of association and then, underneath that, we have the County Partnership Agreement.

There is a specific part of the County Partnership Agreement that is the governance code, which is drawn from the Sport England sports governance code but is at a higher level than the Sport England code. That is the one that we rely on. It has three levels, bronze, silver and gold, and through the County Partnership Agreement we enforce those standards.

These are standards that all our clubs have agreed to. These are standards that many of our clubs have lobbied for to ensure that we have the strongest element of governance possible. Having set in place those standards, we will then maintain those.

Q93 Alex Sobel: How? He is in breach already. He has already served seven years.

Richard Gould: I am not aware that he is in breach. I was not party to the letter that you have had going backwards and forwards between yourself and Harry, but from what we have seen there is no breach. We also met, between ECB and Yorkshire, two weeks ago on an executive level. We have also met with Mr Graves. We sent a letter to the club eight days ago highlighting all the pertinent points that need to be addressed and adhered to. We were very pleased to receive a very straightforward response from Yorkshire stating that it would be dealing and complying with all the procedures and regulations that the game had agreed.



Q94 **Alex Sobel:** I will go on to one more. The framework requires that at least 25% of county board members be appointed by a nominations committee process.

In the same letter that I just referenced I asked, "Does the offer made by Colin Graves require a certain number of named individuals to resign from the board?" The response was, "Yes, six independent non-executive directors will be stepping down no later than the date of the EGM", which has happened, "and the two current member nominated have stepped down following registration by the FCA and three new directors will be appointed", which they have. That was through the process of the EGM.

Are you concerned about the independence of the board being appointed by Colin Graves? Will it have that 25% number?

Richard Gould: The letter that we sent to Yorkshire, and we received a positive response, included precisely that point. We were informed that, yes, they would be complying with all those areas.

Q95 **Alex Sobel:** Can you release that letter?

Richard Gould: I would be very happy to send it to the Committee.

Q96 **Alex Sobel:** As my final one, you have just said that these are extraordinary times for cricket in a positive way, extraordinary opportunities for cricket. That is the way I interpreted it anyway. Yorkshire is one of the great historical county clubs. Headingley is one that has seen some of the greatest moments in test cricket. If a deal by the previous board had not been reached with Colin Graves or anybody else, would the ECB have allowed Yorkshire to collapse?

Richard Gould: No.

Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes our second panel. Thank you all for your time today. If there is anything else that we have not covered, please do feel free to drop us a line after this meeting.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Harry Chathli and Colin Graves.

Q97 **Chair:** Our final panel today will be looking at the specific situation at Yorkshire County Cricket Club. We are joined by Harry Chathli, until recently the chair of the club, and Colin Graves, the current and once former chair. You are both very welcome. Thank you so much for joining us today. I will kick off these questions.

Colin, in June last year you pulled out of discussions to become the chair because you said you only wanted to be the chair of last resort. What has changed your mind?



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Colin Graves: Chair, first, thank you for inviting me to come today to address your Committee and answer the questions on Yorkshire.

What happened basically last June/July was that I put an offer in to the club to help it refinance its financial situation, along with quite a few other people, I gather. That situation then went on for about six weeks and it did not progress any further, so I withdrew that offer. I said that I would be there in the future if it could not find refinancing going forward. I left it at that situation. The next thing I knew is I received a phone call in November asking me if I would still be interested in helping to refinance Yorkshire.

Q98 **Chair:** Thank you for making that clarification. Harry, what were the issues that you had with the alternative proposals for the club?

Harry Chathli: I thank the Chair for inviting me to clarify the position because in the media there has been so much speculation about that. It is a welcome opportunity to set the record straight.

For a number of years, the club has had substantial borrowings. In 2023, including its overdraft the club had debts of around £70 million. I disclosed this in the letter when we sent it to the EGM accepting Mr Graves's offer. With Headingley not hosting a test match in 2024 the club needed to be very careful with its moneys because, generally speaking, the FCCs heavily rely on the substantive income that comes in from test matches. There being no test match at Headingley created a shortfall of cash.

This was identified back in 2022, so we appointed advisers. We appointed brokers and so on, not just here in the UK but throughout where cricket investment is at its best, the US, the Middle East, India and here in the UK. There were several conversations, over 350 conversations that were held with several parties across the things, either directly by us or by our advisers and brokers.

One also has to remember that all this was taking place with the backdrop of extreme macroeconomic constraints. There was high inflation and high interest rates. When we started the process the CDC also had not concluded its inquiries and the fine that was going to be appointed or points deduction. Nothing was certain. It ended up reducing the pool of people who would be interested in supporting Yorkshire County Cricket Club. Then it was further reduced when they looked at the membership status of the club. We also had several approaches as well as conversations with parties who suggested that they would like to buy the club wholesale. That reduced the pool even further.

Even so, as Mr Graves has said, there were several parties at that particular time. You have to understand that my tenure started in October. I was chair-elect from June onwards and I was informed of the conversation they were having, but I was not party to the board



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discussions that were going on. There were several parties and there was one specific party that the board was progressing with, alongside others.

As Mr Graves has stated, on 8 November—I was part of the board at that particular time—we discussed the other party's offer because all the terms and agreements had been arrived at and achieved, hence we were able to decide that that was our favoured and preferred option. That was conveyed to the party at that particular time, but no response was received as to that party being able to proceed or any reasons given not to proceed with it.

As directors we have our duties, so faced with an alternative being administration we had to go through all the other options that were viable, which would ensure that the club would survive instead of going into administration. At that time, we went back, and Mr Graves was one of the people who we approached again. We proceeded with Mr Graves's option. On 22 December at our board meeting, we decided that we would enter into an exclusive period with Mr Graves and to discuss the final agreement with him.

Q99 Alex Sobel: Mr Graves, the EGM notice set out the many risks of the proposal, including uncertainty about the further loan funding on top of the £1 million loan funding you have already guaranteed for the club and whether this would be enough to meet the liabilities. How confident are you about the long-term financial security of the club? Have you managed to secure this additional funding?

Colin Graves: I am very confident, Mr Sobel, that we will secure the finance we require. There has already been £2 million put into the club and there will be another £4 million over the next three months that will come into the club to secure its financial stability going forward. That is why I put the offer in. I wanted to ensure that Yorkshire County Cricket Club did not go into receivership and administration.

Q100 Alex Sobel: The whole plan involves debt piling on to debt that has already accrued. What are you going to do to get the club out of the cycle of debt? With that in mind, how much interest are you and the Graves Trust receiving on loans above the Bank of England rate?

Colin Graves: To answer the first question—which was basically the debt—if you look at the debt history of Yorkshire, in 2016 I think the total debt stood at £24 million. From 2016 to 2021, that business made a regular profit annually and by 2021 it had paid its debt down to £15 million. It was paying the debt down regularly from trading profits. The other thing to remember is that part of this debt is £13.5 million to buy the ground in 2005. That is a big part of the debt, so people need to remember that.

From my point of view, it is a trading business that can develop and produce profit and pay its debt down. Otherwise, I would not have done what I have done. I know it can do that in the future, provided that it



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gets the right allocation of international matches at Headingley because that is what drives the income and the profitability. As has already been said, this year, 2024, there is no test match. When you do not have a test match at an international ground, then yes, it is always a difficult year.

As for the interest, first I would like to reiterate that I have nothing to do with the Graves Trust whatsoever. It is run by independent administrators and that is done at arm's length from me. I have nothing to do with it. All I can tell you is that the interest rate that is being charged is the same as the trust, the club told us that, and I believe it is something like 4% over base rate.

Q101 **Alex Sobel:** That includes the £1 million that you have just lent the club?

Colin Graves: That is on the £1 million I have just put in and the same £1 million that Phillip Hodson has put in already.

Q102 **Alex Sobel:** Mr Chathli, the entire coaching staff, physio staff and so on were removed in 2021. What was the financial implication for the club?

Harry Chathli: As I understand, the financial implication was around £3.9 million, but again I must remind you that I was not around at that particular time. If I get my figures wrong, I will send a correction to the Committee. The financial implication was around the £3.9 million, but I understand that there was a recent settlement. The last one that was made recently I don't know the terms of. That would be in addition to that.

Q103 **Alex Sobel:** Mr Graves, are you intending to bring back any of the previous backroom staff and coaching staff?

Colin Graves: It has not been discussed by the board. We have our first board meeting on Monday, and I am sure that the future, the structure, everything will be discussed, but at this point in time it has not been discussed.

Q104 **Alex Sobel:** We have heard a lot today about EDI. Do you feel that if the board made a decision to return some of the previous staff it would be in keeping with the commitment to EDI?

Colin Graves: I can guarantee to this Committee, our members and everybody else, all the work that has been done by Yorkshire over the last two years regarding EDI. It has been fantastic work that has been done on EDI and the results in Yorkshire prove it. I think that you have heard that from the ECB today. It is certainly performing very well with all its EDI targets. I will guarantee that that is continued and developed.

The other thing I can guarantee is that one of our board members, Mr Sanjeev Gandhi, will be appointed specifically to oversee our EDI development.

Q105 **Clive Efford:** Thank you for coming to give evidence. Welcome. Colin,



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reports around your return have noted the potential for a delay to the repayment to the Graves Trust. Is there any accuracy to the reports and, if so, what discussions have you had?

Colin Graves: First, Mr Efford, I have had no discussions with the Graves Trust at all. As far as I know, the Graves Trust discussions were done with the previous board and the last thing I knew was that the Graves Trust agreed to extend the final repayment until 2025. That was done by the previous board. I had nothing to do with it. I did not even know about it. From my point of view, it will continue as is.

Q106 **Clive Efford:** To clarify your relationship with the Graves Trust, the former chair of Yorkshire, Robert Hutton, told the Committee that weekly when he was chair it “appeared to me as if Mr Graves was influencing the trust and sometimes spoke as if he was”. How independent is the Graves Trust and how independent can it be now you are back in charge?

I will point out that he also explained, and I am quoting Mr Hutton talking about you, “He explained to me very clearly that I should not consider the trust an ordinary secured creditor. He also told me, although it transpired to be incorrect, that the trust could remove me if they didn’t like what I was doing and that I should listen to what they say”. Now, that suggests that there is a very close relationship between you and the trust. Has that somehow changed now or is this how it will continue going forward for Yorkshire?

Colin Graves: As I have said already, Mr Efford, first, the Graves Trust and I have no connection whatsoever. I have nothing to do with the Graves Trust. It is run by independent trustees. I have made that clear over the last 15 years, since that has been in place. That is number one.

Regarding what Mr Hutton said, quite honestly his comments are inaccurate. There is no way that I or the Graves Trust interfered on his chairmanship and what he was doing at the club. The comments he made about me personally are inaccurate.

Q107 **Clive Efford:** I will leave that there. Can I move on to your recent statement where you apologised for what went on at Yorkshire? In a statement ahead of the EGM you apologised—this is January 2024—for any mistakes you or the club have made in the past. What are those mistakes?

Colin Graves: I will apologise again today, to be honest, Mr Efford, because anybody from a minority ethnic background who experienced either discrimination or racism at Yorkshire, which should never have happened. It never will be acceptable, and it certainly will not be going forward. I think all those things have been documented over the last two years with the enquiries that have gone on through CDC and the Squire Patton Boggs report, which has never been yet published to the outside world. Everything that has been looked at, gone through and verified, I apologise for anybody who went through any discrimination or racism. It is not acceptable.



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Q108 Clive Efford: You will accept that when you came out with this apology, it was when you were looking to be appointed as chair of one of our great sports institutions, which is Yorkshire County Cricket Club. But as recently as June 2023, you were dismissing the accusations as banter, were you not? When did you change from that position to the one you made in January this year?

Colin Graves: First, I did an interview in June, July 2023 where I used the word "banter". At the time I did not realise the insensitivity of that word and, again, since then I have apologised for using that word, and I apologise again. I should not have used it. It was bad judgment from my point of view.

I then apologised for what had gone on in Yorkshire and people had experienced, I think, in November, because basically my offer then was being discussed with the board and I needed to get that out there as a proper full apology, because it is the first time I had the opportunity to do that.

Q109 Clive Efford: So I assume you accept what Azeem Rafiq went through if you are making that apology. Have you apologised to him directly and would you like to do so now?

Colin Graves: I have apologised in my statements to everybody who experienced it. I have not apologised to Mr Rafiq personally, no. If I had the opportunity to talk to him then fine, I would do, because he should not have experienced what he experienced.

Q110 Clive Efford: You put an apology to him on the record here today?

Colin Graves: I put an apology on to him for what he experienced, yes.

Q111 Clive Efford: During your time as chair, you said that no one came forward to you with any accusations of racism. Do you stand by that statement today?

Colin Graves: Yes, I do. Basically, the way I ran the club previously, maybe the processes were not thorough enough to record those things, if it happened and when it happened. From my point of view, I never heard anything about racism through any management meeting, any board meeting. It was never brought to my attention.

Q112 Clive Efford: Currently there is an equality, diversity and inclusion plan in place at the club. As the new chair, do you commit to continuing with that work?

Colin Graves: Yes, 200%.

Q113 Clive Efford: I understand that the club has celebrated Eid at its ground in recent times. Will that continue to happen in the future going forward?

Colin Graves: We will continue to look at all the diversity of things we need to do going forward for all communities.



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Q114 **Clive Efford:** Can I clarify one thing with you, Harry, about the bids for the club? It was suggested in an article by Azeem Rafiq that Lord Mann had come forward with three bidders that would have kept the status of the club. Is that claim accurate and what happened with those specific bids?

Harry Chathli: I am quite perplexed by the statement that Lord Mann made and the one that Azeem has referred to. We met with Lord Mann—I cannot recall because I was not around at that particular time—the club met up with Lord Mann in the other House here and on several other occasions, to my understanding. Discussions were held that stated clearly to Lord Mann, as we did with every other party that we spoke to, either broker or adviser, the criteria we would require in order to consider any particular bid. The same was expressed to Lord Mann.

From those discussions, the feedback that we received was that either the counterparty was not ready to make an offer, the timing would be too great, six, nine months from now, and so on. So I am quite perplexed by the statement made by Lord Mann.

Q115 **Clive Efford:** I will come back to you, Colin. Since you became chair have any sponsors withdrawn from the club?

Colin Graves: No. I have only been chair for 11 days. I checked this morning. No sponsors have withdrawn from the club. We have had at least six new sponsors who want to come and talk to us.

Q116 **Clive Efford:** Harry, were you chair up until 11 days ago?

Harry Chathli: I resigned and stepped down as part of the stipulation of the loan agreement we entered into on the day of the EGM on the 2nd.

Q117 **Clive Efford:** Are you aware of any sponsors that have withdrawn since they became aware that—

Harry Chathli: Not that I am aware of. I think sponsors would perhaps have contacted the club, but then I would not have dealt with it. It would have been dealt with by the executive, but nothing was reported to the board.

Clive Efford: Neither of you are aware of any sponsors withdrawing as a result of the decision for appointing—

Harry Chathli: Not a direct one. I think there was an ending of perhaps one or two sponsors, but I do not know the exact details of that because, again, I was not around at that particular time.

Q118 **John Nicolson:** Mr Graves, I am curious about your apology to Azeem Rafiq. You have given a general apology. You have apologised here to him. Why have you not picked up the phone to apologise to him?

Colin Graves: Certainly, from my point of view, I did not feel that was appropriate at the time. I have apologised today to Mr Rafiq and anybody else who experienced any discrimination or racism.



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John Nicolson: Why was it not appropriate to phone him?

Colin Graves: I just had plenty of things going on around not to pick up the phone to Mr Rafiq.

John Nicolson: You were too busy to phone him?

Colin Graves: I did not say I was too busy.

John Nicolson: You had plenty of things going on and you could not phone him.

Colin Graves: Fine, if that is how you see it. I do not see it like that.

Q119 **John Nicolson:** Over this long period of time, with this huge controversy, with this man experiencing this appalling behaviour—including just last week an attack on his parents' home—and you had too many things going on to phone him.

Colin Graves: I have been out of cricket, Mr Nicolson, since September 2020. I have not been involved with running any form of cricket until I have just got back in with Yorkshire 11 days ago.

Q120 **John Nicolson:** You did not have to be actively involved in cricket to phone him and to apologise for what had happened under your tenure.

Colin Graves: Fine. I did not do it.

Q121 **John Nicolson:** I do not know why you are saying "fine". It is not fine. It is really not fine. It is appalling. If I was in your position, I think anybody in your position, would have picked up the phone. I do not understand why you have not phoned them. If you are sincere in your apology.

Colin Graves: I am very sincere in my apology.

Q122 **John Nicolson:** But you cannot explain why you have not phoned him apart from being generally too busy.

Colin Graves: I just did not do it.

Q123 **John Nicolson:** You said to Mr Efford that no racist behaviour was ever reported to you. What about Andrew Gale? He was suspended by the ECB, and you said you would back him all the way.

Colin Graves: The report of Andrew Gale and other complaints was lodged in October 2020. That is when Mr Rafiq lodged his complaint to Yorkshire County Cricket Club. That is when the complaints first come out. I had left the ECB by then and I read them in the newspaper, like everybody else. I was not aware of any complaints regarding Andrew Gale while I was chair of Yorkshire County Cricket Club until after that time.

Q124 **John Nicolson:** I think one of the concerns that people have is that there are a lot of folk who have been involved in this for a long time, who have attitudes that are dated. The fact that you talked about banter in



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this context and did not immediately recognise that that was deeply inappropriate—you recognised yourself, didn't you, that dated attitudes were a problem? As chair, you introduced a rule that nobody over 75 could serve on the Yorkshire Board. Why did you do that?

Colin Graves: Because at that time it was appropriate, and I think things have changed. The other thing I think that this Committee needs to know is about Colin Graves and my background, because my background is working with minority-ethnic-background, independent retailers for 26 years, working with them to develop their independent businesses. I have dealt with ethnic minority retailers from all classes, from all parts of the world.

Q125 **John Nicolson:** If you had been sensitive to that, I think you would have known that using the word "banter" was inappropriate. Can I ask how old you are now yourself?

Colin Graves: I am 76.

Q126 **John Nicolson:** The retirement rule was 75 under you, just to remind people. Could I ask whether you or your representatives have sent any legal letter to Azeem's publisher?

Colin Graves: A firm of solicitors has just asked for a copy of Mr Rafiq's book.

Q127 **John Nicolson:** What was the tone of the letter that you sent?

Colin Graves: It was a very soft tone, just asking for a copy of the book.

Q128 **John Nicolson:** I suspect that Azeem does not think that the tone was soft and does not think that it was appropriate for you to write in those terms. I think he has a feeling that it was designed to be intimidating.

Colin Graves: Far from it, Mr Nicolson. The letter came on behalf of the club; it did not come on behalf of me. It mentioned me and previous and existing employees of Yorkshire County Cricket Club.

Q129 **John Nicolson:** If the letter was as anodyne as you say, will you publish the letter?

Colin Graves: Yes, no problem.

John Nicolson: Thank you.

Q130 **Damian Green:** I think this is a particular question for Harry. Are you confident the culture has changed completely from what it was a few years ago?

Harry Chathli: I think I would not have even thought about applying if I felt that the culture had not changed. The club that I joined has been transformed completely from what we had read about the club back in 2019.



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We heard a lot this morning about the pathway programme, for example, the ICEC report and everything else. I can quite safely say that we are at least two years ahead of where everybody else is, and that is quite phenomenal. What I would like to do is submit a full report on where and the work that Yorkshire County Cricket Club has done over the past two years and the transformation that has occurred.

But if I may be permitted to point out a few things to you. The club introduced measures that increased access to households from lower incomes. We removed match fees. We removed the provision of kit. That is, we provided them free of charge. Winter coaching has been provided free of charge. The creation of an accessible hardship fund for those that require further financial support as well.

We also removed bias or the perception of bias. What also we said was that any coaches who were involved in the selection of players who would go on into the pathway programme, that they would not be allowed to do one-to-one coaching as well. Otherwise, if you are being paid to coach somebody, "Well, let's select them". We removed that. There was a selection committee that was set up in order to do that.

Then you look at the safeguarding work, that was brought directly to the board level as well. A board person was in charge of safeguarding. We also introduced a hotline in November 2021 and that was independent of the club. We did not investigate it. It was done independently by a group of solicitors. To be frank, if you look at the change that has happened, and the proof of the pudding is in the eating, as everybody says.

In 2020, our volume of members was roughly around 3,000. In 2023, that increased to 5,782. You can see the measures that we have taken has had a direct impact as well. Since the changes made ahead of the 2023 one, the proportion of women members, for example, has increased from 16% to 19%, and the proportionally younger membership over indexing of around 35 to 64-year age group compared to 2022 as well. This then translates to the county age group for the boys' pathway.

Also, the girls' pathway—but I do not want to sound complacent as if everything is done. In the women's pathway, as with every other county, I have seen changes happen in the women's pathway because my daughter is a representative cricketer for South East Stars, and so on, and was at Surrey, and is there.

That has a lot of work still to be done but we have seen the diverse nature of participants increasing. I will give you chapter and verse on that one, because you can see the measures that we put in place had a direct impact on the number of people playing, but also increase in number from state schools. For boys it is 71% participation. I think that has to be recognised that the changes that were made in the Yorkshire County Cricket Club has had a direct positive impact, and I am glad to hear that Mr Graves has given his assurance that that is going to continue.



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Q131 **Damian Green:** That was the point I was going to go on to, looking ahead to the future. In practical terms, to try to make this culture change permanent, will you, for example, keep the pathway free?

Colin Graves: Yes, we will. Basically, everything that has been put in place will be left as is and will be even enhanced when we can.

Q132 **Damian Green:** How, day to day, are you going to champion the EDI plan that has clearly been put in place?

Colin Graves: Day to day, as I have already said, we have a board member who will bring that to the board and be responsible for it. The whole board will be responsible, including me.

Q133 **Damian Green:** You are able to say you will keep the pathway free, but I noticed you did not say that you would not bring back any of the old guard, the people who were fired. You say that the previous management never told you that there were all these problems, that there clearly were. I am quite surprised that you would even contemplate bringing them back under those circumstances, because you must feel they have let you down in the past.

Colin Graves: Maybe I misinterpreted it. I have not contemplated it because we are not down to that position yet. The main thing we are concentrating on is the financial position of the club to make sure we are sustainable. Regarding employment and people, and so on, we have not even discussed it yet.

Q134 **Damian Green:** But do you recognise that there will be people listening to this—certainly people out there, maybe your members—who think, “Hang on, we have had this terrible crisis we have come out from under. It would be nice to know that we are not going to get any of those old problems coming back”.

Colin Graves: The first thing I would say is that all the positions virtually are now in full employment by different people. There are employment contracts in place. From my point of view, all we will do as a board is look at positions as and when they become available. That is all we can do and will do. From that point of view, as I said, it has never even been discussed or even thought about.

Damian Green: Do you recognise that the—

Colin Graves: Yes, I do.

Damian Green: The point I am making is that that would cause unease.

Colin Graves: Yes.

Q135 **Damian Green:** One final question from me is that we have had a lot of detailed financial discussion of what offers were available or maybe were not available. Stepping back and looking broad brush at this, would Yorkshire go broke without your support?



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Colin Graves: I think Mr Chathli can tell you that better than me, because he was the chairman at the time. I was an outsider looking in. The information I received came from an adviser to the Yorkshire board, which was an insolvency adviser, who I received a phone call from telling me that information. But I think that is down to Mr Chathli as chairman at the time.

Harry Chathli: The alternative would have been to enter into administration if there was no acceptance of the viable option that was in front of us at any given time, because the club has had creditors and it has taken advice from lawyers, insolvency practitioners and other advisers in order to refinance because the club is in debt, and it has creditors to pay off. The alternative is administration in the absence of any viable option.

Q136 **Damian Green:** How far away from administration were you?

Harry Chathli: I would say that if any creditor who we—this is something to be recognised also, that our creditors were supporters, but there is only so much support that they can give you in the long term. We were one demand away from putting out a notice of intent of administration.

Q137 **Damian Green:** But you pay your taxes and things like that?

Colin Graves: We were in discussion for it with HMRC with payment of taxes, but all other ones were being paid off, yes.

Q138 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Colin Graves, a couple of questions on your time when you left Yorkshire, and you went to chair the ECB. Were issues of racism and discrimination raised with you there?

Colin Graves: No. I was chair of ECB for five and a half years and there was no issue brought to the boardroom table of any racism or discrimination issues. I cannot remember them.

Q139 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Concerns about racism at Essex were raised repeatedly—apparently with you directly—we have been told, and there was no ECB investigation—why?

Colin Graves: Because it was not raised with me directly. The person who came from Essex to see me came to see me about how he would achieve an ambition of how to get on the Essex board. He did not raise any issues regarding racism.

Q140 **Dr Rupa Huq:** When these things do happen, they are painfully slow. Azeem Rafiq started September 2020 and the ECB was charged in 2022. Then you fast forward on, the sentencing was July 2023. Do you accept that the urgency is always lost when things lag for so long? Essex CCC began an investigation in November 2021, still there is yet to be any disciplinary panel on the charges. It is a ridiculous amount of time. We are in 2024.



Colin Graves: I think the way the whole racism accusations by Azeem Rafiq were handled, both by Yorkshire and by the ECB, was pretty poor. It could have been handled better and should have been handled better. First—and this is no excuse for either of them—the ECB had a new chairman who had only been in position four weeks when this was raised. Roger Hutton had only been in position as chairman of Yorkshire for approximately six months at the time of Covid when the whole country was locked down. Virtually you had two new chairmen discussing this racism allegation, and Yorkshire was allowed to do its own investigation. That should not have happened. I think that was the first big mistake.

I think that should have been looked at independently by the ECB and overseen by the ECB. The way it was handled after that was by the Squire Patton Boggs report, which took nine months to come to fruition, and still to this day that report has not been issued to the public.

Q141 **Dr Rupa Huq:** When you were ECB chair, you took part in the decision to remove test matches from Durham, directly benefiting Yorkshire, where you are now. Should you not have recused yourself from that decision?

Colin Graves: When that happened I did not have any direct involvement with it. To start off with, I delegated that to my deputy chairman, Mr Ian Lovett, who virtually oversaw the inquiry into Durham and what the problems were with Durham. Mr Lovett then brought that situation back to the board, and the board then recommended that I get involved as chairman of the ECB.

Certainly, what happened to Durham was not at an advantage to Yorkshire. That is fact. It was a recommendation that was wholly supported by the board of what we had to do at the time, because again Durham, at that time, were in severe financial difficulties and were on the verge of going into administration.

Q142 **Dr Rupa Huq:** George Dobell would not agree with that. He has written about the decision. He said that someone should abstain from a decision where there is a potential conflict and with your trust and everything your tentacles are all over Yorkshire. You cannot claim to be completely—

Colin Graves: As I have said, I have explained the situation of how the board handled it at the ECB, and it was a total unanimous board decision of what happened to Durham.

Q143 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Again, we have had testimony about the Essex role. You said you did not hear anything. Katharine Newton KC would say very different. But a last one from me. Your return to Yorkshire has been described as a potential source of embarrassment for the ECB. Do you have concerns about the current direction of the ECB?

Colin Graves: No, I do not at all. I have every confidence in the ECB and what they are doing.

Q144 **Julie Elliott:** Harry, I wonder if you can comment on this. Mr Graves's



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letter in June last year accused the board of acting negligently. Do you recognise that picture of the board?

Harry Chathli: First and foremost, I was not in the board at that particular time, but the board members that I joined, I would say that statement is entirely incorrect.

Q145 **Julie Elliott:** Colin, the previous board indicated that your bid early last year was based on total control. Do you think that might be the reason why eight out of the 10 members of the board were required to step down as part of your deal?

Colin Graves: Sorry, can you repeat that because I did not understand it?

Julie Elliott: The previous board indicated your bid last year was about total control. That was the comment they made. As part of your deal, eight out of 10 members of the board have been required to step down. That is right, isn't it? Is it because of what they said last year about your original deal?

Colin Graves: No, not at all. Just the opposite. The reason why that was part of my offer is that I believe where the board struggled was with cricket knowledge. Because on that existing board of Yorkshire that was previously, I do not think any of them had any cricket knowledge, either in administration, playing or being part of a club that run an international ground. I said that openly to the board and to the chairman at the time.

With a new board, I want to get people around me. It will be a diverse board, fully diverse board. It will have certainly the required number of women on that board. Thirdly, and importantly, there will be knowledge on there of cricket, which to me is important for a members' cricket club.

Q146 **Julie Elliott:** Will you be keeping board level champions for under-represented groups?

Colin Graves: Yes we will.

Q147 **Julie Elliott:** Finally, Colin, the ECB's County Governance Framework, brought in when you were its chair, sets a six-year limit for chairs. You are already close to that, including your past tenure, how long will you remain chair at Yorkshire?

Colin Graves: My intention with the situation at Yorkshire is once I have the business on a stable footing financially, and we have the right management team and the right board around me, I will be looking to exit that position as soon as possible. I have put somewhere in the region of two to three years' maximum, and as soon as I can get all that in place, then I will step down.

Q148 **Alex Sobel:** I will return to what you said in your response to the first question to Caroline. You said that you made an offer in June and July. Then after, I think you said, six weeks it did not conclude so you



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withdrew the offer with an offer to come back as a last resort. Then you received a phone call in November. Is that accurate?

Colin Graves: Very accurate.

Q149 **Alex Sobel:** On 2 February, Simon Burton, *The Guardian*, reported that you had an initial offer rejecting the base demanded demutualisation. Is that the case? Was that part of the initial offer?

Colin Graves: No.

Q150 **Alex Sobel:** Mr Chathli, do you recognise this letter? Is this a letter that you have seen?

Harry Chathli: Yes, I think so.

Alex Sobel: Dated 25 September.

Harry Chathli: I have seen that letter, yes.

Alex Sobel: This letter is from Mr. Graves.

Harry Chathli: That is correct, yes.

Q151 **Alex Sobel:** Do you recognise the letter, Mr Graves?

Colin Graves: No, I don't.

Q152 **Alex Sobel:** Well, I am going to quote from the letter Mr Chathli recognises but you do not. That is interesting. In the letter it says—I will talk about the letter more at length because you say you do not recognise it. You said that "Yorkshire County Cricket Club has existing debt to CGT of £15 million. There will be a convertible loan needed to refinance CGT debt and the remaining £5 million will be used for working capital needed, as expressed by the board of Yorkshire County Cricket Club".

You then say, "In terms of the key terms and conditions related to the offer, YCCC converting from a mutual society into a private limited company before the loan is made, or the board of YCCC using all reasonable levers to effect the restructure". You just said initially to me that you were not seeking demutualisation. This letter then is conditional on demutualisation. Do you recognise that?

Harry Chathli: I was not at the board at that particular time, but I was shown that letter subsequently, yes.

Q153 **Alex Sobel:** Are you telling me, Mr Graves, you did not write this letter on 25 September 2022?

Colin Graves: I am not saying that at all, Mr Sobel. What I said, I did not recognise the letter. The second offer I put in is different to that which I put in in June, July, and that was sent.

Q154 **Alex Sobel:** But this letter is not from June, July; this letter is from 25 September.



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Colin Graves: To be honest, I do not recognise that. Is that from Oakwell?

Q155 **Alex Sobel:** Yes, it is from you, but it references three people from Oakwell: Andrew Umpers, Doug Harmer and Alex Coral.

Colin Graves: They are my advisers. From my point of view, what was put forward then has now changed.

Alex Sobel: Has now changed.

Colin Graves: Because that is not in the offer that the board accepted in December.

Alex Sobel: We know that was not in the offer, but I am trying to establish whether you initially did seek demutualisation. That was in September.

Colin Graves: That was initially an offer that could have gone that way, yes.

Q156 **Alex Sobel:** This may have been before your time, Mr Chathli, but what discussions did the board have about changing mutual status?

Harry Chathli: We looked at every opportunity and every viable option because we had to look at demutualisation, I imagine simply because there were a significant number of parties out there who sought to purchase the club. But it was never ever, as far as I understand, taken seriously or any step forward, simply because we felt that that was not in the best interest of the members or the creditors at that particular time.

The reason is that you cannot guarantee the outcome because demutualisation requires the members to vote on it and accept it. If any board looks at, if you take this—even Yorkshire out of it—and you are looking to demutualise something and you are basing your last final viable and putting it to them as a viable option, that requires an outcome of members to vote on it, you cannot guarantee it. So you do not take that into account as your final viable option.

Q157 **Alex Sobel:** Mr Graves, in June, July or September, whichever point, did you believe that the future of Yorkshire was best served being owned by you and not being owned by the members of Yorkshire County Cricket Club?

Colin Graves: No, I did not, and I have no ambition to own Yorkshire County Cricket Club.

Q158 **Alex Sobel:** I have a letter that says you did. Earlier, to Mr Chathli, we talked about—and I just want to go on this a bit more. I asked Richard Gould very clearly whether the ECB would allow Yorkshire to go into administration. He said no: one word answer, very clear. Then you later said that you were on the verge of administration. What conversations did you have with the ECB and did the ECB give you the response that they gave me just now?



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Harry Chathli: We invited Richard Gould to our board meeting on 22 December and he came in to the meeting about an hour and a half into the discussions simply to answer that very question ourselves. Mr Gould was very clear in his instruction that if the club could pursue another offer that guaranteed a future of cricket at Yorkshire County Cricket Club, they would prefer that the club took that decision.

The alternative, if the ECB comes into it—and we talked about Durham for example—then we had to consider what is in the best interest of members and creditors. Let's take the scenario of Durham, for example, where the test match was taken away from them, and we heard from Mr Graves. It is true that counties, FCCs rely on that income.

When I consider that creditors have to be taken into account and you take away the substantive income, which is the test match, and just take that away—forget about all the sponsorship that falls away, everything else that falls away—then what is the future of Yorkshire County Cricket Club under ECB rule, when all of that has been stripped away from the Yorkshire County Cricket Club? I could not see a viable option in that, frankly.

Q159 **Alex Sobel:** That is not a permanent state of affairs. Many members voted for Mr Graves's offer on the basis that there was nothing else, there was only administration, and that clearly was not the case. I read both your message to members—and Mr Graves put his own message to members within yours—and reading it, it felt that, first, there were omissions and, secondly, that this was the only course. There was no other recourse. Is that what was the intent?

Harry Chathli: I disagree with that. The reason is that we have to take our directors' duties and fiduciary duties, and we took advice on that every step of the way. What we have to consider is what is the viable option that ensures that cricket survives at Yorkshire County Cricket Club. Having taken legal advice, we felt that Mr Graves's offer was the only viable option that secured that, and secured and ensured that the interest of creditors and members were served. That was the decision that the board had to take. We did not take that without advice. That was taken with legal advice sat beside us, both from an insolvency perspective but also from a director's duties perspective.

Q160 **Alex Sobel:** As you both know, I am the MP for Headingley, for the ground, for the club. I am not currently a member of Yorkshire, but I have been in the past. I love the club. Many of my best experiences were at the club. Mr Graves, are you optimistic about the future of Yorkshire County Cricket Club, of our club?

Colin Graves: As I have said, Mr Sobel, if I was not optimistic, I would not have put £1 million of my own money at risk into that club. I believe in that club. I am passionate about Yorkshire cricket. I want that club to get back to where it has to get back to, both on and off the field. I am very optimistic about the future.



Q161 Chair: Thank you very much. Mr Graves, you are a gentleman who divides opinion. In advance of this session today, our Committee were contacted by so many people giving us questions that they wanted us to present you with. On the other hand, the Committee has come under some criticism from various aspects of the press for inviting you to see us today, particularly some of the local press in your neck of the woods. But I am grateful that you have. I am grateful to both of you for coming here today, especially so early in your tenure. It is a credit to you both for coming, because it is never an easy thing to do. But we are grateful that you have and that you fronted up and you have answered our questions today, and you have set out your priorities.

We know that Yorkshire is a giant in cricket, and we know that it is a county where people are very passionate about their cricket, and you can be such a change driver as we move into the future. That is something that the Committee will be keeping a very close eye on. But before we let you go; did you have anything else that you wanted to share with the Committee?

Colin Graves: Chair, from my point of view, I think I have covered everything that I wanted to get across to you, but certainly the main reason I have done this is for the good of Yorkshire County Cricket Club. It is not for the good of Colin Graves or anything else, I can assure you of that.

Harry Chathli: Thank you very much. No, I think we have covered it extensively. For me, the future of Yorkshire County Cricket Club and the decision that we took secured the future of cricket. That was quite important to me but also the rest of the board. I think the assurances that we sought and have received—both previously and today—is that the good work that we started two years ago is going to continue. That does give me some heart for future things.

Again, we will wait and see. I will be watching as a member of Surrey. I do not want Surrey to win everything either. I want Yorkshire to win something. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Chair: Thank you for your time today.