

# Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

## Oral evidence: Sport governance, HC 855

Tuesday 7 December 2021

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Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; John Nicolson; Jane Stevenson; Giles Watling.

Questions 213 - 369

### Witnesses

**I:** Basharat Hussain, Executive Chairperson, Quaid e Azam Premier Cricket League; and Adil Mehmood, Executive Finance Officer, Quaid e Azam Premier Cricket League.

**II:** Tracey Crouch MP, Chair, Independent Fan-Led Review of Football Governance.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Basharat Hussain and Adil Mehmood

Q213 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and this is a hearing into sports governance. There are two parts to the hearing today. The first part relates to cricket, Yorkshire cricket and the ongoing racism scandal, and the second part will be where we question Tracey Crouch about the football review and examine issues around football governance going forward. For our first part today we are joined by Basharat Hussain, executive chairperson, Quaid e Azam Premier Cricket League, and Adil Mehmood, finance officer at the Quaid e Azam Premier Cricket League. Basharat, Adil, thank you very much for joining us today.

**Basharat Hussain:** It is our pleasure.

**Chair:** Before we begin, I will go around the Committee to see if any interests need to be declared. I will do it for both sessions. I declare, first of all, that I am chair of the Lords and Commons Cricket Club and that I have received hospitality from the ECB and the Surrey County Cricket Club in the last 12 months.

**Giles Watling:** I declare that I have had similar hospitality and I am a long-time member of the Frinton-on-Sea Cricket Club.

**Chair:** There we go.

**Damian Green:** I am a member of Surrey County Cricket Club and the MCC. For the second session, I have received hospitality from the FA.

**Chair:** Yes, and I have received hospitality from Manchester United as well. I forgot about that.

**Julie Elliott:** For the second session, I have received hospitality from the FA.

**Kevin Brennan:** I also did from Glamorgan County Cricket Club in relation to The Hundred earlier this year.

**Chair:** We all have our crosses to bear.

**Kevin Brennan:** We won that game.

**Steve Brine:** For the second session, I have received hospitality from the Premier League; not recently though.

**Jane Stevenson:** For the second session, I have received hospitality from the Premier League.

**Clive Efford:** For what it is worth, I have received hospitality from the gambling association at Lord's Cricket Ground.



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**John Nicolson:** I have received absolutely nothing.

**Chair:** I was going to say we are out of time now.

**Steve Brine:** But he is not bitter about it.

Q214 **Chair:** Thank you very much for joining us. Basharat, first of all, could you outline to the Committee exactly what your thoughts were when you were listening to Azeem Rafiq and his evidence? What has been the reaction within the Asian cricketing community in Yorkshire?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think it is one of shock. Being involved in cricket for nearly three decades, the game itself has moved on tremendously. We just have to look at our national side, the success the national side had in winning the World Cup and the representation that the national side had. Seeing what was happening there and seeing what was happening at grassroots and recreational cricket, which we are involved with, cricket was certainly on the up in terms of interest. Then to see something like that, I just felt that, putting cricket aside, the fact that an organisation and an employer allowed such aspects within its organisation to take place without the course of action that was expected was a bit disappointing, to say the least.

For someone to go through some of the aspects that were mentioned in his statement and later in the media—if we take a couple of scenarios, for instance, the loss of his unborn child, and to show no empathy for that situation—having been in that circumstance myself, the way my employer dealt with the situation was a total contrast. We are all human and I think we should be treated equally. You always treat yourself like you would treat others, and that is the expectation that you would expect. Hearing what he had to go through was a shock and a surprise.

Q215 **Chair:** It was a surprise. Does it resonate in terms of the cricketing experience lower down the food chain, so to speak, within cricket in Yorkshire?

**Basharat Hussain:** It is hard for me to say, simply because I am not involved at that level. From a recreational point of view and our day-to-day administration and running of the organisation, we welcome everyone from all aspects of our community and we have good diversity within the league itself. That is what we hope that we can expand on and continue the good work we are certainly doing in order to eradicate those aspects. Any sport does not have room for racism. We are there to play a team sport and it requires 11 or whatever number of players who are playing within the sport.

Q216 **Chair:** Do either of you play at all?

**Adil Mehmood:** I play.

Q217 **Chair:** Yes, I could see you nodding. It is probably best that I put this question to you, Adil, from a grassroots perspective now. I played for 30



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years—really quite badly most of the time—and I have to say that if I had heard anyone using this language, they would have been sorted out, frankly, in the dressing room, and I go back all that long way ago. It seems to me absolutely astounding that that language could be used in any respect. Is it beyond comprehension to you? Can you see that that could occur?

**Adil Mehmood:** Normally it did not happen to me, but I heard from a few people that it is the case, yes, within the clubs and within the teams as well, so you can say that. Sorry, could you repeat your question again?

Q218 **Chair:** I just wanted to get your perspective in terms of whether or not what you heard from Azeem Rafiq in any way was what your experience is and what your friends' and colleagues' experience is within the game within Yorkshire.

**Adil Mehmood:** To be honest, when we heard this news it was heart-breaking. Then obviously we thought about what he has gone through all this time. He is brave enough to come out and speak about it. Within the grassroots level, where we play—I play in Bradford league—you feel like an outsider. You never gel with the team. It is because this is a mindset and a culture within the teams and within the club and it has been accepted. I have played for the last eight years in Bradford league and I have felt the same. I have played in three different clubs and I always felt like an outsider. I have never felt like I am part of the team.

**Chair:** You play in the Bradford league; you have played in three clubs?

**Adil Mehmood:** Yes, I play in the Bradford league. I played in Haworth as well.

**Chair:** But you never felt part of those teams?

**Adil Mehmood:** Definitely not. It is the culture and the mindset within the clubs.

Q219 **Chair:** What was the makeup of those three clubs that you played at in terms of the south Asian origin and whether or not people were or otherwise?

**Adil Mehmood:** The first club that I played at there were only two of us south Asian players and the rest were all English players. It was in a Haworth league. I don't want to mention the club name. At the second club that I played there were three south Asians. At the club where I am currently playing there are five south Asian players. As you can see, the south Asian players within the clubs and within the teams is increasing. The interest in cricket for south Asians is increasing, but from the other side, like English people and stuff like that, it is lacking. Clubs are struggling for players at the same time, and they are mostly dependent on the south Asian people to come and play for them. If you do not give them the same sort of opportunity and you do not consider them as a



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member of your own team, that is what happens. You do not stay in one club. I always moved to different clubs because you play for a couple of years and then you realise, "No, come on, just move on". There is always something that happens and then you move on to another club.

Q220 **Chair:** Imran Khan, when he was talking about Yorkshire cricket, said that basically he almost felt like there is apartheid in Yorkshire cricket. He would see a situation where he would see lots of south Asian kids being involved in nets and playing early on, so to speak, within their careers, and then he would look at the teams that you have just described, the senior league teams, and then he would look at Yorkshire County Cricket Club and he would see, frankly, that there were next to negligible numbers of people from south Asian origin. He would go, "Well, is this apartheid?" Do you think that was a fair comment? It is very emotive language.

**Basharat Hussain:** I think that it is circumstances. If we look at the studies that the ECB has done in recent action plans in terms of representation of the south Asian community and the percentage of recreational cricket that takes place and then you contrast that with the professional game, there is a big gap. I think that is one that is accepted but that could be a multitude of issues, whether it be those clubs, whether it be the pathways or whether it simply be financial values.

We know that cricket is a very expensive sport and for any child to go through it means that the parent has to do a lot of travelling. One of my players, who was loyal to me for nearly 15 years and played for my team, his young lad now plays for the under-15s. Hopefully he will progress to under-15s next year for Yorkshire, but he has had to finish playing cricket himself and devote his time to taking his child up and down the country to play some of the games. It is quite expensive to do that. He gave me his journey in terms of how many hours he has to put in and the cost that he factors in and what he has to purchase in order to make that happen. It is an investment in his child and it is how many parents can do that. It is probably half a dozen of one and six of the other. It is a case of—

**Chair:** It is economics?

**Basharat Hussain:** The key findings that we were looking at in the report and the action plan was that those can be the barriers to helping your child to progress.

**Chair:** Are you referring to the Fletcher report here?

**Basharat Hussain:** No, it was the South Asian Action Plan that was put in place, I believe, in 2018.

Q221 **Chair:** Mr Rafiq was very questioning about the support that he received from the PCA but also, frankly, the Asian cricketers' association. What did you think when you heard that? Is that something that resonated? Do



you think that perhaps there are not the support structures in place for young Asian players?

**Basharat Hussain:** We have worked with the NACC on a couple of occasions. My first contact with the organisation was on the basis that it took Quaid e Azam as being the beacon within south Asian cricket. What I achieved during that period of running the league and where we took the league was immense. The example for the NACC when we got all the south Asian leagues together down at Edgbaston was that this is what we need to be in terms of organisation and how we promote cricket. That was quite a positive, and we then went on to work with the ECB, where I presented at Old Trafford to established organisations at a lot of dinners as to how to run a successful league. Again, that was a positive.

Q222 **Chair:** Sorry, Mr Hussain, we take as a given the work that you have put in. My point is very specific. When he was talking about lack of support from within the community but also, frankly, within the PCA as well, is that something that rings true?

**Basharat Hussain:** Not having experienced it myself, I couldn't agree with that, no.

Q223 **Chair:** What do you think is the experience? Do you think that the structures that are in place at the moment in order to support young Asian players within the professional circuit, so to speak, are adequate?

**Basharat Hussain:** If they are not coming through, probably not. We have looked at the analyses and it is how we go around ensuring that we encourage young cricketers to get involved. It is how we break down those barriers. Finances is one of the bigger barriers, and the commitment from the parent potentially could be another barrier because obviously they have to decide whether they put food on the table or take their child to a game of cricket.

It just needs more looking into in terms of whether the pathways are supportive of children who have come from a poorer background. Is the support mechanism there? How well are the bursaries that the counties have communicated to those parents and those children? Again, there is a catalogue of elements that are in place and it is how those are projected to the community and whether the community is aware of those support measures that are in place.

Q224 **Chair:** What you are saying is that it is not just about the support that is in place when you do reach a league level; you are saying that there is not the support in place lower down at all in that regard, or very little of it, and that is what needs to be focused on?

**Basharat Hussain:** Certainly. As an organisation, this year we were quite fortunate. I worked with seven of our clubs to secure funding through the ECB. That is the first that we have been able to get funding from ECB. We have been in existence nearly over 30 years.



Q225 **Chair:** Why is it that you waited nearly 30 years for funding from the ECB? What is the reason? Is it because to a degree it questioned the need for your league to exist?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think that it was a combination of two aspects. One is that obviously there is a set structure that our clubs need to have in order to secure funding. Working with those clubs, we put those structures in place in order to secure that funding. All the applications were 100% successful. That was the work that we had done, and I think a lot of the applications previously were on the basis that if you did not have any fixed assets or you did not have any assets or facilities whatsoever, then it was difficult to secure funding. In essence, those clubs that have now constituted are clubs without assets, and our direction of travel is that we want more of our teams to become clubs. Therefore they have committee structures in place, a constitution in place and a simple bank account in order for them then to sustain a long-term future as clubs.

We are moving in the direction of building partnerships. Again, we have worked well with some of the Saturday leagues and Saturday clubs and what we would like is for the likes of ECB—and we met with the Yorkshire county last week. Our aim was to get into the strategic thinking about how we can be supported and how we can carry on supporting recreational cricket to ensure that we get more and more youngsters coming into the game, bearing in mind that there is a small proportion who make it to the professional game. That is reality and that is something that all communities accept. We accommodate for the nearly 99% of those who do not necessarily get into the professional game.

**Chair:** Yes, but it is disproportionate.

**Basharat Hussain:** It is, yes. In any sport, it is the same. It is not just cricket. It is just making sure that we are there to allow individuals to participate in cricket. When they decide between a different career, whether it is cricket or not, at the age of 16 and 17, which is a critical stage when they go through the pathway, we can be there to pick them up if they want to play on a Sunday. That is what we are there for.

Q226 **Chair:** Just before we move on to Giles, the Committee has been contacted by senior people within Yorkshire who have stated that effectively they feel as if there is currently a sustained smear campaign going on against those who wish to see reform at Yorkshire and within Yorkshire cricket more generally. This involves social media, whispering campaigns, as well as briefings to press and so on. What is your view of that? Is that something that you can see is happening on the ground? Is that something that, frankly, disturbs you?

**Basharat Hussain:** It does. As I stated earlier on, we moved in a positive direction because we are all here for one thing, and that is cricket. We want to see the betterment of cricket and cricket come out with a better reputation than it currently has, hence why as a committee



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we decided that it was the right thing to do to meet with the county. It was a nearly two-hour meeting, very positive. They took on some of the suggestions and agreed that we would have several meetings with a bigger panel.

From that point of view, as a league we always like to be positive. We are using this current situation, which under the circumstances we would rather not have had—

Q227 **Chair:** You had a two-hour meeting with the county. Is that under Lord Patel?

**Basharat Hussain:** It is, yes.

Q228 **Chair:** Had you had a meeting before?

**Basharat Hussain:** That was our first.

Q229 **Chair:** Your first meeting. Sorry, I just want to get to the bottom of this. How many people play in the Quaid e Azam league?

**Basharat Hussain:** One of the celebrations we had is that we started with just over 1,100 players who were registered in the system and by the end of the registration system we had increased it by nearly 600. We are at about 1,700.

**Chair:** So 1,700 players, you have been around for 30 years and you have just had your first meeting with Yorkshire County Cricket Club?

**Basharat Hussain:** We met previous board members on a couple of occasions. We hosted one of our finals at Headingley as well, and that was quite a success and certainly a good thing for the outgoing chair, Mark, who organised the match to be played at Headingley. For the community it was quite an achievement to host a final there and we are hoping that we can do—

**Chair:** That was Mark Arthur?

**Basharat Hussain:** Yes.

**Chair:** When was that?

**Basharat Hussain:** That would have been probably 2013, 2014.

Q230 **Chair:** Okay. Just to clarify, you have 1,700 members. You have been in existence for 30 years. You have played one game at Headingley in 2013 or 2014, courtesy of the largesse of Mr Arthur. This is an absolutely shocking level of disengagement. I am speechless that Yorkshire County Cricket Club could allow a situation to occur where literally thousands of cricketers are playing in their catchment area, and we all know that Yorkshire likes to go on about how they like to have Yorkshire white rose values and Yorkshire born and bred playing for them, yet 1,700. I am just staggered that that is all the engagement they have given you over



that time. Why is that?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think it might be an issue that we have probably not approached them. Whether we felt that we needed to, I am not sure. We have worked with the county board and we have been members of the county board probably now for a good 20-plus years. Again, I took the league into becoming a member of the Yorkshire Cricket Board simply because if you are in the club then you can access some of the funding. That was traditionally what we got and obviously the support that we got from the county board as well. What materialised over—

Q231 **Chair:** The county board is different to the county cricket club, isn't it?

**Basharat Hussain:** That is right, yes.

Q232 **Chair:** I play board cricket. It is very different to county cricket club. You have had that engagement with the county board but not to that extent by Yorkshire County Cricket Club?

**Basharat Hussain:** No.

**Chair:** No. You are obviously being very polite here, but this just smacks of racism.

**Basharat Hussain:** I wouldn't necessarily say that it was racism, but again, like I said, we as a league—

**Chair:** I think you are being very polite, Mr Hussain, yes. I think your look to me says everything.

Q233 **Giles Watling:** I just want to clear one thing up. I thought that Quaid e Azam was founded in 1980.

**Basharat Hussain:** Yes.

**Giles Watling:** So it is 41 years.

**Basharat Hussain:** Just for the fact of the Committee—

**Chair:** That makes it worse, yes.

**Giles Watling:** Exactly, thank you. I love the collegiate approach with the ties, thank you, gentlemen.

**Basharat Hussain:** I think that if you are going to set up an organisation, the best thing to do is set it right.

Q234 **Giles Watling:** Going back to 1980 when the league was founded, why was it founded? What were the reasons behind it at the time?

**Basharat Hussain:** It is interesting because a lot of questions—and as the Chair said, you have the media, thankfully, that supports some of the thinking; but many years ago when I first got involved with the Quaid e Azam league it was on the basis that there was not a structure in place. One of the things I started doing was bringing back the founder members



and bringing them to the award ceremonies. We sat down and had this discussion about why Quaid e Azam started, because I got involved probably 11 or 12 years after it was founded. They were simply textile workers who had a free Sunday and decided that they wanted to play cricket, something that they played back in their previous country that they had emigrated from. It was a case of wanting to get together and play a game of cricket among friends and enjoy it, and that is where it started.

The beauty of the game is that it is in our blood. Within the south Asian community there is not a great deal of competition with other sport. It is only cricket. Most south Asian lads and girls who grow up just want to play cricket. That is what it was, but it extended and expanded at such pace that at one stage we had regular teams travelling from Nottingham and as far as Preston to play in West Yorkshire. That was just the interest and that is why, going back to my previous comment about the NACC, we were used as a beacon: this league has expanded to the extent that people are willing to travel hundreds of miles just to play a game of cricket. It just bloomed from there.

We went from having 24 clubs to 30 in the previous season. We already have six applications for this season and now we have built up an associate membership with another representation of south Asian cricket within the Dewsbury area. The league has been going for 120-plus years and it was struggling in the previous season, so we went in with a supported associate relationship with them, allowing them to govern themselves but with our technical expertise and support to run cricket leagues, just to simply save the league from disintegrating.

**Q235 Giles Watling:** You would describe it then as an astounding success?

**Basharat Hussain:** Yes.

**Q236 Giles Watling:** For which you are to be congratulated on. Do those reasons for initial founding still exist, in your opinion?

**Basharat Hussain:** They do. We did a shared survey over the last three days, between Sunday and Tuesday, and again the findings were no different than what they were 30 or 40 years ago.

**Q237 Giles Watling:** What is the criteria for qualifying for the league?

**Basharat Hussain:** It is simple. We have six criteria for the application process. We are open and transparent in our processes. We put them on the website and everyone has access to them. We usually look for a good ground. Again, it is an area of our concentration with the Yorkshire county in order to build better relationships with Saturday clubs, because they have assets that we don't. We rely on them to give us facilities and we are grateful for that because without their support we would not have a league. We appreciate the work that the member clubs have done with those Saturday clubs. That is one of the aspects of the requirements. Obviously financial status is another. We ask clubs to nominate at least



two individuals who we can then train up to be officials, so the umpiring officials is a criteria. Having bank accounts and having a constitution, the basics that you would need to become a club.

**Q238 Giles Watling:** Are those criteria under review constantly?

**Basharat Hussain:** They are, yes. It depends on the circumstances. One of the clubs was struggling with getting a grant facility and with me being involved with cricket—I have a lot of contacts—it was just a case of picking the phone up and asking a club, “Would you entertain this club at a fixed rate of pay?” They were kind enough to say yes.

**Giles Watling:** There is flexibility?

**Basharat Hussain:** Yes.

**Q239 Giles Watling:** That is good to hear. Thank you. The initial foundation was primarily aimed at south Asian players, which you found was a more national thing than a local thing. Has that changed? Do you have players from other backgrounds now?

**Basharat Hussain:** We do, yes. Our team, Bhalot, play—I was an official at the last game of the season and we had two English lads and two black lads who played. One of them travelled all the way from Harrogate, which is quite a distance to come, all the way down to Huddersfield, which is where we were situated. There is a lot of attraction from other communities simply because of the level of cricket that is played and how it is enjoyed.

**Q240 Giles Watling:** As things have changed, as things have moved on, do you think that there is still a need for an Asian league?

**Basharat Hussain:** There is. We have six teams knocking on our doors that want a place. They just want to play cricket. Again, going back to the point about what happened with our national team, the success of winning the World Cup has increased interest immensely, and what we are finding is that there are more and more young cricketers coming in. That is what we want to do because when we carried out the survey last weekend we realised that we are an ageing league and we need to do something about that. The only way we can do something about it for our children of the future who are going to be playing for the county, hopefully, is to keep them engaged and interested in cricket. One of the other aspects as to why I got involved with cricket was the fact that I wanted young lads—at that stage, going back 30 years—to keep away from criminal activity. That was my initial getting involved—

**Giles Watling:** It is a very positive community game.

**Basharat Hussain:** It is, yes. With cricket, as you probably appreciate, there is a lot more than the game. We are teaching team skills. We are teaching respect for each other, organising yourself to get up and meet—

**Giles Watling:** Get the leadership and all the rest of it, yes.



**Basharat Hussain:** That is right. It is that education aspect of it as well.

Q241 **Giles Watling:** What would you say are the barriers that people might find when wanting to join existing local teams?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think it is contacts sometimes. As Adil alluded to, and I will give you my example, my club has been going since 1978 and we are now into our second generation of players who are playing. What we have seen over time is that our club has gone from having one or two playing in major Saturday leagues to now nearly one or two not playing. Over the period of the 30 years we have seen more players engaging and playing in a Saturday club, and that is a good thing, simply because that is what we want our individuals to do, to progress. Seeing the numbers increase over that time is good work and it is welcoming and more doors are opening for them.

The more cricket you play, the better it is. We now have Saturday and Sunday cricket. We have Tuesday and Wednesday cricket. When I was playing and, as Julian alluded to, I was not the best of players—you keep your memories. One of the things I always remember is that as a child I arrived in this country at the age of eight. I can remember coming down Park Avenue, which was a first-class ground at that stage, going in for school trials and walking down that pavilion. Those memories are what you cherish and you just want everyone else to have the same opportunity.

Q242 **Giles Watling:** From your point of view the direction of travel is a positive one?

**Basharat Hussain:** It certainly is. Like I say, we as a league are proud of what we have achieved. We had a lot of teams coming in from Sheffield. Sheffield then set up its own league called Allama Iqbal. It has 16 clubs within the Sheffield region. I have been working with them. They had difficulties at the beginning of the season with their suppliers and they asked me to step in. I literally sorted the issue out within a couple of days for them. We had teams coming from Manchester and Manchester decided to set up its own league. It also has 16 clubs in the Lancashire area. That is why we are proud of what we have done and what we have achieved by giving that encouragement to others to volunteer.

Q243 **Giles Watling:** Finally, looking to the future, what would you like to do now? How would you like to move on?

**Basharat Hussain:** Our meeting was positive with the county and what we want to do is try to build—

**Giles Watling:** One meeting, yes.

**Basharat Hussain:** The fact that we have had the meeting and the doors were open and they listened I think is quite an achievement from the county itself. The aim is to try to build better relationships with some of the Saturday clubs.



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One of the things we have, like where Adil plays, is that the club is very accommodating. They play all their home fixtures at the same ground. It is not always the same for many teams. They have to switch between three to four grounds to play all their nine fixtures. One of the things that we have suggested is that if we can build those relationships to hire facilities so that some of our Sunday clubs have that opportunity to play at good facilities. We want to improve the level of cricket that they are playing, because some of these young lads who play on Saturday want to play on decent grounds and decent pitches. What we want to do is build those relationships with those Saturday clubs and say, "We are here. We want to invest in your clubs by hiring the facilities. You then have access to some of the players that we have". Not all of them have been playing in Saturday leagues. It is a win-win situation for both parties and that is the direction of travel we want to take the league in.

**Giles Watling:** That is good, and I hope that they are listening today.

Q244 **Julie Elliott:** Good morning. I want to go back to something you said. Clearly you are doing a fantastic job with young people playing cricket now, but when you said that when it was set up it was because you wanted young people to be playing cricket, why did people not join existing cricket clubs in the area, of which there are loads?

**Basharat Hussain:** When we carried out the survey, because we wanted to get other opinions rather than just express our own, there seems to be an element of comfort zone, the fact that they are playing with friends and family. You will appreciate that on a Sunday when you play, you are playing with people who you are familiar with. Therefore, you tend to be in that comfort zone and you are comfortable with playing on Sundays, whereas sometimes on Saturdays you are going into a team and you do not know some of the individuals. You are just part of the 11 individuals in the squad. Maybe that might be one of the issues.

Maybe it could be a possibility that getting into those clubs might have been— I can only go back a long time when I tried to play at junior level and I wasn't picked. Therefore I chose to play with my brother's team and ever since I have never looked back and just carried on playing. As long as I play cricket I am satisfied with what I am doing and what I am achieving, and that's what it's about. It's whether you are comfortable where you are playing.

The feedback we got from players is that they enjoyed playing Sunday cricket over Saturday cricket because of the environment that they were in and because of the level of the standard that we were putting together. You only have to take the Yorkshire county as an example. Yorkshire county is made up of all the community that is around Yorkshire and it is the same with Quaid e Azam. All the teams pull together players who play in different Saturday clubs, so you have the best of the Saturday clubs playing in one club, therefore you are playing at a higher standard. That level of cricket is what the attraction is on a



Sunday. Maybe it might be the fact that they are just attracted to that level of cricket on a Sunday rather than a Saturday.

Q245 **Julie Elliott:** But nobody from existing clubs reached out to any people in your community to come and play that you are aware of?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think it is difficult because certainly the community that I am in is in an inner city area. What you find is that cricket is something that was on a decline and unfortunately we lost access to some of the cricket grounds around us. If they were in the better leagues they fell out in terms of not providing the facilities or making the standards that are required of those leagues. Over the last 10 years things have improved in cricket, but we saw the decline previous to those 10 years and I think that is where it has done a lot of damage.

**Julie Elliott:** But 30 or 40 years ago a lot of people played cricket.

**Basharat Hussain:** They still do now, yes, but as I said earlier on, there are a lot more south Asian cricketers playing in Saturday leagues than there ever was.

Q246 **Damian Green:** Good morning. Everything you do is completely admirable and I am in awe of the organisation you have set up. But isn't it in a way an admission of defeat in a wider point about society that you have to have separate leagues so that people from a south Asian background can feel comfortable playing cricket in a cricket-mad part of the world? Do you see it like that?

**Basharat Hussain:** We don't really, because we are enriching. The survey identified that for at least three out of four their lives were enriched on a Sunday. If we did not exist, there would not be a game of cricket on a Sunday. We also saw that for one in four it is an alternative, which is nice to see that only 25% do not play Saturday cricket, but we want that further reduction simply because we want them to engage on Saturday of course. Those individuals need to start thinking and considering playing Saturday.

Certainly I think that as an existence and having a parallel league on a Sunday we are allowing individuals to play more cricket in the week than they would do. If we did not exist, they would not play. The survey identified that if there was not Sunday cricket, there is a possibility that we could lose one in 11 players who would not necessarily play cricket at all and we do not want that. We are here for one cause and that cause is cricket, regardless of our communities and our backgrounds. What we are trying to do is engage individuals to play more cricket and as much as they can play.

Q247 **Damian Green:** As I say, I have nothing but admiration for that. I am just reflecting on the wider point. Indeed, when you were set up, which was 1980, reflecting personally, I never played cricket at any level at all, but I was playing football around London then in very minor leagues. If somebody had suggested then that we need to have black leagues and



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white leagues for young men to play football, it would have been appalling. Even in 1980 that would have been genuinely unthinkable. I suppose looking ahead the question is: do you ever see a point where, as it were, your whole organisation will not be needed, that it will just be that you can play any kind of clubs and people can join any kind of clubs? Has there been any change in the intervening 40 years that makes that nearer?

**Basharat Hussain:** As I touched on, during the 1980s and the early 2000s we saw a decline in Asian cricket and that worried us a bit. We lost members and we went back down to 20 clubs. A complete contrast now, where we are expanding at a rate that no other league probably has ever expanded, simply because there is so much interest. While that interest exists, we exist as an organisation.

Q248 **Damian Green:** You said that the team you play with has non-south Asian players. Is that gradually changing over time? Is it becoming more mixed?

**Basharat Hussain:** It certainly is. Our team was set up on a model of a family and friend team, but last year we had two English players playing. That was simply because my nephew plays for a Saturday club and he just said to the lads, "Do you fancy a game on Sunday?" and they said, "Yes, we're up for it". Since then they have been playing. Again, it is all through contacts. It is through who you know to get into clubs and that is how it works on a Sunday. You do not go for a trial, you just get approached and you are in a side if you are good enough and you stay in the side.

Q249 **Damian Green:** The young players coming in for the first time, presumably a lot of them want to play for Yorkshire, is that right?

**Basharat Hussain:** That is our encouragement. A lot of people say, "You don't do anything with junior cricket" and I say, "Yes, that is because we do not want to duplicate". We do not want to franchise the whole junior structure. We have a structure in place. Whether it works or not, that is for the county to review. For us, it is making sure that we encourage youngsters to continue that pathway, that a career can be in cricket. It is a tough one, like any other sport. It is no different and you have to put a lot of effort in. You have to get your techniques right because we all know cricket is a technical sport. You need a lot of coaching to perfect the way you bat or you bowl. That costs money and there is a lot of coaching that you have to do.

There is that reality that you cannot just pick up a bat or a ball and expect to be playing junior cricket and getting selected for county. You have to get it right, and for us as the league our message is quite clear to parents: continue that path. If your child is talented and has the opportunity, don't waste it. It is important to continue engagement with the community and important to get that message out. We are hoping that what happens over the course of the next few months will change



the attitude of the community in a positive way and we continue engaging our youngsters in thinking about cricket as a potential career.

Q250 **Jane Stevenson:** I am going to confess that I have not played cricket since school. An old girl of my school was Rachael Heyhoe Flint. It just occurred to me as you were talking to wonder whether there are the same issues in women's cricket in Yorkshire. Does your league encourage young girls to get involved and do they face the same challenges in playing cricket?

**Basharat Hussain:** I have to confess that we have focused on men's cricket mainly within the Quaid e Azam league structure. I confess that it is probably one of our weaknesses, but at the end of the day there are enough structures in place to encourage young girls to participate.

We have inclusion cricket as well, which we cannot forget because there are all forms of cricket that are happening. It is good to celebrate that and we have allowed individuals—we had a case where one of the club members registered a male player who was hard of hearing. Then there was a challenge about whether he should be participating in the league and I said, "It is inclusion cricket, why not?" We are an amateur league by status and we have a constitution that does not allow professionals to participate, certainly those who have played within the last five years. You have to meet those criteria. This individual was allowed to play simply because he met the criteria and we felt that if he played inclusion cricket and World Cup cricket elsewhere in the country, then it did not really matter. We are open to anyone who wants to play, but unfortunately it is men's cricket.

**Adil Mehmood:** I just want to add one thing, just about facilities. Obviously we do not have facilities. I have sometimes played Sunday cricket where they have no toilet facilities. You cannot encourage the youngsters, the boys and girls, and their parents to bring their kids to a cricket ground where we do not have toilet facilities. The cricket game, as you all know, is a long game. It is a seven-hour game, so you start in the morning and finish in the evening. You need to have those facilities in place to play cricket.

Q251 **Chair:** Just to follow up on Jane's point, I think that Jane's question really is whether that same divide that is in place in the men's game in Yorkshire, which is quite clear, is in place in the women's game in Yorkshire.

**Basharat Hussain:** With not having that involvement, it is probably not something that I can answer, Jane, sorry.

**Jane Stevenson:** It needs further investigation, I think.

Q252 **Chair:** Yes, that is quite interesting. To also clarify, when you are talking about facilities and so on, many of your clubs do not have their own grounds and are effectively wandering clubs. That is what you said at the start?



**Basharat Hussain:** We do not have control of facilities, so we are reliant on others. If we were to consider starting up a women's league, then the first thing would be the facilities. You would not consider setting up a league—

Q253 **Chair:** If you are a wandering team, but you would consider it if you had a base, if you had a home club ground, effectively? That would be the case?

**Basharat Hussain:** Yes. Like I say, if we had the assets, then things would be different, but we don't.

Q254 **Jane Stevenson:** Can I ask a very quick follow-up? With women's football, for example, it has changed so much in my lifetime. You see so many more girls. I am from Wolverhampton, so football is a huge part of our heritage. Are more girls from south Asian backgrounds seeing male role models and wanting to get involved in cricket?

**Basharat Hussain:** The only experience that we have had is that some of the work that we did with the county was about Park Avenue, which is now a hub in Bradford. What we found is that there has been good work done by Bradford Park Avenue to encourage more girls. There is a regular girls' team that plays on that ground. Yes, there is definitely more cricket being played in Bradford that involves girls and beyond. Yes, definitely more than we saw decades ago.

**Jane Stevenson:** Thank you. I need to go and find out more about it.

Q255 **Clive Efford:** Thanks for coming to give evidence today. Is Yorkshire's pyramid system unique to Yorkshire or does it exist in other counties as well?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think the pyramid system is national, but again with Quaid e Azam we are not part of that pyramid because we are not a Saturday league. We are purely a Sunday league. We play within our own structures.

Q256 **Clive Efford:** Do Asian teams have the same difficulties breaking into that pyramid in other counties? Are you aware?

**Basharat Hussain:** It is difficult for us to say when we are not involved with Saturday clubs that probably want to break through into those systems. We are purely a Sunday league that entertains cricket on a Sunday.

Q257 **Clive Efford:** Talking about your players and how they progress, do you have any feel for how many players do progress to play at a higher level in that pyramid?

**Basharat Hussain:** When you talk about higher levels, some of the players are successful within the local leagues on the basis that they are actually earning from cricket. A lot of players do play in Saturday leagues who are paid to play, so it is more than entertainment. There is a bit of a



salary in there for them as well. That is quite an achievement. Those individuals are proud of that.

Q258 **Clive Efford:** How many would you say that is? Could you give us an indication of how that might compare with other counties?

**Basharat Hussain:** In certain local leagues it is quite prominent, in two of the established leagues, simply because they want to attract the best of what the county has. In order to get the best, they have to pay. I will give you my own example. One of our lads who plays in my team attracts a three-figure number for a match.

Q259 **Clive Efford:** You talked a bit about coaching and that it is a highly technical game and you need to teach players the proper technique. What support do you get to do that? Do you get grants from the ECB? Is there money available to support you to develop the game at grassroots?

**Basharat Hussain:** Probably not, but there are enough establishments in West Yorkshire that do that. We have links with at least three academies that were set up over the last decade that now provide that coaching level, and coaching to a very good standard. We have some of the Yorkshire county players coming in and coaching some of the sessions, some previous county players as well. There is a lot of coaching and certainly the example I quoted you about one of my lads whose child is playing for under-15s, he does invest in some of those coaching sessions for his child. There is the provision but it is down to the parents to pay for that. I know there was mention about bursaries being available and he has tapped into some of the bursaries in order to get some winter coaching going along as well. There are structures in place that each county has and it is how they invest that bursary on the basis that it is—

Q260 **Clive Efford:** Would you say that you have equal access to that, you would not complain about—

**Basharat Hussain:** We do not have access to that simply because we do not have junior-level cricket and that is predominantly for those who play junior level. We tap into other sources of funds. The seven clubs that were successful in this previous season was the funding that ECB had made about getting cricket back in and through the Covid situation that we went through. A lot of the clubs are supported by businesses. Some are so keen that they fund the clubs themselves. Obviously when there is no cricket there is a loss of income and the grants helped some of the clubs survive the difficult season that we went through last year. That was quite a positive in terms of how the league supported the clubs to secure funding from the ECB and we are proud of those achievements.

Q261 **Clive Efford:** You talk about not having your own base for clubs. Is that true about all the clubs in your Sunday league?

**Basharat Hussain:** We have two clubs that have secured facilities and have been given a bit more control over the Saturday club. The spinoff from that is that they have access then to Sunday facilities much more



predominantly and I think that has been the positive. What we want to do is build those partnerships like they have done and extend that to many more clubs. The more we do that, the more sustainability we achieve for those clubs as well as the league going forward.

Q262 **Clive Efford:** Do you rely on local authorities' facilities or is it other clubs' facilities? Where do you play your games on a Sunday?

**Basharat Hussain:** Over the period one of the things that I did as a strategic direction was to move away from local authority facilities simply because we felt that the standard of facilities was not what we wanted it to be and it would not attract a good level of cricket. I was fortunate that probably about 15 years ago the leader of the Birmingham Council rang me up, just out of the blue, and said, "Basharat, how is it that you are sustaining your own league, you have private facilities and you are not reliant on the council for any funding?" I said it was a 10-year strategy that our application process at that point encouraged individuals to get private facilities and encouraged them to move away from council facilities; therefore playing a better level of cricket. That is what we achieved over that period and we were quite successful.

We are less reliant on the council knowing that, particularly in the area that I live in, there are no council facilities. It is very limited. Our ground that we use is part of a private school now. The council handed it over to them and since then it has been the best thing they did because the facilities have been brought up to a standard that matches any other. We have changing facilities. We are fortunate that we have toilets that accommodate ladies there because it is a mixed facility. We have football and cricket there, as well as archery. There is a mix of users but that is a good model to use where things have improved. That is in association with Sport England as well as the school that has now taken over the responsibility. Our long-term objective is to move towards partnership with Saturday clubs and having consistency of access to those facilities.

**Adil Mehmood:** If they allow us to.

Q263 **Clive Efford:** This is the last question. Azeem Rafiq has opened up a debate about not just Yorkshire cricket but cricket in general and how we go forward. I think that this is a time for us to look to the future. From your perspective, what should that future look like? What would you like to see Yorkshire cricket, the ECB, Sport England, whoever, doing to break down those barriers?

**Basharat Hussain:** For us as an organisation this is an opportunity. It might be a once-in-a-generation opportunity and we are trying to make the best of it that we can for the sport of cricket. If we can come up with some aspects of the county strategy, that will be an achievement in itself, because that is only for the betterment of cricket and the wider community as well. That is what we want to achieve. It is unfortunate that these circumstances have arisen and we got to this situation, but as an organisation we think positively. We will work with the county and the



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boards to ensure that as a league we are sustaining ourselves and we can move forward and develop our teams to become clubs. The more we do that, the better it is.

Q264 **Kevin Brennan:** Thank you both for coming this morning. Mr Hussain, the players who play in your league, how many of them will have played formal cricket as a youngster and in some way, shape or form been part of a structure of that kind at school or in a club or in an academy or somewhere?

**Basharat Hussain:** I would say probably more now than there was 10 years ago, simply because there is—

Q265 **Kevin Brennan:** What proportion would it be, do you think?

**Basharat Hussain:** It is hard. If you look at the analysis that we did, it was a very small proportion.

**Kevin Brennan:** It is an adult league you have and most of the people coming to play in the league are playing amateur or recreational cricket on a Sunday, but they will not necessarily have been through any structures and been formally coached or anything, they just love the game. They may have played it with their friends in the park and so on.

**Basharat Hussain:** There are pockets of lads who are still playing who have gone through the junior system. Looking at those, they are probably the better of the players and you can see that straight away, whether it is the bowling technique or the batting technique. You can see the quality of what they have gone through and they do stand out.

Q266 **Kevin Brennan:** I think what this has revealed, Mr Rafiq's evidence to the Committee and this whole Yorkshire County Cricket Club scandal, is this extraordinary statistic, which he quoted to us when he gave evidence, that 30% of people playing recreationally are from south Asian backgrounds and only 4% of players at the elite professional level are from south Asian backgrounds and that that has got worse over the last two decades. You are painting a picture of things getting better, which they are in your league and its organisation and the wonderful richness that brings to people's lives, but at the professional level it is not happening for players of south Asian origin in England and Wales. Glamorgan is my local county cricket club and its ground sits right next door to the most diverse community in south Wales, in Riverside in Cardiff and my constituency in nearby Grangetown, but the leaky pipe does not seem to work. There is this ECB south Asian plan. Were you involved at all and consulted about that when that was drawn up?

**Basharat Hussain:** No. Unfortunately, that was the only time I was out of cricket. I wasn't in organising—

Q267 **Kevin Brennan:** Was the organisation consulted then, if you were not personally consulted about it?



**Basharat Hussain:** I don't think it was. Reading the whole summary, it seemed to be that teams were sent out from ECB to gather that information and that is how it has come back into allowing the survey. One of the things I can certainly say from a junior point of view and the recent reports that are coming in and now the recent action plan from ECB is that in any organisation transparency is absolutely critical. Whether it is sport or education, if you are assessing a young person, whether that be in the classroom or in the nets, it is critical to give that feedback and to say, "You haven't been selected on the basis of x, y and z". That has to be transparent and I am not sure whether that has been. It is difficult to make a judgment call on that.

Q268 **Kevin Brennan:** I am interested in the south Asian cricket plan because that was published, I think, in 2018 and launched by the ECB. Did the NACC have a role in the group that set that up, as far as you are aware?

**Basharat Hussain:** It is difficult to say. Like I say, I wasn't involved at that stage.

Q269 **Kevin Brennan:** You are not sure, okay. I was looking at some of the action points that are in it. One of the long-term ambitions of the South Asian Action Plan from the ECB, 2020 to 2024, it says, is to create a new national talent pathway plan that identifies and supports talent "regardless of background or ethnicity". It struck me as astonishing that in 2018 the ECB should have to say that it needs to create a talent pathway plan that supports talent "regardless of background or ethnicity", which seems to me to suggest that up until 2018 it is acknowledging that its talent pathway plan effectively excluded people because of their ethnicity and background. Is that a fair thing to say?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think if it is coming from ECB it has to have come from the research that it has done to then come up with that conclusion. As you said, it is startling that any organisation has to categorically specify that in its action plan. Clearly it has identified that there are shortcomings and therefore some action needs to take place, hence why that aspect of the action plan was completed.

Q270 **Kevin Brennan:** Some of the other actions were, "Establish a mentoring programme for young south Asian players on the talent pathway". Mr Mehmood, when you were growing up and playing and so on, did you ever get any mentoring or anything of that kind as a young player?

**Adil Mehmood:** Not really, no. I wasn't good enough, but I still play competitive cricket. I have seen so many players who were growing up and very talented but, as you mentioned as well, they were lost somewhere in the pipeline. It is true as well that there is a mindset and culture when you go and play for a club and coaching as well at the same time.

I can add one thing that we were discussing yesterday. One of my friends was discussing—it will be right or wrong, but I just want to add it here—sometimes, as you all know, the pitch condition can play a vital role when



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you play cricket. There are sometimes grassy pitches or something and the coaches normally get the Asian players to go and play, open the innings and stuff like that, even though they normally play in the middle orders. It is like a coaching mindset when there are flat pitches, when you can get scores, a huge amount of runs. That is that coaching mindset as well that we see.

Q271 **Kevin Brennan:** There is an assumption that the—

**Adil Mehmood:** Yes, definitely, there is a mindset.

**Kevin Brennan—**white players should be put in on the flat track and Asian players should—

**Adil Mehmood:** Obviously when it comes to the stats, you always get the stats and you make the decisions on the stats. Whether it is right or wrong I cannot say.

Q272 **Kevin Brennan:** On that point, one of the items in the action plan is delivering a programme of unconscious bias training for first-class county academy directors. Do you think there is a lot of unconscious bias or even conscious bias among coaches?

**Adil Mehmood:** Yes.

Q273 **Kevin Brennan:** Another one was to support 10 south Asian coaches—it seems a very small number to me for the whole country—in a mentoring and work placement scheme. There is huge interest in the game and an enormous amount of talent. Is enough being done to get south Asian coaches who might, one would hope, not have any unconscious bias, which would allow players to come through the pipeline or make it more possible?

**Basharat Hussain:** Previously there has been a lot of funding that has gone in. NACC has been one of the organisations that has funded a lot of the coaching courses that we have done within our region. Does that refer to high-level coaching? I think that might be why it is such a small number.

**Kevin Brennan:** Elite coaching I think they are talking about here, yes.

**Basharat Hussain:** Yes, it will be, and we have seen one recruitment in Yorkshire, which both Adil and myself were involved with, an individual who has secured coaching.

Q274 **Kevin Brennan:** How many elite coaches would there be, do you think, across the country? Would you have any idea?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think that might be just at county level and particular areas, by the sounds of it.

Q275 **Kevin Brennan:** A third of them ought to be from south Asian background if the interest in the game is reflected in the coaching statistics.



**Basharat Hussain:** Again, we are talking about elite as opposed to general coaches. There are a lot of general coaches who are available and people do have access. As I mentioned earlier on, we have quite a few academies that provide that facility, but it is done at a cost.

Q276 **Kevin Brennan:** This plan was launched in 2018. Has it had any significant successes or made a marked difference?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think for us as a league probably not because we are senior cricket and we do not engage in junior cricket. Those leagues that provide junior cricket are probably the better platform to ask the question of.

Q277 **Kevin Brennan:** Do you have any anecdotal reports of what people think about it, or do people not think about it, or do they think it is—

**Basharat Hussain:** From a league perspective, we are encouraged that the numbers coming through are certainly increasing. As a south Asian community we saw a decline in numbers that was worrying, and what we are trying to do is change the way that the game is played in order to attract more to come into recreational cricket. That has been our—

Q278 **Kevin Brennan:** I suppose it might be quite difficult for you to say whether this plan is still fit for purpose if you are saying it is not impacting on your league because of the nature of your league and so on.

**Basharat Hussain:** Correct, yes.

Q279 **Kevin Brennan:** Do you think there is anything else that should be done to make this plan more effective?

**Basharat Hussain:** What we have highlighted with the county is the way that we want to go forward as a league. That is to build partnerships and foster partnerships with local grounds, therefore having access and building those partnerships so that we can have more community cohesion between the Saturday and Sunday clubs.

Q280 **Kevin Brennan:** What is the standard like of your league compared with the Saturday leagues?

**Basharat Hussain:** If you are willing to travel 100 miles, that tells you all. We have players who travel the distance simply because they—

Q281 **Kevin Brennan:** Do you ever play against any of the Saturday teams in any friendly challenges?

**Basharat Hussain:** We used to. I will give you a scenario. When we joined the boards, we also were allowed to play our under-19 team. In the first year our under-19 teams got into the semis of all the leagues in our county. In the second year we were in the quarters. That was a testament to the standards that we were playing in our league. If we can reach the semi-finals of an under-19 competition, which was all the best that Yorkshire had, we were certainly on good grounding and proud of our achievements.



Q282 **Kevin Brennan:** As a matter of interest, how integrated within the south Asian community do the teams tend to be? Do they tend to be teams that are made up mainly of players of Pakistani origin or Indian or Bangladeshi origin or does it tend to be fairly integrated?

**Basharat Hussain:** We have very much mixed and we are proud of that. I will give you a scenario. India and Pakistan are not the best of friends, but in our teams we have players from both sides playing within the same club.

Q283 **Julie Elliott:** Going back to what you said there about getting to the semi-finals, have any of those players broken through into professional cricket?

**Basharat Hussain:** When we played the under-19s it was the mid-1990s or maybe early 2000s, so it is a long time ago.

Q284 **Julie Elliott:** Yes, but there were still cricketers of a certain standard. Are you aware of any of these people breaking through into professional cricket?

**Basharat Hussain:** Not any of those.

**Julie Elliott:** Or even county cricket?

**Basharat Hussain:** No. They were certainly good cricketers and some of the teams played against individuals who they looked up to. I was young when I started playing in the league and there were some players there who I would have said deserved to play in county, they were that good.

Q285 **Julie Elliott:** Why didn't they?

**Basharat Hussain:** I think it was just circumstances.

**Julie Elliott:** What circumstances?

**Basharat Hussain:** We know that Yorkshire would not allow anyone who was not born in Yorkshire to play. We went through that era or period. I was born in Pakistan so when I went for trials and I was not selected, I knew there was not a future.

Q286 **Julie Elliott:** They got rid of that rule quite some time ago, didn't they?

**Basharat Hussain:** They have, yes, but we are talking about that period in the under-19s as well. The positive out of it is that we wanted to participate in a platform that treated us equally and that is why we engaged in the under-19s and engaged in the county board membership. We wanted our players to acknowledge that as a league we were just as good as any other league. That is why we played the under-19 competition, to give that—

**Julie Elliott:** Just as good but not breaking through.

**Basharat Hussain:** Not breaking through, yes.



Q287 **Julie Elliott:** Adil, you were nodding and smiling. You are a different generation than everybody else here, looking around the room, so your experiences both playing cricket and as a coach are probably different than others in the room. Can you tell us about your experience? You have nodded and smiled at various things that Mr Hussain said. What was your experience of coming through? Were there opportunities? Tell us about it.

**Adil Mehmood:** I was born in Pakistan as well and I moved here when I was 17, so I did not play cricket here at a young age. When I got here I played different league games but I did not play the young cricket game here. The only thing that I experienced, by looking at the youngsters and me when I was 17, there were kids playing at nine and 11 and 13 in the same club, there were lots of Asian players in the age groups, but I have not seen anyone progress to the county level, to the higher level. They were talented enough. I do not know what is wrong within the system or what is wrong somewhere that they are not making it through.

**Julie Elliott:** They are clearly not making it through?

**Adil Mehmood:** Yes, they are not making it through. You can see the stats as well that 30% of Asian people play cricket, but only 4% make it through to the county level or to the higher level.

Q288 **Julie Elliott:** You coach young people, is that correct? You coach people in cricket?

**Adil Mehmood:** I do not coach. I just play cricket.

Q289 **Julie Elliott:** I thought you coached. I apologise for that. The people who coach cricket in your community, if people are good, is there any encouragement to say, "You could be doing this. Have you thought of trying for the county," or anything like that? Is it ever put as an option to young people, in your experience?

**Adil Mehmood:** As we were discussing, we recently got these Park Avenue net sessions. There are lot of coaches who come and coach the youngsters. Normally when we go to the net practice we see lots of coaches who come. Most of them are from a south Asian background. They tell you straight away, "Yes, this guy will make it at least to the county level, if not to the national team. At least he will make it through to the county level". There are a few coaches who encourage the youngsters to work hard and get into that Yorkshire south. If you get into the Yorkshire south, you will probably make it to at least county level, if not the national level.

Q290 **Julie Elliott:** What do you think the barrier is that people are not getting through that?

**Adil Mehmood:** Previously we did not have enough coaches, but we are increasing the number. Also for the south Asians it is the facilities. We do not have that many facilities available. If a youngster wants to play Sunday league and we do not have a specific ground every Sunday and a



parent has to take his kids 20 miles outside of the city, it takes an hour to get there and an hour to get back as well. Also there are the facilities—toilets and stuff like that. You cannot encourage boys and girls to come and play if you do not have facilities available.

There is a Saturday league where lots of south Asians play, youngsters as well, under the age group of 11, 13, 15. There are only a few who have stayed with the same club. They keep switching clubs as well. Very few stick to one club. I do not know why they switch clubs. Is it because they are not happy with the club? Is there something, the mindset or the culture within the club, that they do not accept them? If you are at the early age, between 11 and 13, you take things seriously. If there are any words being said or spoken about you, obviously it disheartens and you go away from cricket and try to focus on other things rather than cricket. I think there is something in that pipeline that stops lots of people going through to play competitive cricket at county level or a national level.

Q291 **Julie Elliott:** Changing tack completely, we had the ECB here a couple of weeks ago talking to us. To be fair, it has acted quickly and produced a report, a 12-point plan, to address the issues of racism in the game. Do you think that what it is proposing will do that? Will it work?

**Basharat Hussain:** There is recognition that more work has to be done.

**Julie Elliott:** More work or any work?

**Basharat Hussain:** More work. As a board, as the governing body for cricket, it is accountable for making sure that the game and the way it is travelling goes in the right direction. What we have seen over the past month has been a backward step in terms of the south Asian community. It is how we can continue to encourage elements of the community to be positive and to work. We have gone out of our way to work and build a relationship with the county. That might be part and parcel extended to ECB. We are here as an organisation and we can promote the game. We can encourage the pathways to improve. If it means there is an element of communication that is not quite clear to that community, we can support that mechanism and give confidence to the community.

When you are at the age of 11 you might be enthusiastic about the game and you might have the talent. As Adil has touched on, it is making sure that you continue that enthusiasm all the way through. When you get to 16 or 17, you do your GCSE, you do your A-levels and there are distractions. The distraction is, "I have got to make my mind up. What career do I want for my future? Do I want to play cricket or do I want to be something else?"

Q292 **Julie Elliott:** That is any young person. That is not tackling racism, because those issues are there for anybody.

**Adil Mehmood:** They are, but they may be more so for the south Asian community because of parental support. The parents say, "You're not making any progress with your cricket. Are you going to think about



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becoming a doctor or a dentist or something else, an accountant?" Then you might have those pressures on you to think about reality and say, "Do I want to carry on with my pathway of cricket? Am I talented, am I going to get in?"

Q293 **Julie Elliott:** I have to go back on that because, as I say, I think that is across the piece and people have to make choices in life, whichever background you come from. There is something that has sadly gone wrong within cricket, because the numbers speak for themselves. Young cricketers from south Asian communities are not breaking through in the numbers that they should be. Something is not right there. What I am keen to know is: do you think this report will make any difference?

**Basharat Hussain:** I hope so, for the betterment of cricket, and I hope that some of the pathways are much more transparent, if they were not. At least that way the evidence will be there. At the moment it is anecdotal. We do not know whether it is breaking through because the talent is there. Are the Asian cricketers just as good, if not better? It is anecdotal. When we have a very good, transparent system in place of the selection process, we will know better.

It is important for the ECB to have a system in place that looks at those and makes every coach who makes those selection decisions accountable for those decisions, because at the end of the day we are talking about lives. No matter what your background, your life is destroyed if you do not get in. Whether you are from an Asian background or whether you are English, it does not matter. If you are given the word "no", it is hard to absorb, particularly when you are a 16 or 17-year-old and you have to make alternative plans for your career.

I appreciate, as you say, it is every community that makes that decision, and they do, but if you are a 16 or 17-year-old being told, "Sorry, you're not good enough, we are not going to carry on until the next level," unfortunately you have to consider other options then.

Q294 **Julie Elliott:** Adil, what do you think? Do you think what the ECB is suggesting will make a difference?

**Adil Mehmood:** As Bash said, we hope for the best but we do not really know until they execute the plans. We had a meeting with ECB and we suggested a few plans, but I do not know. After three or four months it said it would invite us again to see where we—

Q295 **Julie Elliott:** What type of things did you suggest? What type of things do you think can make young south Asian players reach their potential in the professional scene? What do you think will make a difference?

**Adil Mehmood:** Obviously the first thing is the ground facilities, the rest of the netting facilities and stuff like that. These are the main things that we need to have in south Asian cricket.



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As we were discussing the other day with the ECB, these clubs that run the Saturday league, they are run by these bars and obviously the south Asians, most of them do not contribute into the bars. We want an alternative system. Being from a finance background, I know that obviously you need funds to run an organisation or a club or whatever, but if you have a bar, at the same time alternatively you can have a café as well for Asian people to come and sit there and enjoy their evening.

When you have both the bar and the café in the club, it will increase the sources of funds. Then you can encourage, go out and reach the Asian sponsors and they will come in and sponsor these clubs. These clubs play only on Saturdays. If we can have the same club and we play on Sundays and we can use the same facilities for the first couple of years—it is hard for the councils and the ECB to make new arrangements and new grounds, but the current grounds are available where people play on Saturday, and we can play on Sundays—then we can encourage our young boys and girls both to come and play cricket so that they can come with their families and play cricket on Sundays. This is the main thing. That is what we will focus on and where we will put pressure.

New facilities will be hard and it is a long-term thing, but in the short term, if we have some collaboration with the Saturday leagues and if they accept us, it will encourage collaboration between the Saturday and the Sunday league.

**Julie Elliott:** You think that there needs to be more joining up. Thank you.

**Chair:** That concludes our first panel. Basharat Hussain and Adil Mehmood, thank you very much for your evidence today. We are now going to take a short adjournment of two minutes while we set up our second panel.

### Examination of witness

Witness: Tracey Crouch MP

Q296 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee and this is our second panel today on sport governance. We are joined by Tracey Crouch MP, chair of the Independent Fan-Led Review of Football Governance. We have already done our declarations and we will get right into the questions. Thank you very much for joining us this morning.

**Tracey Crouch:** Thank you for having me.

**Chair:** The first questions are going to come from Kevin Brennan.

Q297 **Kevin Brennan:** Thank you for joining us today, Tracey. The proposal in your review for an independent regulator—how big should that independent regulator be in terms of staffing? What do you envisage about that?



**Tracey Crouch:** We envisage very much that it is a properly staffed independent regulator underpinned by legislation and set up through an Act of Parliament, because what we are suggesting is that the independent regulator is not just in charge of licensing but some complex financial regulation as well, so it needs to be staffed adequately.

**Kevin Brennan:** Can you give us any idea what that means in practice? Do you have a picture in your mind of an office and a number of people working for the regulator?

**Tracey Crouch:** We did not put a specific figure on it on purpose, but we think that it is bigger than perhaps what is envisaged by the Premier League, for example.

Q298 **Kevin Brennan:** What does it think?

**Tracey Crouch:** It wants to see an independent unit in the FA, not built through legislation, but we think that it is considerably bigger than that. The thing is that these things can evolve over time in terms of its ability to deal with issues. You could put a starting point of between 30 and 50 members of staff and see how it works out.

Q299 **Kevin Brennan:** Between 30 and 50 probably as a starting point. If there were particular investigations that it had to do that were more complicated, would it be possible to expand and contract to do that and how would that be funded if that happened?

**Tracey Crouch:** The independent regulator will be funded by football clubs themselves through a levy that is on a sliding scale depending on broadcast income. It would, like all regulators, have the ability to manage its own finance in the future. From a shadow regulatory perspective, because we do not think these things should wait until the legislation is passed, a shadow regulator could be established straight away. The suggestion is that the Treasury would start that with its funding from HMT.

Q300 **Kevin Brennan:** You would not ask the game to fund the shadow regulator?

**Tracey Crouch:** No.

Q301 **Kevin Brennan:** When you say "straight away", when does that mean?

**Tracey Crouch:** Straight away. There is no reason to—

**Kevin Brennan:** January, December? When?

**Tracey Crouch:** Why not? Obviously the Government have said that they need to look through the detail of the report, but my view is that I hope that there will be legislation in the forthcoming Queen's speech to set up the independent regulator.

Q302 **Kevin Brennan:** Do you have a commitment from the Treasury that in



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the meantime it will fund the shadow?

**Tracey Crouch:** I do not have that commitment, no.

Q303 **Kevin Brennan:** But you envisage that that is what ought to happen, but it has not yet signed on the dotted line as far as that is concerned?

**Tracey Crouch:** No.

Q304 **Kevin Brennan:** When they are investigated, should there be a separate appeals process if the regulator finds something that clubs are not happy with?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes, we put out some detail in the report about how investigations could work. We also put out the fact that there would be a decently sized advocacy aspect within the regulator so that it can support clubs through some of the changes, particularly financial regulation changes, because we do not want clubs to fail. It will be about the ability to help in a real-time way rather than a club reaching crisis and then coming to the regulator.

We had quite a lot of conversations with clubs that are going through particular challenges at the moment, and asked them whether, had these proposals been in place already, they thought that they would be in the situation that they are currently in. The answer was no.

Q305 **Kevin Brennan:** I saw a great sports documentary recently about the NFL in the 1970s and 1980s in America and the battle with Al Davis, the owner originally of the Oakland Raiders, which then became the LA Raiders and then became the Oakland Raiders again and then became the Las Vegas Raiders. Pete Rozelle was the independent commissioner of the NFL. It was a fascinating documentary about the power play between these two individuals and this club that moved around as a result of it. Could a powerful owner do what Al Davis did with the Raiders and move it around to the highest bidder as a franchise? Is that now an impossibility under this and would the regulator be able to stop that?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes, I think so, not just because of the regulator, but the whole recommendations that we put in place. For me, this is not an à la carte menu. The report is a holistic package of reforms that we think sets out a long-term financially sustainable future for English football. Part of the package is around the ability of fans to have a say over matters of heritage, for example, so they would not be able to move around the country like we saw with Wimbledon going to Milton Keynes and so on. This is something that is a holistic package that protects English football.

We saw the issues at Cardiff with an owner. It has very much formed part of the recommendations around the ability of fans to have a say over the future of their football club.

Q306 **Kevin Brennan:** Yes. I am sure others will ask about that, but the idea of them coming in and changing the colours that they have had for 100



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years or something is what that is aimed at.

Finally, it is the independent regulator of English football. You do mention Cardiff. There are a number of Welsh clubs that come under the Football Association of Wales but play within the English structure and have done historically as part of the heritage of the game. Have you done any thinking about how that works in legislation terms in relation to them being based in Wales but as an independent regulator of English football?

**Tracey Crouch:** Not specifically in terms of legislation. I should say that I did not get an opportunity to talk to the Welsh FA, but in terms of the fact that many Welsh clubs play within the English football system, that is where the regulator powers would lie, the fact that they are already in the system.

**Kevin Brennan:** He would be a regulator of the system but he would not be a regulator, for example, of the Football Association of Wales. Yes, okay.

Q307 **Steve Brine:** I want to talk about financial regulation briefly. What do you say to those who make the point that this is potentially a Conservative Government seeking to intervene in all the leagues in English football, including the world's most successful league, the Premier League? None of our competitors in Europe are so government regulated. The devil's advocate question I have had throughout this is: do we risk killing the golden goose? You must have heard this before.

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes, indeed I have. In fact, it was a phrase used by the Premier League chief executive, who a few years ago was arguing for more money to be put into the lower end of the football pyramid, where his club resided at that particular time.

However, I do not see it as killing the golden goose. The whole point of what we are setting out is about long-term sustainability. The report as a whole is about enabling confidence in the system. What we have at the moment is a system that is subject to vulnerabilities and if you can remove some of those vulnerabilities through better regulation and better financial regulation, it encourages growth and investment in English football, wherever you may be in the pyramid. I do not see this as an attack on the golden goose. In fact, I see quite the opposite. To pick you up on the point that you made about other European countries and regulation, there are lots of examples where different countries have different rules in terms of football and where there is legislation and government involvement, so I do not buy into that.

Also we should be clear that regulation happens across most sectors. Football has changed from what it was to what it is now, which is quite complex and a big business. Therefore I don't see why it should be exempt from regulation, because it is complex and it is continuing to grow, so you do need to apply some of the rules that you see in the business sector, for example, and the financial sector to football.



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Q308 **Steve Brine:** You mentioned the financial sector. Let's follow that through. You could argue that the financial sector is people's savings, people's livelihoods and people's mortgages, therefore we had to have a tight system of regulation after the financial crash of 2008 in order to protect that. This is just football.

**Tracey Crouch:** It is not just football. We all know that, and everybody here in this room who supports a football club knows that it is not just football. I understand the argument, but as we saw with Bury, these are people's livelihoods. It is not the same as investing in a bank or a building society, where you can just switch your account. The truth is that you and I share a love for our football team and we would not just switch to Arsenal, for example, in the same way that you would switch to a different energy supplier or a business supplier.

One of the advantages of doing this review, by the way, is that in the past when there has been a football problem, football look at it through the lens of football. We have been able to step back from that particular lens and that tunnel vision and look at the way that other sectors are regulated, so we have been able to think quite creatively about some of the solutions. Talking to people from the Financial Conduct Authority, they themselves are passionate football fans. For years they have wondered why capital and liquidity requirements are not applied to football clubs, so it was good to be able to step back. Some of the things that we are suggesting in this report for football are also now being considered, for example, by the energy sector as a means of stopping or removing those vulnerabilities as well.

Q309 **Steve Brine:** What I like about your work—and it is coming through in everything that you are saying—is that there is a clue in the title. It is a fan-led review of football. That is very clear.

With the IRF system that you are proposing, is it more of a warning than a promise? Is football on notice to come up with its own regulation or has that horse already bolted?

**Tracey Crouch:** The horse has already bolted. I stood at the Dispatch Box as Sports Minister, and many Sports Ministers both before me and after me have talked about the last-chance saloon in football. We have given football enough chances and it has not proved itself in any shape or form in terms of reform or independence or the seriousness of the situation. I think that this is the opportunity now to grasp reform and put football, the whole pyramid, on a footing that gives it some real long-term sustainability.

Q310 **Steve Brine:** Finally—and I am not suggesting that you have done any of this work, but have you seen such and does it exist?—has there been any assessment of the impact on investment that you talked about? You said that other countries have different types of regulation and that there is no evidence of an impact on investment. As much as it pains me to say it, Chelsea is an attractive, well-run, well-financed football club that I



think will win the league—God, that hurts. Manchester City is the same. Have you seen any impact assessment around investment and would the transformation that we saw at Chelsea and City be possible in the future?

**Tracey Crouch:** Absolutely, but not just at Chelsea and City. As I said in an earlier reply, this is about giving confidence throughout the pyramid. Therefore, people coming in knowing that they are investing in a football pyramid that is well regulated, well governed and has rules that are applied to everybody in the same way and it is not run by vested interests—that is a very attractive proposition for people wanting to invest in a football club.

Q311 **Steve Brine:** Finally, one of the three pillars around which you launched this work was the failed Super League, which lasted 48 hours. Is the peak of the pyramid of English football still connected to the pyramid or is it like a triangle itself that is lifted above, thinking of your visual image? Because it seems to me that there is already a super league in English football, in that there are only three or maybe four clubs that can win the English Premier League. Sadly, ours is not one of them. Is there not already a super league in English football?

**Tracey Crouch:** No, I don't think so. I still think we are arguably one of the most competitive Premier Leagues, elite leagues, in Europe. You only have to look at Germany, France and Spain to see that there is still the opportunity for other teams to win the league, Leicester being a classic example of that. I look at the league at the moment and I sit there and I think that West Ham could win the league at the moment, sitting where it is. That pains me as much as—

**Steve Brine:** Would you like to have a lie down at that point? Literally a tumbleweed has blown through the room.

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes, shall I leave now?

**Steve Brine:** Back to you, Chair.

Q312 **Chair:** Thank you—as Alan Partridge would say, “On that bombshell”. To clarify something, in terms of the idea of a golden share and the idea of giving fans much more say in historical aspects of football clubs, thinking about the Tigers and that debacle, we also think about the ground itself and what happens to the ground. How does that interact with loans that have already been taken out against grounds and other facilities that are owned by football clubs?

**Tracey Crouch:** The beauty of the regulator and the beauty of the system that is set up is that it is quite agile to some of the things that already exist. We are not asking for anything different to be happening now. The Chelsea pitch owners, for example, have a very specific and niche role in their football club.

With the golden share, it is quite complex. I am unapologetic, by the way, about the length of the report, because what I did not want to do is



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come up with recommendations without showing and demonstrating some of the nuances and the complexities of coming to that point. For example, the golden share has to have a legal personality and that is through a community benefit society, and 73 of the 92 supporters' trusts are already a CBS, so there are aspects to it. Fans were very passionate about the heritage items because that is what really matters.

Q313 **Chair:** There is a thing called contract law. If a financial institution has a loan that it made against a facility, is the proposed effect to set aside that contract?

**Tracey Crouch:** No, I do not think so.

Q314 **Chair:** How does it achieve that?

**Tracey Crouch:** I am not entirely sure of the question, to be honest with you. The financial regulation aspects of it allow for all these different aspects of the relationship or the nature of it.

Q315 **Chair:** The point is though if you have a 50-year loan, it is secured against something, because that is the reason why you got the interest rate that you did. What it is secured against is assets and what you are proposing effectively is to say that that security is now subject to something different, something outside what was laid out in the parameters of the loan.

**Tracey Crouch:** No, it comes in with the capital aspects of it, as far as I am aware. The financial regulation side is incredibly complex but the assets are part of the capital, as far as I am aware.

Interestingly, by the way, just so you know, people keep on asking if I want to be the independent regulator. The answer is no, because I am not qualified to be the independent regulator, because you need somebody who understands regulation and financial regulation for this very reason, that there are lots of different complexities. Don't forget that across football you have 92 different clubs with 92 different ways of running themselves. That is part of the aspect of having a financial regulator that enables it, with its expertise, to be able to look at all these different aspects. As I said earlier, I do not want any football clubs to go bust. This is not about applying stringent regulation—

Q316 **Chair:** If there is an arrangement in place, does that arrangement still stand?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes.

Q317 **Chair:** Therefore what happens is that this is about going forwards from there rather than retrospectively?

**Tracey Crouch:** Correct.

Q318 **Chair:** Effectively, if there is a loan on a football club that says a part of that loan that it is secured against the ground, that takes precedence over the golden share?



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**Tracey Crouch:** No, the golden share is about giving a consent issue. For example, it is about moving to a new stadium.

Q319 **Chair:** If they wish, for example, to bring about extra revenue through a football kit change or a football name change, that would be for the future rather than retrospectively?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes. Sorry, I am confused, Chair, with your question. How would they retrospectively vote on something that already existed?

Q320 **Chair:** I am saying that there are already arrangements in place that could cut across what you are proposing to bring about, but you said that effectively those arrangements are in place and therefore what will happen in the future will be from this moment forward, so to speak, rather than back.

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes, Tottenham Hotspur fans could not retrospectively rename—

**Chair:** Go back to the old ground.

**Tracey Crouch—**White Hart Lane, because it is now called Tottenham Hotspur rather than White Hart Lane. So yes, it is going forward.

Q321 **John Nicolson:** Hello, Tracey, thanks for coming. In the integrity test that you talk about and the whole idea that prospective owners of clubs should be of good character, the new owner of Newcastle would presumably have failed that test.

**Tracey Crouch:** It is a fund.

**John Nicolson:** Yes, but the fund is the country and the country is the ruler.

**Tracey Crouch:** I would be very careful on this question because I have not seen all the details of the Newcastle takeover bid, so it is difficult for me to know. My understanding is that the Premier League received assurances of a legal separation between the state of Saudi Arabia and the fund.

**John Nicolson:** That cannot be taken seriously in the case.

**Tracey Crouch:** That is not for me to answer. But in terms of the integrity test and the good character test, we have not just made this up. This already exists in the banking and securities and insurance sector as a test. It is a test that is applied in other regulated environments that we think can apply in terms of football as well.

Q322 **John Nicolson:** That is a wee bit worrying though, is it not? That means that we would continue to take assurances from a country like Saudi Arabia to the football authorities, which would still allow the whitewashing or the sports-washing of cash from monstrous regimes like Saudi Arabia.



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**Tracey Crouch:** We can set out a test for the ownership of a football club. We have tried to make sure that there is a greater integrity test in the owners and directors test. I do not know all the details of the takeover bid. I hear what you say and I know that there is concern about the PIF takeover of Newcastle.

**John Nicolson:** There certainly is.

**Tracey Crouch:** But that was not for the report. I have to say that it was interesting because it happened in two parts. We were taking evidence from Newcastle fans, for example, at the beginning of the process, who were desperately keen to have an outcome for the takeover bid because it was taking a very long time and they considered there was a lack of transparency in the process. Then the takeover happened and we were taking evidence and hearing evidence from Premier League clubs that were concerned about the process. We fell halfway on each point.

Q323 **John Nicolson:** If the words “good character” are to mean anything at all, most people would think that if you chop someone’s head off and dismember them, you are not a person of good character. That surely has to be a basic benchmark.

**Tracey Crouch:** I am not quite sure I can answer that question for you. There is a criminal aspect to it and there is a relationship aspect to the integrity test, but it would be something for the independent regulator to look at.

The point about the owners and directors test is that at the moment there are three different types of owners and directors tests. We are recommending that that is one test split into two parts. You obviously have different skills to be an owner or a director, but that it is an enhanced test with an enhanced good character and integrity aspect to it.

Q324 **John Nicolson:** Where do human rights fit in all of this? We are seeing clubs being bought by foreign despots with appalling human rights records. Is there a place for human rights in football and in our determination to maintain high standards and integrity among directors and purchasers of clubs?

**Tracey Crouch:** I could flip that question around. We did not look at human rights as part of this particular review, but I would flip that around and say that football has an important part to play in improving human rights in other parts of the world.

**John Nicolson:** How?

**Tracey Crouch:** By actively talking about social issues. For example, as Sports Minister I went to Saudi Arabia. I did not want to. In fact, I did almost everything I could to not go.

Q325 **John Nicolson:** Why did you not want to go?



**Tracey Crouch:** Because I have my own perceptions of the country. But I went and I played football with girls in Saudi Arabia. I talked to the Sports Minister at the time about women in sports stadia. About four weeks ago I was heartened to see a picture in *The Times* of a female Saudi national player in the national stadium playing football. I think that football has an extraordinarily important part to play in improving human rights across the world.

Q326 **John Nicolson:** Let's look briefly at diversity, because you also talk about diversity here. Why are there no out gay players, soccer players?

**Tracey Crouch:** I do not know the answer to that, John. I did the fan-led review into football governance. I am not the Sports Minister anymore. I do not know why.

**John Nicolson:** I am interested in your view. You are passionate about this and I thought that I would ask you.

**Tracey Crouch:** On equality, diversity and inclusion issues, we took a lot of evidence from fans who are passionate about EDI issues, not just those who have a specific role to play. We were quite taken by the passionate support for greater diversity in football, which is why we have made some quite specific recommendations on EDI and on EDI action plans in football clubs. If we can make EDI more commonplace, maybe we will have people who are more comfortable with coming out in football while they are still playing.

Q327 **Chair:** Do you mean Newcastle got under the wire, so to speak, before your report came out, with the takeover by the Saudis?

**Tracey Crouch:** It was a long time coming. From memory, it was about four years, the Newcastle takeover bid. It was a long time in the process.

Q328 **Chair:** Yes. After the review is enacted holistically, would you think that the Saudis would still be able to take over Newcastle?

**Tracey Crouch:** I do not know, because we talk about the Saudis taking over Newcastle and many people obviously still think that that is the case, but the Premier League had legal assurances that it is a separation from the state. I have not seen those legal assurances and I do not know the detail of that so you are asking me questions that I cannot answer. Those are questions for the Premier League.

What I do know is that the way this is set up, there will be greater transparency. You remove the vested interests and you have a good character test that is being applied elsewhere in other regulated environments. That is the way I see it: that we are trying to put the best possible test in place that would—the way I put it—have stress-tested the takeover bid more than perhaps it has at the moment.

Q329 **Clive Efford:** Congratulations on getting your report out in a relatively short space of time, because we often see these reports in various areas



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where the Government announce a report and it is two years later before you get it. Congratulations and well done on what you have achieved.

I have to ask you this question: are you or have you ever been a communist? What is your knowledge of Maoist agrarian policy?

**Tracey Crouch:** To be honest with you, as a one-nation Conservative, there might be many colleagues on my side who would consider that to be the case. No, I have never been a communist. I thought that it was a tad extreme as a comparison. All I am trying to do is get some money down the football pyramid.

Q330 **Clive Efford:** Was the response of the Premier League always predictable no matter what you came up with?

**Tracey Crouch:** It is very important to stress that there are differing views within Premier League clubs to that of the Premier League. It is part of the challenge. The Premier League has 20 shareholders. I know for sure that some of those clubs are in favour of an independent regulator underpinned by legislation, but I also know that there are clubs that are not in favour of an independent regulator full stop, and that there are some clubs that are favour of an independent regulator, but not underpinned by statutory legislation. The Premier League has to take a corporate view on some of these issues but there may be differing views within the Premier League clubs.

Q331 **Clive Efford:** Can I ask you about legislative time too? What you are putting forward will require legislation. At the time that we had the big kerfuffle around the Super League, the Prime Minister said that, if necessary, we will have a legislative bombshell and that action needed to be taken. Have you had reassurances from the Government that legislative time will be set aside to deliver your recommendations?

**Tracey Crouch:** The Government have said that they support the main recommendation of an independent regulator. The main recommendation is an independent regulator underpinned by legislation and I would be disappointed if it was not in the next Queen's speech.

Q332 **Clive Efford:** That is pretty straightforward. Can I ask you about the licensing of owners and directors? This is licensing of those who are members of shadow boards as well, is it not? They will be subject to the same checks?

**Tracey Crouch:** The licensing system is for football clubs.

**Clive Efford:** Yes, but you are also recommending that the shadow boards are subject to the same tests, is that correct?

**Tracey Crouch:** Sorry, yes. A shadow board plays an important role in terms of the relationship between the board and its fans. It is a board for off-pitch matters. It is not like the supervisory board in the German system, where they can decide on football-related matters. This is not for fans to tell the board that they want the manager sacked or that such-



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and-such a striker should play more often. This is about having a better working relationship with the board on key decisions.

**Q333 Clive Efford:** How do you envisage all this being structured, in the sense of who pays for it? Does this come out of the levy or is it the club that has to facilitate this? Is there a set structure? Clubs will have several supporters groups quite often and sometimes they will not come together. How do we resolve those issues and ensure a proper representation of fans across the board at that particular club on these shadow boards?

**Tracey Crouch:** It need not be costly is the first thing to say. The second thing to say is that there are clubs that are already doing it. Manchester United, for example, announced last week that it was setting up a shadow board. It had a good cross-section of its supporter base as part of that shadow board, including from the supporters trust, but also including other members as well.

**Q334 Clive Efford:** We have agreed that there is a test for people to be part of this process. At any level, if someone is no longer in compliance, what is the enforcement process for removing them?

**Tracey Crouch:** From a shadow board or from the board?

**Clive Efford:** From either, because the same system applies.

**Tracey Crouch:** As part of the owners and directors test, every year there will have to be a compliance statement to the independent regulator and then there will be a reassessment on a three-year basis.

**Q335 Clive Efford:** Will the removal take place at that point?

**Tracey Crouch:** We would hope that because it is agile enough—we talk about the ability to help clubs in this. We do not want to see clubs fail these tests. We want to support and make sure that an independent regulator is supporting clubs through these particularly difficult challenges.

Let's remember that at the moment that there are lots of clubs that do not have boards. We want to make sure that we encourage clubs, through the licensing system, to have good corporate governance in place. I do not think it is a particularly onerous thing to ask for there to be an actual board in a football club that can challenge some of the decisions that are being made.

**Q336 Clive Efford:** Will there be requirements on diversity?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes.

**Clive Efford:** Will that include both—

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes. We talk about a football club governance code that is based on a sports governance code. It would be different levels



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depending on where you are in football, which is the same as what happens at the moment in national governing bodies.

Q337 **Clive Efford:** Can I follow up on what was said about Newcastle earlier on? You said that you understood that it was a fund and that it was separate from the Saudi Government, the royal family, but how do you set a fit and proper person test for a fund? Who is the brain? Who is the person behind this?

**Tracey Crouch:** We put a requirement in there for the ultimate beneficiary owner. At the moment I think that it is 30% and we have dropped it down to 25%.

Q338 **Clive Efford:** Will there be a system for satisfying ourselves that that is a completely separate body/entity from somebody who would not pass the fit and proper person test, who chops heads off journalists or something?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes. We do need to remember that PIF also has substantial stakes in Disney, in Facebook and other organisations.

**Clive Efford:** That makes it so much better.

**Tracey Crouch:** No, I know, but personally I have concerns about—

Q339 **Clive Efford:** We should not single out, as some of my colleagues have pointed out, Newcastle, because there are other entities that it does have shares in.

On the shadow boards again, do they require the independent regulator to be in place or is this something that we can get on with?

**Tracey Crouch:** Get on with it. A lot of the recommendations football could start straight away. The shadow board is a classic example. As I say, Manchester United has already set up its own shadow board. Liverpool has already started an engage, consult and consent process with its own fans through the Spirit of Shankly. To be honest with you, a transfer levy could be introduced tomorrow by the Premier League. It does not need the independent regulator to do quite a lot of this stuff, it is just that it is not doing it, so clearly an independent regulator is needed to make it do it.

Q340 **Clive Efford:** In terms of the shadow IRF, do you similarly think that Treasury should agree the funding and we should start to get that in place ASAP?

**Tracey Crouch:** I am sure it won't endear me to the Treasury, but yes, it could start straight away.

Q341 **Chair:** To follow up on that and another point as well in terms of your package of measures, you mentioned earlier the fact that you wanted the seed money for the shadow regulator to come from HMT.

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes.



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**Chair:** Should it not be the case that once the regulator is set up and a levy put on football that that money is refunded to the taxpayer? It is a simple concept. If you are taking £5 million or £10 million of taxpayers' money in order to set this up, many people would feel that that is not a good thing considering the huge amount of money that is in the Premier League, for instance. Should it not be the case that once the regulator is set up, the levy is set at a level so that HMT gets the money back?

**Tracey Crouch:** If that was a requirement of the Treasury—

Q342 **Chair:** You do not think it would spoil any part of your report?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes, I do not think it is too difficult.

**Chair:** You know how difficult it is to get money out of the Treasury. That may be a way of getting it.

**Tracey Crouch:** If I was to pluck a figure out of the air that I would think is required from the Treasury it would probably be in the region of about £5 million, which, as we know, is not a huge number in the scale of things for the Treasury.

**Chair:** DCMS does not generally get to sign off more than £5 million at the moment.

**Tracey Crouch:** No, I have been there. But I do think that it is perfectly possible for the Treasury to start the process. If it wants to do it as a loan, that could be something that happens. We did not make those specific points in the report.

**Chair:** Many people would feel that handing over £5 million to football is a little bit insulting considering it makes—

**Tracey Crouch:** I was Minister at the time that Treasury decided to give £5 million to China to improve its own grassroots football, so I feel that we can possibly have Treasury—

Q343 **Chair:** We can get into a whole conversation there about Ugandan girl bands and that sort of thing and overseas development aid, for example.

What part of the package do you think will get the real ire of the big clubs? Which ones will you get the most pushback on and what would you say in response to such pushback?

**Tracey Crouch:** My understanding is that the Premier League, from its meeting on Friday, will argue very strongly for the independent regulator to not be set up by legislation. We have seen some of that commentary in relation to being accused of being North Korean and so on. I think that it will push back very, very hard on the statutory aspect of the independent regulator and would rather that it was a unit within the Football Association.



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The other part that we have seen some commentary on is around the transfer levy, which is interesting because it was proposed by a Premier League club. But again, it could change the rules tomorrow and have the transfer levy and not have Government or an independent regulator.

Q344 **Chair:** Will the transfer levy increase inflation in the game or do you think that it would dampen it down?

**Tracey Crouch:** I do not think it will have any effect whatsoever, pretty neutral—not on international transfers. If you are going to pay £100 million for a player, getting a certain percentage of that, whatever it might be, into grassroots football is—

**Chair:** Take it from the agent's cut.

Q345 **Jane Stevenson:** Thanks, Tracey, for coming. I will start by fessing up as a lifelong Wolverhampton Wanderers supporter. I am going to ask you about heritage and the golden share. The golden share would apply to things relating to identified heritage items. How broad do you think that definition is? Is it just the colours and the stadium or is it community parts of the club that do work with schools? How wide would you think the ideal is?

**Tracey Crouch:** We have been very specific in the report about it. We talk about the club stadium in terms of its relocation outside of the local area. We have talked about club badge, first-team home colours, club playing name and because of the ESL we have added in competition.

Q346 **Jane Stevenson:** With the creation of fan-led, do you think it is important that we include as many fans as possible? It looks a very broad definition. I know Wolves includes all fans now. It has moved from a parliament to a much wider fan base. If it does come down to a vote by fans, do you think it is 50% of whoever votes or should there be a minimum, that you need to get a certain volume of supporters behind it?

**Tracey Crouch:** Again in the report we talk about the fact that it could be a member of a supporters trust, a season ticketholder and somebody who has been to one home game within the season, because there are lots of different aspects to being a fan. If you know that by joining a supporters trust you have the ability to potentially vote in a golden share issue—let's be clear, this will not be happening all the time. It is a once-in-a-blue moon event, or at least we hope that it would be a once-in-a-blue moon event. But if you know that you have an actual power through joining a supporters trust, it may well enhance the supporters trust.

We thought it was important to broaden it out just from the supporters trust. I am a season ticketholder but I am not a member of the supporters trust, for example, at my own club, so we needed to make sure that we did reflect the fan base as much as possible.

Q347 **Jane Stevenson:** Should there be a minimum number of people participating in those decisions?



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**Tracey Crouch:** I am sure, from memory, that in the 162-page report we do reference that but I cannot remember it off the top of my head.

Q348 **Jane Stevenson:** It would be very occasional, from what I can understand. It is just a one-way street. Is there any concern that a supporters trust could become an activist method and start demanding things back from clubs and would it be a two-way street?

**Tracey Crouch:** It is a two-way thing. I think by and large most clubs get on very well with their supporters trusts and they do have a positive engagement. I think the big six from the ESL have improved relations with their supporters post the attempt earlier this year. But I think it is a combination of the shadow board and the golden share and that general recognition that fans are incredibly important to the future of their club that I think that there will be a much better productive relationship.

Q349 **Jane Stevenson:** Finally, in terms of the people leading the supporters, is there any requirement to ensure diversity? Do you think it goes far enough?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes, the FSA is working incredibly hard to make sure it is supporting its own supporters trusts and I think that by giving them more power and responsibility comes with that the need, for example, for greater democracy or certainly the improvement of the accountability and the option in terms of the actual transparency in the supporters trust as well. The FSA is working incredibly hard to make sure that it is supporting supporters trusts in their own development.

Q350 **Damian Green:** In the context of this being a fan-led review and there is lots of very good stuff in it, it strikes me that one of the paradoxes that perhaps you have not managed to solve—and it may not be solvable—is that when you punish a club because the owners have done something reprehensible or reckless, you punish the fans. Is that just insoluble?

**Tracey Crouch:** I feel quite strongly about it. I think it is very unfair when clubs are docked points because of the behaviours of their fans. We do address that in the report, about the various sanctions that can be employed. You cannot remove point deduction entirely from that process, but I think there are certainly different ways you can punish the owners and the directors before you get to points deduction. I think there are a lot of examples where clubs have been relegated. Clive Betts always tells me about Sheffield Wednesday, for example, and—

**Damian Green:** Or Derby this year.

**Tracey Crouch:** Derby, yes. I think it is very hard on the fans for those clubs because, as I say, they are being punished because of the behaviours of their owners. But we do address that in the report. I think it is impossible to remove the threat of points deduction because obviously if you are relegated, then that in turn impacts on your financial well-being but it is unfair on the fans.



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Q351 **Damian Green:** What is interesting is that points deductions does not seem to have that much effect. I declare an interest here as a season ticket holder to a club that has had a six-point deduction this season. Again, to some extent that feels like it was a previous regime did something; it was accumulative error and so everyone currently involved with the club is being punished. With your system, do you think points deductions would become less common in future because there are other ways of punishing owners?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes, but it is also not just about punishing, it is about stopping them from getting to that point in the first place. One of the benefits of real-time financial monitoring, for example, is that you can have that early intervention to stop a club from getting to a point where it requires a sanction. I think that is the benefit of having an agile and nimble regulator.

Q352 **Damian Green:** That is what I was going to come on to, the regulator and what the regulator will do, because I think the amount of power is clearly important. If you are a communist, then I am Trotsky. How micromanaging will or should the regulator be?

**Tracey Crouch:** I do not think it is about micromanagement. I think it is about that support process. Nobody calls the FCA a micro-manager and I think—

**Damian Green:** Financial advisers do.

**Tracey Crouch:** Some of the financial advisers?

**Damian Green:** Yes.

**Tracey Crouch:** That would be the equivalent of agents in the football system and certainly many of the clubs would quite like the micromanagement of agents. No, I think it is about flexibility. I think it is about there being sometimes clubs that find themselves in peril that need micromanagement or, as I like to put it, support in terms of navigating their way through that. Other clubs would just be fine and just get on with it.

Q353 **Damian Green:** Perhaps an example is the regulator would presumably decide whether parachute payments continued.

**Tracey Crouch:** Not necessarily. We address parachute payments in the report. We agree with the criticism that they distort competition but we also think this is something that football should resolve itself. Football, as in the Premier League in the EFL, has been talking about alternative models to parachute payments for some time. What we have said in the report is that it should draw a line under those talks at the end of this year because they have been ongoing, and if it cannot come to a solution about what the alternative is to a parachute payment, then it should commission some proper research and analysis into potential alternatives to that model.



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If it still cannot agree, then we have recommended that the independent regulator has backstop arrangements to do that work for it and to come up for a solution. It is the same with the redistribution of funding from the top through the pyramid. Again, that should be something that football can resolve itself, but if it cannot, then the independent regulator should have those backstop powers.

As stressed to football on a regular basis, that is not something that it would necessarily want to rely on because it would not necessarily return in its favour, so I would hope that football will sit down and have the conversation and come to a solution.

Q354 **Damian Green:** Take Chelsea's loan system, where it buys dozens of young players and then loans them out. Some people would argue that is too many, that it is bad for the individual young players themselves as well as other clubs. Micromanagement is probably too derogatory a term, but in terms of the level of detail, do you envisage the regulator saying, "Okay, you can only have 36 professionals on the books"?

**Tracey Crouch:** No, that is a football matter. Some of the criticism by chief executives post the publication of the report, with similar attacks on this, made it clear that they had not read the report because we make very clear within the report that this is not about football matters. If you want to buy a player on loan, buy a player on loan—or a send a player out on loan; you know what I mean. This is not about government. By the way, it is not a government regulator. It is an independent regulator not appointed by government, so again an unfair criticism and attack on the notion of an independent regulator who is there to look at specific business-related matters, not football-related matters.

Q355 **Damian Green:** I was struck by your statement that you would not be qualified to be the independent regulator because you do not have the financial background. From what you are saying and indeed through the report, is it largely a financial regulator? Is that what you see it doing?

**Tracey Crouch:** I think the business of football has evolved to such an extent now that we are talking about complex businesses, so yes, I do think it is about financial regulation. The remit is about the long-term financial sustainability of football. I think in a way this is why the independent regulator has to be independent of the FA because we are talking about sophisticated business decisions here. Yes, I think it is around financial regulation.

Q356 **Damian Green:** I ask partly because I wonder, admirable though it may be, that it is not quite enough. Looking at other systems that we have admired over the years, particularly the German system, where for various reasons they have greater financial stability but they do not have much of a competition, to be honest. The level of German football is extremely high over the decades and Bayern have won their league for the last nine years. That is not much of a competition. I almost feel that as well as a financial regulator some thought should be given to a sort of



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competition regulator to interfere a bit in the footballing decisions—the sort of things we have been talking about—to avoid if we ever got to the stage where two clubs dominate everything. I know Tottenham and Arsenal think they are part of the big six but others would disagree, but at least that is a competition. We are sitting here today in December not knowing who will win the league this year. That is quite exciting.

**Tracey Crouch:** I think the Premier League would argue that it is the competition regulator and I think it would be right to argue that. As part of the evidence we took from fans, particularly where their football clubs had faced some sort of perilous situation, they would go to the football authority that was relevant to them and they would say, “We are the competition organiser and regulator,” and I think that is right. I think the EFL and the Premier League are the competition regulators.

Q357 **Damian Green:** Do you think they are good at that?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yes, I do. I think the Premier League is the best league in the world. It is exceptionally good at promoting the Premier League and that is why it is the wealthiest league in the world. It is why we attract the best talent. It is competitive; it is exciting. You only have to see that in terms of the new broadcasting deal that was done with the US state that its value is continuing to grow. I think the Premier League is very, very good at that.

What it is less good at is some of the regulation around the financial regulation and owners and directors and so on, and I think that is why you need an independent regulator where the vested interests of the 20 clubs within the Premier League are completely removed and the decisions are being made in a transparent and equal way.

Q358 **Julie Elliott:** Tracey, I want to move on to something completely different: women’s football. We are at the backdrop of attendance going up massively—40,000 there on Sunday—a huge thing, and you have come to the conclusion that it needs its own review. Did you get to that conclusion by the weight of evidence in the survey or was it your view as you moved into the review?

**Tracey Crouch:** We took evidence from many fans—not just fans who were solely interested in women’s football, I hasten to add; fans who were interested in football but also brought up women’s football as part of their evidence. What was clear was that, going forward, a lot of people were desperate to see women’s football teams not go into the same situation that men’s football clubs have gone into, but then there was also a debate as to whether or not women’s football should also be aligned to men’s football clubs and so on.

It became more complex and deeper than what we had originally anticipated. We wanted to look at women’s football as part of the review but then it just became quite clear as the evidence moved on that it needed something completely separate.



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Q359 **Julie Elliott:** Clearly it will take a lot more time to make a full review. How do you see that transpiring and have you any view on timescale?

**Tracey Crouch:** No, it is for the Government to look at that. Hopefully the Government will see that that is a recommendation that they can take forward fairly swiftly.

Q360 **Julie Elliott:** Have you had any feedback from Government on that element of the review?

**Tracey Crouch:** No. The only feedback I have had is that they agree with the primary recommendation around the independent regulator.

Q361 **Julie Elliott:** In saying that, have you any idea how we make sure something does happen, looking at the future of women's football, if we have had no response and that in the end you have concluded it was a bigger thing than to be in this report? How do we ensure that does not disappear into the ether?

**Tracey Crouch:** I will certainly make sure that it continues to remain on the agenda. I know there are many other parliamentarians who have a deep interest in women's football but I do think it is something that can easily happen. I do not see why it should not happen.

Q362 **Giles Watling:** Hello, Tracey, and thank you for coming today. I want to talk about welfare and duty of care. Your report raised the issue of young players and older players leaving the game. I understand there are between 10,000 to 12,000 young players at youth academies all over the country and very few of those go through to professional football et cetera. They have these dreams, don't they? They are dreaming of a professional career. They are going to follow their heroes and they tend to put all their eggs in one basket on a lot of occasions and then suddenly they are dropped. The fundamental question is: do you think the football academies are doing enough to support these kids beyond that football dream, because they need to go back into academia?

**Tracey Crouch:** I think there are some very good examples of football clubs where they are doing that, that they are seeing the youngster as a whole and looking at their development in a holistic way. I went to see the Man City academy and I would say the new systems it has in place are excellent in terms of what it is doing to support young players. I would not necessarily say that is applied as a standard across the board, although most do make sure their youngsters are still in education.

A lot of the time, particularly in clubs further down the pyramid where they have academies, education is often used as part of the carrot and stick approach to players but it can be much better. You are right, in terms of outcomes I think it is less than 2% of youngsters will play in the Premier League, for example, and we need a comprehensive player welfare system. I would not sit here and say it is all dreadful because it is not.



**Q363 Giles Watling:** It is an example that I have of course in my old profession, where a lot of people go to drama schools and the focus is all on that one thing and the academic studies tend to be left behind. What can you do to change this attitude within football?

**Tracey Crouch:** We have said as a matter of high priority that we think all the football stakeholders need to come together and make sure there is a comprehensive player welfare system put in place, because this is not just run by one part of it. The FA, the leagues and the PFA all need to come together and remember that ultimately at the end of the day there is a youngster involved.

I first came to the issue around player welfare through a constituent who is a mother of a Premier League player who is concerned about the lack of financial advice that young players get. We all know what we were like as teenagers getting our first pay cheque and how exciting it was and how you went and blew it immediately.

**Giles Watling:** You know something about my background.

**Tracey Crouch:** But imagine if you are a young footballer and you are suddenly on £1,000 a week, yet with no concept that your playing career is likely to be incredibly short, and so what to do with it. I think financial advice is a very important part of that but also mental health support as well. We have seen, I am afraid, some tragedies as a consequence.

**Q364 Giles Watling:** You mentioned the PFA, the Professional Footballers Association, and there was very little mention of it in the report with regards to these issues. Do you think it is doing enough or is it failing as a players' union?

**Tracey Crouch:** I think the PFA is going through reformation right now. It is evolving. It has new leadership and is putting structures in place. We had some good conversations with the PFA as part of the review process. I find it very hard to criticise the PFA when literally in the last few months it has a brand-new leader and is putting new systems and structures in place. I would hope it is taking its role incredibly seriously and looking at the report's recommendations and implementing them.

**Q365 Giles Watling:** Are you going to stay in close contact with it on this issue?

**Tracey Crouch:** I shall be man marking the PFA to ensure that it does that.

**Q366 Giles Watling:** A very good analogy. Finally, earlier we talked about the levy on transfers. Do you think part of that levy might be used on welfare for not only the young footballers but the older footballers who had a career and are suddenly left out in the cold? That is a similar sort of situation after a long career in football and, as you say, sometimes a short career in football, but suddenly nothing further. There are mental health issues. Do you think we could use that money better?



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**Tracey Crouch:** Yes. If I may, Chair, I think the transfer levels are a very important part of the report. I was not specific on purpose. I did not say what it should be; I did not say where it should go. I gave an indication of what it could be and where it could go but, frankly, football, as I said earlier, could make this decision tomorrow. It could decide to put, for example, a 3% levy starting in January and that it was going to go to grassroots and player welfare. To consider a football analogy, that would effectively put them one nil up and park the team bus in front of the goal because they have already—

Q367 **Giles Watling:** I am getting from what you are saying, Tracey, that you would encourage it to go down that route.

**Tracey Crouch:** I would encourage it to do that because, ultimately, at the end of the day we all operate in an environment of flux. I think I have been very reasonable in terms of what I have recommended as part of this football review. But if there were to be an election and if, God forbid, a certain party was not to be re-elected, then if you want to see communism or Maoism in place in terms of a Premier League transfer levy, well, wait and see. I am just sitting here thinking that as the Premier League you could introduce it now and you can say you have done it and it is done.

Q368 **Kevin Brennan:** For the record, I do not think many people think Comrade Keir is a communist. There has always been a lot of money around in football, Tracey. In fact, I have just been reading our colleague Chris Evans MP's interesting biography of Don Revie and that certainly reveals some of the—

**Tracey Crouch:** Are you getting commission? I am sure you have mentioned it twice now.

**Kevin Brennan:** I am not getting commission but it is an interesting book. I think we should support our colleague's creative efforts. But there was a case yesterday where an agent called Dax Price received a nine-year ban from football and coach Tommy Wright received a six-year ban from football because of breaches that they were found to be guilty of under the Bribery Act, as I understand it. Why has your report not been able to do anything about the scandal of football agents?

**Tracey Crouch:** Oh, it does. We have a recommendation on agents in it.

Q369 **Kevin Brennan:** What is it?

**Tracey Crouch:** It is that the Government should explore ways to support the regulation of football agents operating in English football by working with the relevant authorities, including FIFA. We took evidence from Premier League clubs and other clubs in the pyramid who all raised concerns about agents, but there was also recognition from those clubs that FIFA is looking at doing something on agents.



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One of the things I was desperate to do is to ensure that through the report we do not make English football any less competitive or put it at an international competitive disadvantage to other parts of football. Agents operate across all countries, so what I did not want to do is recommend something that was unique to English football that was not necessarily happening across other parts of European football predominantly. Given the fact that FIFA are looking at this, we thought it was only best that Government work with FIFA in terms of supporting what it is that it comes up with, but there is a desperate plea from clubs for something to be done on agents.

**Kevin Brennan:** We will see. Thank you.

**Chair:** That concludes our session. Tracey, thank you very much for your evidence today.