

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Sport governance, HC 855

Tuesday 8 February 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 8 February 2022.

[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Questions 484 - 606

Witnesses

[I](#): Anuj Dal, Vice-Chair, Professional Cricketers' Association; James Harris, Chair, Professional Cricketers' Association; Rob Lynch, Chief Executive, Professional Cricketers' Association; Julian Metherell, Non-Executive Chair, Professional Cricketers' Association.

[II](#): Maheta Molango, Chief Executive, Professional Footballers' Association; Geoff Thompson MBE, Chair, PFA Operational Board, Professional Footballers' Association.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Anuj Dal, James Harris, Rob Lynch and Julian Metherell.

Q484 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and this is our hearing in two parts into the governance of cricket and the governance of football. We are joined in our first panel by representatives from the Professional Cricketers' Association. We are joined by Rob Lynch, chief executive, Professional Cricketers' Association, who was formally the treasurer, I believe, Rob.

Julian Metherell: No, sorry, Chair.

Rob Lynch: That is incorrect. I have not been the treasurer.

Chair: You have not been the treasurer in the past. Commercial director?

Julian Metherell: Rob was hired as the PCS commercial director and promoted into the chief executive role.

Chair: Thank you. I was misinformed. Then we have James Harris, chair, Professional Cricketer's Association; Anuj Dal, vice-chair, Professional Cricketer's Association; and Julian Metherell, non-executive chair, Professional Cricketer's Association. Rob, James, Anuj and Julian, thank you very much for joining us this morning.

Before I move to the first question, which will be from Kevin Brennan, I want to declare some interests. First, my own. I am chair of the Lords and Commons Cricket Club. I have also accepted hospitality in the last year from the England and Wales Cricket Board. Kevin Brennan, interests?

Kevin Brennan: I also received hospitality in the last year from the Glamorgan County Cricket Club.

Chair: Thank you. Our first questions come from Kevin Brennan.

Q485 **Kevin Brennan:** Thank you. Good morning, everybody, and thank you for coming before the Committee. Could I ask you, Mr Lynch, do you think that the players' union should have been more supportive of Azeem Rafiq?

Julian Metherell: Perhaps I could—

Kevin Brennan: Well, no, I am asking Mr Lynch first, if I may.

Rob Lynch: Look, we had some failings in our dealings with Azeem Rafiq and have learnt a lot of lessons from the last 12 months with Azeem. We applaud Azeem for his courage and bravery in being the whistleblower, coming forward to create the necessary change within the game. The PCA has offered support to Azeem throughout his career but clearly, in this dispute with Yorkshire, we did not meet the standards we would have wished to. We have apologised—both Julian and I—directly to Azeem for where we went wrong. We have listened to Azeem as to what he feels are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the issues in the game and what can be done better, and a number of changes have been introduced. You are well aware of the 12-point plan that we are a stakeholder in, and the game coming together to create the necessary change that we need to.

Q486 Kevin Brennan: At one point in his evidence to the Committee Mr Rafiq said that the PCA had called the police because they were so concerned about his welfare, and he received a phone call from the police that said, "You have been reported missing." He also said he did not feel that that was done because of real concern about his welfare but more concern about the fact that if he killed himself the PCA could say, "Well, we did what we could in his case"—

Julian Metherell: Mr Brennan, I made that decision.

Kevin Brennan: I have not asked you to answer a question. We do have order here, Mr Metherell.

Julian Metherell: Apologies.

Kevin Brennan: You may not be used to our procedures, but everything is done through the Chair and I have, at the moment, been asked by the Chair to ask some questions. If I may, I will come to you in a moment.

Julian Metherell: I apologise.

Kevin Brennan: Did you see that evidence when it was given to the Committee, Mr Lynch, and what was your reaction to it as the chief executive of the Professional Cricketers' Association?

Rob Lynch: Yes, I saw the evidence and it was hard to hear. The action that we took was borne from nothing other than genuine worry for Azeem's welfare at a time where he was under a lot of pressure and scrutiny. Having consulted with my colleague, our director of welfare and development—we procedurally have to talk to each other about these very difficult matters—and also talking to the ECB's safeguarding team, there was a decision made to ask the police for a safe and secure check, which is different to a missing persons check. That is a factually incorrect statement that was made in this Committee.

I do not feel it appropriate to go into the exact details that led us to make the decision, I would like to keep those in confidence, but we were genuinely concerned. It caused me certainly sleepless nights before we took that action, but it was out of no other driver than Azeem's safety.

Q487 Kevin Brennan: Elsewhere in his evidence Mr Rafiq said that having spoken to the ECB as well about his concerns, "I kept begging the ECB, the PCA. The PCA kept telling me, 'We agree with Yorkshire.'" He said to us, "I am telling them they are not doing the right thing; they are changing processes, they are not communicating with me. This is going to end up in a car crash for everyone, please step in." Then he went on to say, "At no point did any of the two organisations want to do that" until the article broke. What is your reaction to that, looking back on those



events, as someone who has come in with a fresh pair of eyes to this?

Rob Lynch: Sure. I said at the start of my response to you that we had some failings and some learnings through this experience, and Azeem is right: one of those key learnings we have made is that we should have stepped in and put more public pressure on both Yorkshire and the ECB.

What we did, which was wrong, was put too much faith in the process that Yorkshire was undertaking, or at least telling us they were undertaking. That was wrong. We should have come out. We should have said in the media that we wanted Yorkshire to conclude the inquiry, first, in a much timelier manner and make those findings known. The engagement we had with Yorkshire was very sub-par. Julian and I led that, and Julian was in direct contact with the Yorkshire chair.

That, along with the nature of this being a member-on-member dispute for us, created some extraordinary challenges for us to deal with. We are certainly better equipped to deal with them now, having implemented a legal panel of barristers that we have now put in place, which enables us to provide that support to any member now but maintain our independence.

Kevin Brennan: Mr Metherell, is there something you would like to add to Mr Lynch's answers?

Julian Metherell: Yes. I tried to contact Mr Hutton on a number of occasions, both by email and by telephone. Azeem was pleading with us to find out the terms of reference of the inquiry and the timing of that inquiry. Those calls and those emails went unanswered until I sent a note to Mr Hutton and said that we were under increasing pressure from the media to comment and I would be forced to go public and say that Yorkshire was not returning any of our calls. Mr Hutton then did speak to me, but I am afraid, as this Committee well knows, nothing we received from Yorkshire at that time was in any way helpful. As Mr Lynch has said, one of our failings at the PCA was that we placed far too much confidence in Yorkshire, the independent inquiry and the ECB to give us an independent report and a regulatory process expeditiously, which we could then have acted upon.

Q488 **Kevin Brennan:** Can I ask you, Mr Lynch, how many other players have been in touch with you about issues with racism in their clubs?

Rob Lynch: This has not been something that has just come up in the last couple of months. I need to take you back to mid-2020 when I joined the organisation, which was in line with the BLM movement. We were questioned, rightfully and strongly, by a section of our membership as to our stance on racism in the game off the back of that. What we did is stop, look at ourselves and consult with our members to understand this issue better, because quite simply I and my colleagues did not have enough knowledge on it. We then felt it appropriate to quickly set up an equality, diversity and inclusion working group that reports directly to our board.



Following that, one of the first things we did was survey our members in late 2020 on the issues of racism to try to better understand those. We subsequently, off the back of that, followed up that survey in 2021 to see if the work that we undertook in that time had had an impact, which it did, which was good. Throughout that period we clearly saw one of our key roles in education and worked with a third-party company, the EW Group, to deliver game-wide education to James, Anuj and their colleagues in the professional game. I am sure they can elaborate on that later.

Through the legal panel I mentioned more recently, we had around 20 of our members come forward who were victims of or accused of racism in the game during that period in November when a lot was happening. Along with that and the knowledge that we have through our personal development managers, our troops on the ground, if you will, we are directly in contact with many members and talking about this critical issue for the game.

Q489 Kevin Brennan: Thank you. I am going to finish by asking James, as a former Glamorgan player—

James Harris: I am back—sorry, I am back to Glamorgan. I am currently a Glamorgan player once again.

Kevin Brennan: You are back, sorry. Fantastic. James and Anuj, as a player as well, what was your reaction to what happened when Azeem gave his evidence to the Committee and what is your experience in the game around these sorts of issues?

James Harris: First of all, the reaction was one of severe disappointment and I was very hurt by it. I grew up in Swansea—a village just outside Swansea—and I was very fortunate the secondary school I went to backed on to a local cricket field. Through an extreme amount of help from my parents both in time and financial means to get me through all the way to turning professional and to where I am now, I largely have nothing but great things to say about the sport and the opportunities that it has afforded me. To hear that there are others who have not had the same experience that I have had is really quite hard for me to listen to because I love the sport. Would you like to add anything?

Anuj Dal: I was pretty heartbroken when I heard Azeem giving his evidence, not only from what he had to experience but also the fact that a lot of what he had said hit home for me personally. I think it is worthwhile noting that I, like James, feel very fortunate to be playing cricket and have a great career within the game, not only being here in my position as a current player but also within the PCA. However, at times in my career I have had to face issues that I have felt uncomfortable with, and that I have felt have not been dealt with in the correct way.



Unfortunately, what Azeem said really did hit home for me. There were instances as I was growing up where Asian players in particular were stereotyped as being lazy, were stereotyped as having to work doubly hard to be afforded a position in professional cricket. I remember specific hand gestures that were made for players of colour and also comments that were made while senior members of staff were laughing along. That, to me, was particularly heartbreaking.

I look at my position now and I am in a very different position compared to when I was younger. Yes, I probably would have dealt with things differently back then. However, the environment was such that I did not want to be seen as a troublemaker. I did not want to have that tarnish on my reputation. Cricket, as in professional sport, is a very cut-throat sport and it is difficult to make a career in general. I was in that position where I had to almost brush things under the carpet and try to get on with it.

Q490 Clive Efford: Just following on from that because that is quite a powerful statement that you have just made, do you feel that the PCA is in a position to be able to respond to those issues if you went to them and said, "Look, this is what my experience of playing in the game is today"? Do you think there would be a different approach?

Anuj Dal: With what the PCA is currently doing, I feel very positive. I have received the education myself. I was sat with our players at Derbyshire, who also received the education training. We also, as a club, through our board, have received specific training outside of the PCA education sessions. The big thing for me was the attitude and the culture within the dressing rooms, which is obviously one of the big points on the 12-point plan, the dressing room culture review. I think that is going to be the biggest thing moving forward, this environment where players feel comfortable challenging and also feel comfortable asking questions because that, I think, is the biggest issue at the moment and the hardest one to feel accepted within the game.

Q491 Clive Efford: You feel that that pressure to not be a troublemaker and ruffle people's feathers is not there any more, that you could come forward and say, "I don't like that language that is being used. I do not feel comfortable," and that people would listen?

Anuj Dal: I still feel it is there to a certain extent. There are clearly issues that are still present within the game, but I think the PCA is moving forward in a good way with the education, having experienced it myself and left those sessions feeling very positive. Knowing what I have experienced and what current players are experiencing, for me it is about building a foundation and building experience for players so that they understand what certain people are going through.

I think one of the biggest challenges within the game is: where is that line between banter and what is actual discrimination? That has been lost in the past and there have been certain comments that have been made



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that have crossed that boundary. Now, with that approach and through what the PCA is delivering to players, I think it is a really positive thing.

Rob Lynch: Mr Efford, if I could just add to that, point 1 in the ECB 12-point plan surrounds game-wide whistleblowing. Independent of that, what we are in the process of doing at the PCA is setting up our own specific whistleblowing line for the PCA. If our delivery is substandard to our members, there is an independent whistleblowing line that will be set up before the season starts for any complaints to be made directly on the PCA. That will be an independent process that we will obviously make our members very aware of.

Q492 **Clive Efford:** Thanks for that. Mr Lynch, in answer to my colleague just now you said you sat down with Azeem and you had taken a number of things from the conversation with him. Could you just tell us what specifically? We would expect you to say that, but what did you take from what Azeem said to us and what he said to you following his appearance at this Committee?

Rob Lynch: I, like many, was so sad, watching the evidence. It was so powerful.

Clive Efford: You have said that, but what did you learn from Azeem specifically?

Rob Lynch: I specifically learnt that we needed to voice our pressure more publicly, more quickly, on what was in this instance Yorkshire and the ECB. If I was in a similar situation again, we would do that. I learnt a lot of difficult lessons about the complexities of member-on-member disputes and that is how we will handle those, and that is why now we have a legal panel of seven barristers in place, on retainer with us, who we could put forward to provide that independent support.

Q493 **Clive Efford:** One of the things that Azeem described was the pressure that he felt because the PCA, in particular, had people on both sides of the argument. The people he was accusing of using racist language were also members of the PCA and he was looking for support from membership of the PCA. I hear what you say about legal representation but how would it work in practice now if you were in that situation, representing both sides of the argument?

Rob Lynch: I state again about our legal panel. We have it in use right now. Where a member comes in who is accusing or making an accusation, we take that request, if you like, and then we put in an independent lawyer to directly advise that person. Subsequently, if someone has been accused of something within the game, we then again put a lawyer on their side and maintain our independence. This was a crucially difficult situation with members on all sides and we were the only organisation that had members on all sides. I state again there are learnings from how we dealt with them, and I apologise for that. I cannot change what has gone before but I can influence tomorrow.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q494 **Clive Efford:** You have quoted the ECB's 12-point plan. How much involved with the development of that plan was the PCA?

Rob Lynch: I attended the game-wide meeting at the Oval in November, we are a signatory to the plan, as you will be aware, and we will play a key role in its implementation. In terms of core areas of the plan we will be engaged in, I mentioned the whistleblowing hotline and we will make our members very aware of it and strengthen the reporting and subsequent disciplinary arrangements within that.

As Anuj stated earlier, the dressing room culture review, in my opinion, is the single most important part of the plan. I am in regular contact with Clare Connor, who is leading that workstream for the ECB. We both are in firm agreement that it requires independence and there is a tender process, which is down to the last two companies, to play that role of independence. Our role within that will be to help develop the terms of reference and then, crucially, speak to our members about this review and the wider 12-point plan. Once its findings are made, we will then help with the implementation of that plan.

The other key area of the plan is education, as has been stated, and the work that we have done previously I see as a start, as a foundation, because it is clear that we need to do more. Crucially, I also mentioned earlier that I and we are not as geared up as we needed to be to tackle these very important issues. I am delighted that as of last week, we are currently recruiting for a director of EDI, a very senior role within the PCA, to work with us to develop the education that is required in the game. That is a crucial appointment for us in a small organisation.

Julian Metherell: Perhaps I could just come in on the education point because I have been speaking to Azeem quite regularly since November and I have agreed that we will work with Azeem on the education programme going forward. One of Azeem's very constructive criticisms is that we have been giving EDI training to the first-class counties but some of what has been said has been going in one ear and out the other. How do we make this training stick?

One of the things we do not have in cricket today is a code of conduct. There is a clear code of conduct on gambling, on drugs—it is zero-tolerance, and every player knows what the policy is and what the sanction is. We do not have that today on discrimination. We must have that. It is part of the 12-point plan. There has to be a clear regulatory process, clear sanction and zero tolerance. That is something that we look forward to working with Azeem on in the immediate future.

Q495 **Clive Efford:** One of the problems that Azeem highlighted that was quite shocking testimony, as you have alluded to, Anuj, was the locker room banter, which is not banter. A term like "Kevin" was clearly a racist term designed to be abusive. Before he gave that evidence, had you ever heard the term "Kevin"?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Anuj Dal: I had heard the term. In my past career, I had heard—

Clive Efford: Outside of Yorkshire?

Anuj Dal: I would rather not go into—

Clive Efford: You are here before this Committee to give answers. I take it from that response that it is outside of Yorkshire that you have heard that term.

Anuj Dal: As we have seen, there are issues within the game as a whole, as I have experienced personally. Clearly it is not just at Yorkshire, it is within the whole game. There are instances where, in all forms of cricket, I have experienced these sorts of things personally. As I have mentioned, I think the key is to look forward to what we can do to address these things because at the end of the day we as players want to feel socially accepted within professional cricket.

The banter is a big part of the sport. It is a tight-knit environment within your dressing room side. I can speak of my experience at Derbyshire, and we have a fantastic group of players, a very strong group of players, and I know that these sorts of things would not happen. We have very strong senior leaders within our team, and I feel fully comfortable within that side.

Rob Lynch: Sorry, could I add something to that?

Clive Efford: If you just forgive me for a moment, just to pursue that. We have a 12-point plan here and we have just been told that point one is whistleblowing. Given what you have just heard about whistleblowing, I wonder why you are reluctant to tell us where else that term has been used throughout the game.

Anuj Dal: For me, the importance is to look forward. I do not feel it is right to go into individual—

Clive Efford: You should be sitting here as a politician, with an answer like that.

Anuj Dal: Personally, for me, I do not think it is the right thing to do, to look back on individuals and details, and I do not think it is fair to do that. For me, the main reason I wanted to get involved within the PCA was to look to try and address this issue and put it to bed full-stop.

Q496 **Clive Efford:** Are you saddened by that answer?

Rob Lynch: Look, we cannot change what has gone before us, as I said earlier. We can look forward to tomorrow.

Clive Efford: Is that looking forward? He is reluctant to say where a racist term was used—

Julian Metherell: Mr Efford, I am very saddened by that. As you say—let us be truthful—we have a situation in the game today where some



members of the game are scared of the ramifications and implications of being honest about what has happened in the past. That is deeply sad.

James Harris: One of the great things so far to come out of this is that it is fostering conversations within dressing rooms right now. These have been happening already. We have a lot of dressing rooms: the men's county dressing rooms, the women's county dressing rooms, two sets of dressing rooms for The Hundred, both men and women. These are high-performing environments and people not feeling comfortable in those environments is a real issue. The testimony that has brought things to light in this room so far has forced people to sit, think and discuss this to make sure that people do feel comfortable in their environment. For me, that is a positive from where we have been before.

Clive Efford: I will leave it there, Chair.

Q497 **Chair:** Thank you. Anuj, I completely respect your right in any instance not to disclose instances of racism in that regard. We had picked up the fact that "Kevin" was used in other dressing rooms as well, including the England dressing room in the past. Thank you anyway for your disclosure on that and the issues you have discussed.

Turning to James and Anuj as players, and you are now part of the organisation as vice-chairs, do you think that the PCA, as it is currently constructed and as it has been in the recent past, has the power within the game—I do not just mean within dressing rooms but in relationship to the ECB, which, obviously, mostly funds the PCA as I understand it—in order to, first, effectively stand up for individual members in cases of racial abuse, and secondly, really move the dial on this issue? What are your views?

James Harris: My view personally now is yes they do. I have played cricket now professionally for the best part of 15 years, I have been involved with the PCA more and more over the last four and five, and was very fortunate to be appointed chair in March of last year. I have seen that needle move a long, long way. Yes, as you say, we are part-funded by the ECB. A lot of that funding goes back into the players, back into the education, helping them in their day to day, helping them transition out of cricket into different careers once they finish.

I am fortunate enough now to sit on certain panels at the ECB, we have a player's voice on those, and we hold the ECB to account where we need to. We feel like we do. The other side of that is that we need to collaborate with the ECB as well because a lot of this stuff is very joined-up and it is important that we do collaborate. I feel like the PCA, from the 15 years that I have been playing professional cricket, has never been in a stronger place than we are right now.

Anuj Dal: I feel very fortunate to sit on the EDI group within the PCA. Witnessing the BLM movement and seeing the approach that the PCA took, it was a no-brainer for me to be a part of that and see all the



brilliant work that was taking place. Like James mentioned, that dial has moved very quickly, and rightfully so, but it is clear that racism within the game is one issue. There are other issues.

With the induction of female members to the PCA and with Heather Knight as our former vice-chairman, we see other issues that she presents to us about women being treated differently within the game. There are clearly a lot of things to address. However, with what we have within the EDI space, with all this education that players are going through, I feel we are in a good state to deal with these issues and hopefully avoid something like this happening again.

Q498 Chair: Mr Lynch, James and Anuj have described there the welfare focus of the PCA and also the educational focus of it. They are relatively easier wins, perhaps, than playing a real power role within cricket. My concern over the PCA—and Mr Rafiq mentioned this when he was in front of us—is effectively it is not a normal type of union as we would think of a union, as one that represents its members and has real power to its elbow in terms of finances and in terms of being able to effectively take employers to tribunals and matters such as that.

Does the PCA suffer to a degree from the fact that it has an intensely close relationship—joined at the hip, if you like—with the ECB and also the fact that financially you are not what we would call a proper union in that regard? I can see, Mr Methereil, you are nodding your head. Is that one of the key issues that you come across in your position, Mr Lynch and also Mr Methereil?

Rob Lynch: I will talk about the relationship with the ECB and perhaps Julian can take that second one.

My description of our relationship with the ECB would be that we have a firm but fair relationship. We are, as you state, a trade union. Purely by virtue of what we do, we need to have robust conversations with the ECB, which we do often. As Anuj or James said, in other areas such as the EDI agenda, it makes perfect sense to work collaboratively, as we have done and as we are doing with the 12-point plan.

We strike the right balance of taking what James and our players bring to us as the executive to the ECB through three different areas: on the domestic game through the player working group, which is a collaboration between some county CEOs, one of my senior colleagues, the ECB and me on domestic issues; and on the England men's and women's teams through sub-bodies of the organisation, the Team England Player Partnership for the men and the equivalent England women's player partnership for the women. In those three areas, we have clear and frank at times conversations, but they are all done in good nature, which is important for any good working relationship.

Q499 Chair: How many players have you as a union represented at an employment tribunal in the last two years?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Rob Lynch: In my time as the chief executive, we have not.

Q500 **Chair:** That is a key part of being a union in that respect. I will continue with Mr Metherell but first I need to ask you another question, Mr Lynch. You mentioned the 12-point plan. Would any part of the 12-plan not have been present or have been weaker if you had not been involved?

Rob Lynch: The two clear areas where the PCA needs to be involved is the dressing room culture review—

Q501 **Chair:** No, I am not asking whether you have been involved. I am asking what influence you have had. Show me an example within that 12-point plan where you have had an influence in moving the dial in the formation of that 12-point plan.

Rob Lynch: I have been involved in, as I say, the dressing room culture review and the process to get to where we are now, working with Clare Connor at the ECB, and the education. One of the survey questions we asked our members was: who do you feel is the best body, if you like, to deliver game-wide education on the topic of EDI? The unanimous view was that we were. Point 4 and point 5 of the 12-point plan I see as our key focus and two that we have been keen to achieve.

Q502 **Chair:** Were you involved in the formation of that or are you effectively involved in the execution?

Rob Lynch: We were part of the game-wide meeting at the Oval as a key stakeholder.

Chair: You were part of that?

Rob Lynch: Absolutely.

Q503 **Chair:** Thank you. Mr Metherell, we were discussing there how you do not represent at an employment tribunal, or have not in the last few years. That is a resource issue. I can understand how this has grown up over time and this is no reflection on the people who were involved and particularly the players, who do value the PCA and what it does. I know that from personal experience. But in terms of whether you are a proper union, I suspect the answer is that you are not.

Julian Metherell: We are not. We are resource constrained. We are financially constrained. We are grateful to the ECB for the support it gives us. To put it in context for the Committee, we have a turnover of about £4 million a year. Last year during Covid the ECB support, because of the downturn in commercial, was 70%. In a normal year when our commercial activities operate effectively, it will be 50%. But no doubt our ability to fund proper legal support and take legal action to, for example, a tribunal where the costs become exponentially greater is constrained. That weighs upon us.

Q504 **Simon Jupp:** Looking at wider governance, the ECB being both promoter and regulator does pose some questions about governance more



HOUSE OF COMMONS

generally and I want to touch on that for a couple of minutes. In your view—and I do not mind who begins answering this question—is that dual role as it stands still acceptable?

Julian Metherell: We are still supportive as the ECB as promoter and regulator. There needs to be improvement in its governance. We welcome the governance review as part of the action plan. We are in active dialogue with the ECB over both governance and some of its operating capability.

The ECB board lacks real cricket expertise. Again, we are on record as saying that. We would like to see more cricket experience within the ECB board. We will be making a number of proposals as part of the governance review as to how we believe that could be implemented.

Q505 Simon Jupp: How can they turn around the view that your body does not quite work at the moment? When we talk about this dual role that the ECB has, even if it shaped up, as you have stated, the way that its board has experience, how can that make a difference? Will it ever be quite right or do we need an independent regulator?

Julian Metherell: We all call into question the independence and transparency of the governance in cricket today. We share that view. This action plan and this governance review is the ECB and cricket's chance to show that it can perform both roles. We agree with this Committee that if we fail to implement this action plan and this governance review effectively, we will be back in this room discussing the independent regulator for this game. We do not need to go this far. Self-regulation can work, although we have some way to go to prove that to you.

Q506 Simon Jupp: How much time are you willing to give it until you can see improvements that will mean that you will not start calling for an independent regulator?

Julian Metherell: The good news is we now have a 12-point action plan that is receiving significant parliamentary and public scrutiny. I heard Mr Harrison saying that he will report back to you on a quarterly basis. If we fail as a game to deliver against that plan, we will be called out.

Q507 Simon Jupp: Is it better to bite the bullet, though, and perhaps just—

Julian Metherell: No. The ECB has done a lot of good things and continues to do a lot of good things. The way it navigated cricket through Covid was exceptional. The way it financed the game through a fantastic media rights deal, again, is providing huge financial support to the game. The Hundred has been a great success with the support of players through the PCA. A lot is good about the ECB. A lot, as part of this action plan and this inquiry, needs to be addressed.

Q508 Simon Jupp: What are the challenges of introducing an independent regulator?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Julian Metherell: Who is the regulator? Are we effectively saying that it is the Government? Will we create "Ofcrick"? I do not know, Mr Jupp.

Simon Jupp: Please no. We have enough "Ofs".

Kevin Brennan: "Ofstump", I think.

Chair: It would take the Government 14 months to appoint a chair as well.

Julian Metherell: I hope that we can get our house in order and self-regulation can work.

Q509 **Simon Jupp:** What about the fans? Would you support a fan-led review?

Julian Metherell: The PCA of course has no responsibility for the fans. It is not required at this stage. We have seen it in other sports. As part of the 12-point action plan, fan-related issues in cricket need urgent attention but, no, the PCA does not support today a fan-led review.

Q510 **Simon Jupp:** Would it do some good to heal some of the wounds that have been opened up in the last 12 months?

Julian Metherell: Given everything else we have to do at the moment, no. Personally, I think the priorities we have are the right priorities. We do not see the need today for a fan-led review.

Q511 **Damian Green:** Picking up on that point about the ECB's success or otherwise in running the game, from your own particular perspective, are there more or fewer professional cricketers in this country than there were five years ago?

Rob Lynch: There are more. In fact, there are more professional cricketers than ever before in the game. There are 526 current players and that is broken down into 461 men and 68 women. The reason for that is primarily due to, when The Hundred was being played, a 50-over competition was being played as well, which brought in an influx of players to the game. We also had a lot of players hit by Covid last year and, therefore, those numbers are where they are. But we expect that to be the new norm, if you like, for our members and our focus on supporting them.

Q512 **Damian Green:** For the current players, I know all sporting careers are insecure for obvious reasons, but does it feel more or less secure than it did a few years ago?

James Harris: That is an interesting question. It is probably about the same. It is tied purely to performance on an individual basis and whether you get another contract. Like Julian mentioned, the funding that the ECB managed to secure is great. From that point of view, for the next period of time the game is in a strong position provided it can deliver on all of that.



Rob Lynch: Just to add, The Hundred has brought more employment opportunities to the game as well. That aligned with the global T20 and T10 market as well, not to mention also the development in the women's game, which is hugely important, means it is no better time to be a professional cricketer with the opportunities in front of them.

Anuj Dal: Like Rob mentioned, opportunity-wise, as a current player, The Hundred gives the opportunity for players to be financially better off and also to compete on one of the world's biggest stages. From an opportunity point of view, the game has certainly gotten better. Like all professional sport, as James mentioned, it will always be purely on a performance basis.

Touching on a previous point that was mentioned about the ECB, there will be some need to get more of a player voice on there. Judging from my own personal experience, at Derbyshire where we have a smaller squad, I have seen the demands that players have to be put through and the tight-knit structure that our game currently demands. That does make it difficult.

I have witnessed some of the comments that were made on the county structure following the Ashes defeat. It was disappointing to hear but understandable because, for us as a smaller county, being able to field our best team nine games out of nine when we have an action-packed schedule week after week, playing a four-day championship game, made it difficult for us. Clearly, we were not in a position to put our best side out, whether that was through injury or through trying to safeguard players on a workload basis.

It is important. James is the voice that we filter through, but it is important that we have more of a voice that comes from the players to influence the game moving forward.

Julian Metherell: I will pick up on the women's game point. We have seen a fourfold increase in the number of professional women cricketers in the last two years from 17 to 68. We have seen salaries increase for the women by 100%. We are not there yet, but we are making significant progress in the women's game, which is another key focus for the PCA. Thank you.

Q513 **Giles Watling:** First of all, it is worth noting that unions come in all shapes and sizes. I am an erstwhile member of Equity, a union that largely represents unemployed people. It makes it difficult, and I imagine that you have your difficulties.

As a union—and I am putting this to Rob Lynch—what would give you more power to your elbow?

Rob Lynch: Certainly that position around the ECB boardroom table we feel is required. The most important asset to the game is the players. As Julian has outlined, we feel more input and influence in the matters that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are appropriate—because some are inappropriate, which we would step out of—would give us weight.

The employment tribunal point that was referenced earlier is a financial point. One of our key objectives and one of my drivers, especially with my background, which is largely commercial, is to find new commercial revenue that purely goes into that support, so we are not so reliant on ECB funding in our operation. I would certainly love to be the CEO who brought that extra independence because of that.

Q514 Giles Watling: I was looking back at your foundation in 1967 and I could not find on your website—or on Wikipedia even—a statement. What is your statement? Is it to hold the ECB to account? Is it to hold the counties to account? What would your statement be?

Rob Lynch: The one-liner if you like, is to champion the ongoing interests of professional cricketers in England and Wales.

Q515 Giles Watling: But you do not hold anybody to account like other unions do.

Rob Lynch: As we have referenced, we do hold largely the ECB to account within the work that we do. But primarily, I am employed and judged by James and the players' committee, which consists of 18 representatives from the 18 domestic counties and four new players from the women's domestic structure. We constantly consult with our players committee on issues arising and we take them to the ECB.

Q516 Giles Watling: But would you agree that it is healthy to have an organisation such as yours looking at the strategies and the implementation of such strategies of the senior empowering body, the promoting body, the ECB?

Rob Lynch: Yes, that is an important question and an important point and one which as a board we need to reflect on. The landscape of cricket has changed. The term that I have used internally is that the PCA needs to be fit for purpose for the modern-day challenges of professional cricket. They have changed.

Q517 Giles Watling: Would you say you do that job effectively?

Rob Lynch: I would say that there are areas that we could improve and learnings that we have made, as we have discussed. I would like to think that James, as the ultimate boss of the organisation, is happy with the work that we do and the 526 members and 3,100 former players are happy with the support that the PCA provides.

Q518 Giles Watling: Thank you. I realise that it is founded for former players and current players of first-class cricket. That is what the PCA is all about. But do you go further? Do you reach out to the grassroots at all, these people who will come through and ultimately be part of the ethos and the dressing-room banter that will grow through? Do you reach out to them at all?



Rob Lynch: There are two parts to this. Clearly, professional cricketers in this country have a responsibility as role models to young boys and girls in the game. There are many examples of our members in such things as coaching. In fact, Anuj has his own coaching business, so maybe he can talk about this point as well.

We also go out of our remit as we have discussed resources and issues with the PCA. Our primary focus is on those current players and former professional players, but we do have work that goes into the academies at the level below that comes in. Naturally, there is a feeding system there into the professional game. In fact, on the topic of EDI, we have run inclusivity workshops within that environment in the last six months or so and we do other work to prepare those players for the professional contract that they may receive thereafter.

But we do not by way of workstreams, if you like, go below that right into the grassroots. That is simply not our remit.

Q519 **Giles Watling:** That is fair enough, but in your relationship with the academies do you deal with such issues as racism, as it has now come very much to the fore?

Rob Lynch: Yes, obviously, it has come right bang smack centre into our game and has shocked our game, as we are all well aware. We have—we felt a responsibility to do this—delivered the workshops that I mentioned to talk about racism and wider issues of discrimination and to ultimately create a health environment. It is all about the culture of those dressing rooms. We need to get to a place where it is organic and those are much healthier places than the stories we have heard in the past.

Q520 **Giles Watling:** You have the wellbeing of your members at heart. I would like to move on.

First of all, Mr Dal, I fully respect your comments about some of the things you have heard outside of Yorkshire, but is racism a game-wide issue or is it focused in a few counties?

Anuj Dal: Certainly at the moment it is a game-wide issue. From what I have personally experienced and, as Rob mentioned, from my coaching business, I see lots of young players from all sorts of backgrounds and I see the issues that they have to deal with and the opportunities afforded to them. I see the issues with the costs involved. I see more opportunities for players from private schools to get more chances to play professional cricket. I see how difficult it is for players who have difficult upbringings to get involved in cricket and feel accepted within the game.

Personally, my own experience within the game is that at a club level in particular there is quite a big emphasis on drinking. It was quite difficult to feel accepted from a social point of view. A lot of younger players will have that. From an Asian background, I felt it. Clearly, my own beliefs were against that, and I felt as though it was always harder to feel



socially accepted. That is why it is important for the game as a whole to come together.

- Q521 **Giles Watling:** Thank you. That is good. This is not off the top of my head. I have been thinking about this for quite some time. As an organisation you are in a unique position. Your members are first-class cricket players. Should they be going out into the grassroots and visiting clubs and talking to people about what is happening and passing on the ethos that you would like to engender within the game? I put that to you, Mr Metherell.

Julian Metherell: Mr Watling, I completely agree. One key finding coming out of this is the issue around pathway. One way of addressing this pathway issue is by putting our role models into that pathway. It offers post-cricket career opportunities for our members, quite a few of whom struggle to find their feet post-game. We would be supportive of working with the first-class counties and the ECB on that.

James Harris: I have to say that we have at times done certain things through the clubs themselves. Some clubs are more active than others. I have definitely been out and have spent time at schools and spent time in different environments, playing with the children, coaching children, being part of their environment and trying to pass on perhaps what I have learned in my time as a cricketer.

- Q522 **Giles Watling:** Would you encourage others in your position to do the same?

James Harris: I would encourage, and we can do it more. That is what I would like to say.

- Q523 **Julie Elliott:** I am a bit alarmed when listening to what you have all been saying this morning about what you do when representing the members of your organisation. You describe yourself as a trade union and you are registered as a trade union. Am I right in thinking that, Mr Metherell?

Julian Metherell: Yes, we are registered.

- Q524 **Julie Elliott:** I have looked at a definition of a trade union and it says, "An organised association of workers in a trade, group of trade or profession formed to protect and further their rights and interests." How do you do that, Mr Lynch? Do you do that?

Rob Lynch: Yes, one of our core functions is our player welfare and development programme.

- Q525 **Julie Elliott:** The rights and interests in terms of a trade union are far wider than that. How do you fulfil that? If somebody has a problem at work and they come to your organisation, how do you look after them?

Rob Lynch: Absolutely; we have support and advice that we provide individuals when they have matters of dispute with their employers. Absolutely, we do. We have a department that looks after these areas.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

They are all different issues. As we said at the start, there was the issue at Yorkshire with Azeem where we fell short, but on terms of employment we work with our players on a one-to-one basis on issues in this space.

In addition to that, we were crucially involved in the development of the standard employment agreement that domestic cricketers have. We represent the employment and commercial interests of England men's and women's players with the ECB. We deliver on the commercial programmes for the England players.

Q526 Julie Elliott: This is hypothetical—I am not talking about the cases that we have looked at in this Committee—but if somebody came to you with an issue of bullying in the workplace, for instance, how would you handle that?

Rob Lynch: We are now much better geared up to deal with that. The first thing—

Q527 Julie Elliott: You have been in existence for quite some time. How would you deal with that?

Rob Lynch: It is an individual situation and one in which we would need to understand the specific issues because some of our members simply want to come to us for a voice and to be heard.

Q528 Julie Elliott: If somebody comes to you and they have clearly been bullied and they have evidence to you that they are being bullied in the workplace, how would you deal with that as a trade union?

Rob Lynch: We would take that to the ECB's investigation unit because it is the regulator, and we would raise a claim and support our member through that process. We would aim to be the police of that process.

Julie Elliott: The police?

Rob Lynch: Of ensuring that the process went well.

Q529 Julie Elliott: You would not directly represent your member?

Rob Lynch: Absolutely, but we are not the regulator. We would take them in that process—

Q530 Julie Elliott: No, but a trade union representative represents the member and at the centre of everything is representing the interests of that member. It is not being a policeperson. It is representing the concerns and issues of that member. Do you do that?

Rob Lynch: Yes, we do and please do not confuse my use of the term "police". We support the member through the process and that is what I was meaning. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our members through that process, explaining at times what they are going through, giving them advice and providing them with legal advice where appropriate as well.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q531 **Julie Elliott:** There have been no cases in recent times of going to an employment tribunal. Have you as an organisation ever approached any of the trade union solicitors to see if you could do a no-win, no-fee deal for serious issues?

Rob Lynch: During my time as chief executive of the PCA since July 2020, no, we have not. We have set up the legal panel of barristers that I mentioned.

Q532 **Julie Elliott:** Why have you not done that?

Rob Lynch: We have not, being frank with you, had too many instances where we have needed to. We have had—

Q533 **Julie Elliott:** In some of the instances we have heard, you have had a great need. Do any of your staff have training in representing members at tribunals, county courts or other places that you take issues that come through a trade union normally? You do not need a lawyer to go and represent any member at an employment tribunal, county court or anywhere else.

Rob Lynch: Two of our staff are trained in basic legal employment matters and a panel—

Q534 **Julie Elliott:** Out of how many staff?

Rob Lynch: Out of 26. We are a small organisation.

Q535 **Julie Elliott:** Only two of your members are trained in employment law practices?

Rob Lynch: That is correct. It is clearly an area because of the complexities of the game—

Q536 **Julie Elliott:** Is that good enough?

Rob Lynch: We have learned a lot.

Julie Elliott: No. Do you think that is good enough, sitting here today?

Rob Lynch: We need to improve in that area, yes.

Q537 **Julie Elliott:** You have talked a little about women in the game of cricket and it has grown enormously in recent years. People watch it. The England team has been successful in recent years. What proportion of your membership is women members?

Rob Lynch: As I mentioned earlier, we have 526 current members of which 68 are women.

Q538 **Julie Elliott:** Has that grown in recent years?

Rob Lynch: Two years ago the number was 17, which represented the England women's team. The balance is from the development of the women's domestic structure.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q539 **Julie Elliott:** What is still the biggest barrier to more women's cricket being played in this country?

Rob Lynch: Bear in mind I am the youngest of five boys, but I am the father of two young daughters and, hence, very driven about the women's cricket development. I think there has been some great progress made in the last two years, and we have a hell of a long way to go. Julian mentioned it earlier. This is one of my key workstreams.

In two years of being involved in the PCA, we have delivered a strong white paper to the ECB on equality within the game, and there have been some very constructive and collaborative conversations with the ECB from that paper. That has led to the England women's team having very similar employment conditions as their male counterparts. The England women's team are now remunerated better than they ever have been.

Q540 **Julie Elliott:** If you go down to grassroots level, which is where the pipeline starts, what are you doing as an organisation to promote women in cricket?

Rob Lynch: We were asked earlier about our relationship with the grassroots. It is very much from a role-model perspective. Sitting here today talking to you, we have more role models in the professional women's game than we ever have before. I can tell you about my first-hand experience of my daughter, aged seven, wearing Heather Knight's playing shirt as a nightie to bed. That is clear evidence of that. Long may that continue. We need to continue to chart a path for further equality in the game.

Q541 **Julie Elliott:** What exactly are you doing? I trump you on numbers; I have three daughters and four granddaughters, and I am not aware of any of them being asked through their school life to play cricket. What are you doing at a grassroots level?

Rob Lynch: It is important to understand what the remit of the PCA is. The ECB has some good initiatives in women's cricket in the grassroots space. Our job is to complement those by being role models. Look at the huge success of The Hundred. If anyone knows about last year, the number-one success within cricket was the women's Hundred. What that did for little boys and girls following teams has to be a great start. We have come a long way in two years, and I think, personally, that women's cricket is the biggest opportunity afforded to the game currently.

James Harris: The highlight of my summer last year was sitting at the oval on opening night. That was the women's game in The Hundred. That was the first game of The Hundred to be played. It was a fabulous occasion. I think that showed everyone in cricket what an opportunity the women's game now has, and throughout the competition, it only got better and better. It is in a great place and moving forward.

Q542 **Julie Elliott:** Watching the professional game has grown exponentially but I am not sure it is filtering down.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Finally, going back to my original question about trade unions, you said two of your staff do this type of thing. I think you said you had 26 staff. Rather than going through it now, could you send a breakdown of the types of roles that all those people have, please, particularly outlining any representation roles that any of them have?

Rob Lynch: Yes, I can. To be clear, over the course of the Covid pandemic we have maintained our staffing levels through some very difficult financial times. We have not recruited, but we are now in the process of recruiting a few more roles; crucially, the EDI director role that I mentioned earlier. I would be very happy to provide that information for you.

Q543 **Steve Brine:** We have already touched on Covid and its impact on funding to your organisation. Mr Harris, do you have any concerns, or have you heard a lot of evidence—or any—that Covid has put clubs in England and Wales at risk of going bankrupt through their inability to fundraise through clubhouse activities, for instance?

James Harris: To be honest, as a player, I am not sure that is particularly my area of expertise.

Rob Lynch: I cannot add much more on that. It is not in our remit to understand the county finances. We are not exposed to that information, so I cannot comment any further.

Q544 **Steve Brine:** When we did our work on supporting infrastructure, a correspondent of the Committee raised the issue of the potential for infrastructure requirements to lead to religious disparity. Do any of you have any concerns around infrastructure funding that goes into the grassroots game being derived from the sale of alcohol in the clubhouse, for instance, or lottery funding, which may hinder the participation of Muslim cricketers? Has that ever come up as an issue?

Julian Metherell: It is not an issue we have ever discussed at the PCA board. We recognise the issue. It is not something the PCA has addressed to date.

Steve Brine: Does anybody else have anything to say on that? Mr Harris?

James Harris: If you are speaking specifically about alcohol, I can talk about the 15 years that I have been a professional sportsman. It is declining, to be perfectly honest. Over those 15 years, the landscape has changed, because the game is getting more and more professional, largely. There are times when people have breaks in their calendar where they need to let off some steam and go and have a drink, but on the whole, alcohol consumption has, in my opinion, gone down over the last 15 years.

Steve Brine: Mr Dal, what was your experience?



Anuj Dal: At Derbyshire, we have a very inclusive environment. That was the biggest thing, and one of the main reasons why I feel so comfortable in that club. I have felt at times that the social norm is to go out and have a drink, which is an issue for players of backgrounds and faiths that do not find that acceptable.

Like James mentioned, it is certainly in decline within professional sport at the moment. We have seen lots of players being scrutinised because of their activities outside of cricket, and we see day-to-day the demands that the game puts us through and all the hard work we have to put in. Clearly, players are choosing to avoid alcohol, in a sense.

The biggest point is the respect of culture. That is a really big point to mention. We have seen lots of instances of Muslim players, in particular, with different shirts that avoid having sponsor's logos that have any relation to alcohol on them. That is a big thing. It is about respect, first and foremost, and that needs to be considered the norm. As we have seen through the Covid pandemic, finances in general have been difficult for clubs to come by, as I have heard from numerous conversations with our chief executive at Derbyshire; he has always kept us in the loop of where we stand. It has been important to have voices from players on those matters. On alcohol, it is clear there are some issues there, but they are improving.

Q545 **Steve Brine:** Are they hindrances, or just issues? Can they be barriers?

Anuj Dal: I think they certainly can be barriers. From a team perspective, it is about acceptance within the team. Speaking from current playing experience, I do not feel that it is a hindrance. I feel as though senior players, in particular, within our side make it feel very comfortable for me to engage in all activities and respect my choices and beliefs. One of the biggest reasons I am so engaged within the PCA is I want to try to replicate that culture I have at Derbyshire. I know Azeem touched on his experience at Derbyshire also. I want to feel as though that culture, that environment, is replicated across the county game.

James Harris: I think this process is starting to happen organically, considering what has been said in the last six months and everything that has taken place. I feel like within the game, internally, in the dressing rooms—and bear in mind that some dressing rooms are unique—these conversations are happening as we speak, which can only be a positive.

Rob Lynch: That point that we are very aware that there has been some organic work that has started because of the events in the game comes back to point 4 in the review of dressing room culture. It is our collective responsibility with the ECB to incorporate work that has already happened or is ongoing in those dressing room reviews, because there are some really good stories and good conversations coming out of them.

Q546 **Kevin Brennan:** I listened to Julie Elliott's questions about women's cricket, and I agree that The Hundred has raised the profile of women's



cricket hugely in the public eye. Mr Dal, we have received evidence during the course of this inquiry that there is an issue for girls from south-Asian backgrounds, in a community where cricket is hugely popular, that not enough girls are getting opportunities to play the game. What do you think the way forward is on that, and what role might The Hundred play in it?

Anuj Dal: That is the golden question. Yes, we have seen the importance of The Hundred for women's cricket. From my perspective, I try to get more involved within the girls coaching set-up and try to actively seek out and coach more female cricketers by trying to approach players in particular, but I have found it very difficult to do so. I think the difficulty at the moment is the attitude towards cricket, especially getting involved in club cricket and at grassroots level. I have seen how much of a challenge it is, especially from a social-acceptance point of view.

That is the stereotype that we are trying to address, and we really need to address. In general, female cricket is massively on the rise, and The Hundred has played a significant part in that. But clearly there needs to be more done from a grassroots level to try to get more south-Asian females to go into the game. I know from own family experience; my sister and my whole family were massive sports fans and involved hugely in sport. However, my sister was never really involved; she took the academic route, as she thought that was what she needed to do. Clearly, it is a stigma that needs to be challenged. The more opportunities there are from a younger age to get involved in the game and to feel more comfortable engaging with the sport as a whole, the more it will become the norm. That has to be an opportunity that is afforded to everyone, and not just players from certain backgrounds or from certain schools, for example.

Q547 **Chair:** Anuj, do you think cricket needs a truth and reconciliation commission?

Anuj Dal: I think it certainly does. From what we have seen over the last couple of years, it has brought certain issues to light. It has brought racism within the game to the forefront for a lot of people. It is very fortunate that this Committee is challenging that, and challenging lots of people within the game, as clearly it is an issue that is ever so present. The importance for me, and why I feel it is positive, is that everyone within the game—not just at the professional level, everyone within the sport—is now questioning their response to this issue. That is the need moving forward, not just at the professional level, but right from the grassroots level.

Q548 **Chair:** Mentioning no names—I completely respect your desire to try to keep this confidential—are there any players who have come to you and said, “I said this,” or, “I did this”—a Matthew Hoggard-type situation? Have you experienced that?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Anuj Dal: I have. A few months ago, I got a personal message from a former player apologising for some of the comments he made to me in the dressing room. To me that was one of the biggest and most positive things, that it caused him to question some of the things he said. From my personal opinion that is a massive factor moving forward. Even if it is not made public, and even if players are not seeking to apologise, the fact that they are questioning themselves is an important thing. What Azeem mentioned about education going in one ear and out the other ear is largely to do with an attitude towards coming and receiving education. Education is the start point; it is not the solution to fix it.

Q549 **Chair:** It is not about shaming; it is about understanding.

Anuj Dal: Absolutely.

Q550 **Chair:** Would you, therefore, say it would be healthy for cricket to operate, even if it is on a confidential and private basis, a commission in order to bring players together to discuss past instances and lessons learned, and understanding, and when it is felt by that person that they have gone over the line that they apologise to the other person? Would that be a healthy thing for cricket?

Anuj Dal: I certainly think so. From the education that we have received, it is about allowing environments and dressing rooms to be open. The biggest thing that I have said to the players at Derbyshire is, "Feel free to ask questions; feel free to come to me if you want to ask about my background, my culture, my beliefs." That is the biggest factor. We need that environment moving forward. We need more of those things.

The situation we don't want is for players to feel as if they cannot say anything at all. I don't think that is a positive thing. I think we need an open environment where players feel comfortable challenging certain comments that have been made and asking questions and at the end of the day, respecting players and their beliefs because that, first and foremost, is the most important thing.

Q551 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Rob Lynch, you have heard Anuj and I have to say that was deeply impressive and frankly I think that is positive thing that we can all take away from this and hope to see some development from the ECB, with your co-operation, setting such a commission up, even if it is private or whatever.

However, there are refuseniks in the game. I am thinking, in particular, of Lord Patel's comments just the other day. He said that there is a group of individuals at Yorkshire who are actively seeking to delay and derail reform. He cited the ex-Yorkshire chairman, Robin Smith, who according to my information has close ties to Colin Graves and obviously has a very friendly journalist, seemingly, at the *Yorkshire Post*. They are suggesting effectively that Lord Patel's appointment is null and void, that his decisions therefore are null and void, and that the changes to the trust that need to happen and its relationship with Yorkshire in order for



HOUSE OF COMMONS

international cricket to be secured once again by Yorkshire are therefore themselves not to be considered.

Considering you have many members at Yorkshire, Rob, what is your view, of these individuals who seem to be ostensibly holding up progress? The game is trying to turn over a new page and these individuals seemingly, for their own very particular reasons, are taking it upon themselves, as Lord Patel says, to derail this process. What is your view, Rob?

Rob Lynch: I find the situation up there very sad. This is Yorkshire County Cricket Club, one of the most, if not the most famous cricket clubs in the world. To watch these events unfold is extremely sad. I think the progress that Lord Patel is trying to put in place is going in the right direction and we have all, I hope, shown this morning, our objective is to move forward.

I am not across the detail, and nor should I be, with what is going on, with regard to what the members are doing, the small group of individuals. Our focus, in Yorkshire, is the current players and ensuring their welfare. We are spending a lot of time up there because there is a group of individuals who are very uncertain about what is going on around them and that is where we will maintain our focus within the environment.

Q552 **Chair:** I have many concerns about the answer you have just given.

Julian Metherell, you wanted to add to that. Perhaps you could answer the concerns. You can feel what my concerns would be about the answer I have just heard.

Julian Metherell: We only know what we read in the press and what Lord Patel has said but if they are accurate, it is abhorrent, it is totally obstructive and frankly these are some of the great barriers that we face in trying to make cricket a more inclusive place for the game we love. These minorities cannot prevail. They will not win. With your support and the support of the other key stakeholders, we have to drive this out of the game. There is no place for it in cricket.

Chair: Thank you. That was the answer we were hoping for. Thank you very much.

Okay. That concludes this session. Thank you very much, Julian, Rob, James, Anuj. Thank you very much for your evidence today. We will take a short adjournment while we set up our second panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Maheta Molango and Geoff Thompson MBE.

Chair: This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and this is our second panel, this time into football and the governance of football. I do wish to declare an interest before we begin. I have accepted hospitality recently from Manchester United Football Club. It was a terrible game of football.

Julie Elliott: I have accepted hospitality from the Football Association, for women's football.

Q553 **Chair:** We are joined here for our second panel by Maheta Molango, the chief executive of the Professional Footballers' Association and by Geoff Thompson MBE, Chair, PFA Operational Board, Professional Footballers' Association.

Maheta and Geoff, thank you very much for joining us. We are still in the morning. It is nice that you have joined us today.

Maheta Molango: Thank you for having us.

Geoff Thompson: Thank you.

Chair: To Maheta first of all, could you outline for us what opportunities you think the PFA has after 40 years of Gordon Taylor?

Maheta Molango: First of all, thank you very much for the opportunity to appear in front of this Committee. We welcome the opportunity to come here, tell you about what we do, tell you about our vision for the PFA and, we hope, answer as many questions as we can.

To answer your question, and thank you for the opportunity again, I think society has evolved. I think the players' voice has evolved over the years. One of the reasons why I accepted this role is because I am convinced that there is a unique opportunity for the players to play a bigger role in the new governance of football.

The last 18 months have shown us what football can do in driving change and having a positive impact and I think the players have realised that as much as a platform as they have, there are certain things they cannot achieve on their own and they need to work collectively towards achieving certain things. We think that it is a unique opportunity for us to be that driver for change, to be the positive voice, to try to influence the game that we love and which has given me an opportunity, now 20 years ago, first as a player, then as legal counsel, then as an executive. We are very enthusiastic about this opportunity.

Of course there will be challenges and of course we need to be self-critical about what has not worked but equally I think we need to be honest about what has worked and try to build on that and be very honest and up front about what has not worked and try to improve it.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

That is what we are trying to do and what we have tried to have been doing over the last seven months. It has been only seven months; it looks a bit longer but it has only been seven months.

Chair: Geoff, do you have any thoughts?

Geoff Thompson: No, just to simply build on what Maheta Molango has said. When I was asked to become an independent non-executive director—I have spent my life in sport and the last 30 years in sporting administration—it just seemed a wonderful time to join the PFA, knowing of its history but more importantly knowing that big changes were taking place, especially within the transformational culture change potential.

Along with my fellow INEDs, I felt it was a very positive and productive next chapter in the journey of the PFA with its challenges and opportunities. The last seven months have been a considerable and enlightening experience, understanding what, how, who, why and when, but I am very confident that the PFA is in a very good position, has consolidated and has learned from the past into the present to embark on a future.

Q554 **Chair:** How important is transparency to an organisation such as yours, Geoff? Also, as chair, do you think it is key to your organisation, particularly after 40 years of one man at the helm?

Geoff Thompson: Clearly so. As a membership union the PFA observes a number of statutes, but equally the PFA has a responsibility to the football ecosystem, the stakeholders of football and the public at large. The PFA has a well-established presence in the football community, and transparency and disclosure have taxed the newly convened operational board. More importantly, this is about the culture of the PFA and, on that basis, transparency and being able to be transparent in a way that represents and reflects its members and, equally, the football community as a whole.

Q555 **Chair:** Okay. Then why has the board not published the governance review?

Geoff Thompson: Are you referring to the independent review?

Chair: Yes.

Geoff Thompson: I am sorry. As we became selected, then nominated and appointed as independent non-executive directors, we were given the independent review as our induction pack, and we read it comprehensively.

As we began to look at the immediate, short-term priorities, we looked at the 2020 PFA AGM and the announcement that was made by way of the recommendations from the review. The review's recommendations were posted on the PFA website, and we felt that it was important to focus on



the recommendations and to ensure that the governance, policies, procedures and protocols were fit for purpose.

The AGM for 2021 identified and met questions asked of us as a players' board with the ultimate authority delegated to us on the basis of being able to update members on the progress we have made. It is a rare occasion for an independent review to be able to have delivered at least 90% of its recommendations. I am happy to report that the PFA is in a good position on the basis of those recommendations and has even made the independent review available to its members should they wish to have access and sight of it.

Q556 **Chair:** Okay. You know that there is a lot of press comment about the non-publication of the review. We take the point about the recommendations, but we cannot see the thing as a whole. You have talked about transparency and the need for it. You are not just about your members, obviously; you are also about the wider football community and, ergo, you are also about fans and the wider football game—the national game. It does seem very strange that although you have said that you have published the recommendations, you have not published the review itself. Why have you not published the review in full?

Geoff Thompson: First, we had to respect the confidentiality that many who participated in that review had been assured of. That assurance allowed for a frank and honest reflection of the PFA in its previous form and allowed the recommendations that have led to the appointments of Maheta Molango, now the chief executive, and me along with Ebru Köksal and now Trevor Johnson and Darren Hardman as independent non-executive directors. Above all, it enabled us to look at how we are able to take them forward.

While appreciating the public and media interest, we are a union, and we are bound by a statute. We have discussed this at great length. It has taxed the PFA operational board and the players' board but equally we are mindful of a fervent and still growing wish to see the independent review published. In a recent meeting with the sports Minister, we offered to take him through the report. There is nothing untoward. It is simply us respecting the confidentiality of those who contributed to it. We would be equally willing to take any member of this Select Committee through the report should they so wish.

Q557 **Chair:** It would be lovely to have that privilege, but I would have to refuse because members of the public do not have the same privilege. I would find that incredibly jarring. It is kind of you to offer.

The guarantees that you have given: what type of guarantees are they?

Geoff Thompson: Guarantees can only reflect on what I believe is an operational board that reflects integrity. I believe that in seven months, we have conducted five years of board business. We have made an



HOUSE OF COMMONS

extensive commitment and dedication that is pretty unprecedented in my 30 years in sports administration and public life.

The governance, risk and audit committee is now sitting and effectively and efficiently operating with the independence that is required, the remuneration nomination committee is now sitting, and the senior leadership team is being refreshed, led by Maheta Molango. The operational—

Q558 Chair: That is all very good detail, but it is not answering the question. Maybe I need to rephrase it. What guarantees have you given to people who have contributed to the governance review report? What specific guarantees have you given and how many people have you given these guarantees to?

Geoff Thompson: In the first instance the guarantees were given to the members. The members were given the opportunity to review the independent review. The recommendations have been publicly shared, disclosed, and to my mind, on the basis of having reviewed that report, I believe that we have met our fiduciary responsibilities while acknowledging that there is a wider public interest that would want to see the content of that report.

Q559 Chair: The impression is that after having 40 years of one individual, the highest-paid union official in the world, as your chief executive it is deeply jarring, I think, from a public viewpoint that you are not willing to publish the report in full. You acknowledge the fact that you have recommendations. You have stated that there is nothing untoward in the report. You have not specified the guarantees that you have given to individual members, nor have you specified the number of guarantees that you have given or to whom.

It does look to me as if the words about transparency are nothing more than window dressing and that until this report is published in full, you cannot claim to have moved on from the previous period. Both of you intimated to this Committee when you first sat down that you are effectively turning over a new leaf and that there is a new direction and so on and we are very happy to accept that. However, do you understand the public view represented by this Committee that effectively you cannot say that, that you are doing that, without first putting the report in the public domain?

Maheta Molango: Can I maybe complement what Geoff Thomson said, if I may?

Chair: Yes, of course.

Maheta Molango: There were terms of reference to the guarantees. The independent review was performed by Sport Resolutions. There were terms of reference.

Q560 Chair: They were drawn up by Gordon Taylor, though, weren't they?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Maheta Molango: Sorry?

Chair: Were the terms of reference drawn up by Gordon Taylor?

Maheta Molango: I was not part of that.

Chair: Okay; so it was your predecessor?

Maheta Molango: Yes.

Geoff Thompson: Yes, it was; yes.

Q561 **Chair:** So effectively Gordon Taylor set up an independent governance review which set up at the outset guarantees of effective anonymity and non-disclosure in the report. Do you understand how that looks? Frankly, it looks really dodgy. I'm sorry that I cut across you there.

Maheta Molango: I have just joined. I am a result of those recommendations. As you can imagine, we totally understand the importance of those recommendations and of the report. This has completely changed what the PFA is today. Let's remember that, as a result, we adopted new rules in November 2020 and that led to the adoption of a new players' board, which now represents all categories, including WSL. It has led to the creation of a new operational board with four non-executive directors of a calibre, which I think should give us the comfort that we are at that level of quality in terms of what we want to do and experience in terms of what we are trying to achieve, and it has led to my appointment through a very competitive process.

Of course we know that this decision is not easy, and we understand people's interest in this report; we fully understand that. However, I think you can see that we need to put things into balance, and the reality is that people have participated in this review under certain conditions, one of them being that it will be kept confidential.

Q562 **Chair:** Conditions that were drawn up by your predecessor who had had 40 years on several million pounds a year.

Maheta Molango: Yes. I was not part of that, but I can tell you that—

Chair: You should understand how that jars.

Maheta Molango: Yes.

Geoff Thompson: We fully appreciate that. It was certainly not known to me. At the time, there would have been a dialogue with the players' board, the senior leadership of the time. I can assure you that within the exposure that we have had and the contributions that we have made over the last seven months, everything has been on the basis of the integrity, objectivity and balance that we felt needed to be discussed in great detail and then recommended to the players' board who ultimately are the governing body.

Q563 **Julie Elliott:** I am very interested in supporting the women's game to



grow, both professionally and in the non-professional area.

Why, as an organisation, do you only represent women who have played in the Women's Super League?

Maheta Molango: That is a very good question. Thank you. Let me just put some context around what we are trying to achieve as the PFA.

We decided about a year ago to set up a proper, bespoke women's football department, which is led by Marie-Christine Bouchier and Florence Allen recently joined us, which I think is great news. This was on the back of us accepting WSL as part of our membership, which I think was the right step forward to create the parity that we need.

We are not at a stage where we think the goal should be, which is to also include the championship players, but this is our goal. We have communicated that to the FA and are working with the FA to achieve it.

We believe that this needs to go hand in hand with making sure that the league is a really professional league which, by the FA's own admission, is not yet the case. It is still a league with semi-professional teams as well as professional teams. We need to work towards a fully professional league to achieve our goal and let's be quite clear that that is our goal, but we want to make sure that we can provide exactly the same benefits to those players as to their male counterparts.

The situation right now is that at WSL level we are still not able to provide those women with the pension-scheme benefits that their male counterparts have because, unfortunately, at the time we accepted the WSL there was no resource attached to it. Hence, we want to learn from something that was not done in the right way in the past.

When we accepted the WSL players, we should have made sure that we had the ability to deliver at the same level as their male counterparts and that is what we are trying to achieve. We want to make sure that we do not take a step that we think is right without making sure that the rest is ready for that step.

Q564 **Julie Elliott:** It has been announced recently that agreement has been reached between you and the FA to bring in the standardised women's contract, which I think is excellent news—I am pleased. I would be interested to know about the timescale of it being introduced. You have said it is your objective to include championship players. I understand that the standardised women's contract covers championship and WSL. Would the logical conclusion be that by the time that the contract is introduced, and standardisation comes in across the piece, that women who are playing professional football will be allowed, whether they have played in the super league or not? Is that where you are and what is the timescale?

Maheta Molango: Those changes took 16 months to come to fruition by the way. It was a very long and laboured process. I watched a WSL game



this weekend and you can see that there is still so much to be done at WSL. We want to make sure that we deliver at the level we need to be delivering at for WSL. This is a good example to show that we still lack very basic cover. To us, celebrating this maternity coverage—it should be normal; it should not be something that needs to be celebrated because it should have been in place a year ago—we want to make sure that we do provide the level of cover that the women deserve. Once we are ready to have the resource to also support the championship players and the league is fully professional, let's do that.

To respond to your question about when it will come into force: immediately. We are working towards having a deed of variation that will allow the clubs to implement directly. It is not just maternity, by the way; it also covers termination. Right now we are in the situation whereby a male player would need to be injured within a period of 24 months, 18 months, in order to be terminated whereas the female counterpart could have been terminated three months after injury. We have a situation whereby the female members can be retained for a week after the contract finishes whereas the male counterpart will know what the future looks like two months earlier. These are the realities that we are facing today.

Q565 Julie Elliott: The standardised contract is fantastic news, but I am interested to know when the next level happens.

There are problems supporting the growth of women's football. Viewing figures show there is appetite for watching women's football but during Covid the anomalies and variations to do with women's teams and the governance of women's teams have come to the fore. Women's football has suffered enormously. One thing that came out of the fan led review was recommendation 45, recommending an independent review into the women's game. Do you support that recommendation?

Maheta Molango: Yes.

Q566 Julie Elliott: I asked Minister Huddleston in the debate I led the week before last in Westminster Hall would he commit to it, and he would not. He said that it would come out in the fullness of the whole review and the response to the whole review. Do you think that is good enough or do you think this should just happen?

Maheta Molango: I think it is not for us to comment on the Minister's views.

Julie Elliott: But you must have an opinion.

Maheta Molango: Yes. Our opinion is very clear. We think that we need to achieve parity. The men and the women should be treated at least at the same level and then we need to be able to adapt and tweak, specifically focusing on women's football. I think a fan led review of women's football is a good idea. Why not?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Geoff Thompson: May I add that a women in football sub-committee has been established within the PFA. Steph Houghton, one of our most celebrated female footballers is serving on that committee and Ebru Köksal, our independent non-executive director, is chairing it. It is a standing agenda item at every players' board meeting and is something we are fully aligned with in our overall equality, diversity and inclusion framework. Parity is a priority. The ability of the PFA to take the steps that it has taken, as well as engaging with the wider stakeholders in football, will accelerate what I fully support and would like to see, which is a review of women's football. Participation in football is the fastest-growing among young women and for that reason it deserves to be given its rightful place of equitable priority.

Q567 **John Nicolson:** Can I ask you, Mr Molango, first, what the PFA does to ensure that your organisation and footballers in general are strong advocates against domestic violence?

Maheta Molango: Let me start by making our stance on this topic clear. We condemn any violence and, even more so, domestic violence. This is absolutely clear to us. In full disclosure, my mother is a social worker, and she works in an institution, an alternative to prison, with people who have either suffered themselves from domestic violence or have been involved, and it is a topic that I personally feel strongly about. Our stance is absolutely clear. We need to make sure that we foster healthy discussions with the players.

Q568 **John Nicolson:** How do you do that?

Maheta Molango: First by leading by example. In terms of how we treat parity in our organisation, I think the examples that Geoff Thompson has given you show that this is the level of respect you need to have, irrespective of your sex. It is not just workshops; it is about showing people that you believe in parity by doing the right thing.

Q569 **John Nicolson:** Can you give me an example of this?

Maheta Molango: Yes. We have joint funding with the Premier League. We do workshops to discuss sexual concerns, how you engage in your relationships, what is acceptable and acceptable, and this is something that we need to continue doing.

Q570 **John Nicolson:** Should somebody who is found guilty of rape ever play for a football club?

Maheta Molango: I think you need to separate two things. Maybe that is the lawyer part of myself speaking. Legally speaking, can someone who has done his time work, not just for a football club but work in general? Legally speaking I would imagine yes. Is it morally the right thing to do? I think this is for the employer, or the club in this case, to decide what stand they want to take. I have my own opinion, but I am not here to express my own opinion.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q571 **Julie Elliott:** What is your own opinion?

Maheta Molango: I think you need to be consistent about what you, as an organisation, want to portray. If we are supportive of certain things, we need to make sure that we are consistent.

Q572 **John Nicolson:** There is obviously a real-life example of this in Raith Rovers, which signed a player who had been found guilty of rape in a civil court and they signed him up. What is your view on how the club behaved?

Maheta Molango: I don't think we need to get into answering about specific cases. I don't have the details of the situation.

Q573 **John Nicolson:** It has quite a high profile. Maybe I can help. The club has said that they think they did the wrong thing, so the club has backed away from what they did after a huge outcry, which was a big story in Scotland but also got headlines around the world.

Maheta Molango: As I said, I am absolutely clear on the fact that domestic violence is not acceptable; it should not be part of society and by the way, football is a reflection of society. This is not a problem of football; it is a problem of society and I think we have a role to play in terms of being role models and positively influencing change. This is one of those topics where football and society need to do a better job.

Q574 **John Nicolson:** How do you think it would make women feel, women who either work at the club or support the club or just follow the club on telly? How do you think they would feel if they saw that their club had signed somebody who had been found guilty of rape?

Maheta Molango: We have seen the reaction and we respect every opinion. Our stance is very clear, and I want to state once again that we believe that there is no space for domestic violence in society and even less so in football because football is a very visible sport. We have a role to play in terms of setting the right standards.

Q575 **John Nicolson:** I find it extraordinary that here we are in 2022 and a club would do this. Okay, they have said they are sorry, they have tried to make amends, but it is bizarre that the people who ran that club would think, after all the publicity that we have had about domestic violence, after all the discussions we have had nationally and internationally about violence on the football pitch, violence against women, the link between football, defeats in football, alcohol and football, and domestic violence, all of that, and they would think, "Okay, we're going to sign a rapist".

Maheta Molango: I think it is once again an example of how, hopefully, football can put the spotlight on the stuff that needs to be discussed even more, that need to be tackled even harder, and that is the way I would like to see football. Football is a place where we can achieve stuff that no one else can achieve if we use that platform effectively.

Q576 **John Nicolson:** Which this was not; this was not using the platform



HOUSE OF COMMONS

effectively. It just shows football, I think, as wildly out of touch with many of the discussions we are having in society in general.

Maheta Molango: I am not sure I would agree with that statement because—

John Nicolson: Really? Can you think of any other organisation that would hire a rapist?

Maheta Molango: Again, as I said to you, I would like to remember some of the stuff that members or players have done over the last 18 months to try to drive change in society. We condemn violence and we have said it once again, but you also need to always see the overall situation. I feel very proud to represent people like Jordan Henderson, who have led the line in terms of supporting the NHS. I feel very proud to support Raheem Sterling, who has been recognised by the Queen for his work in society.

John Nicolson: I think the overall situation is that there is much work to be done. I will tell you how the women in this particular club, Raith Rovers, reacted to it. They went off and set up a separate women's team because they were so appalled by it. It is called McDermid Ladies after the world-famous crime writer Val McDermid. They set up their own football team, which kind of shows that they did not feel safe, I think. Anyway, back to the Chair.

Q577 **Julie Elliott:** I am not holding either of you responsible for what has happened in the past. However, anecdotally, the PFA's advice to players who have been charged with serious sexual offences of varying natures that would lead, if convicted, to custodial sentences—some have been found guilty, some haven't—but the anecdotal evidence of the advice coming from the PFA has been in some cases to allow those players to continue to play.

This is not about a specific case so I think it is something you could answer. In general terms, if a member of the PFA was charged with a sexual offence that could, if convicted, lead to a custodial sentence, would your advice as the PFA to that player and the clubs be they can continue to play or would it be that they should be suspended on full pay, which would be the case in any other workplace I can think of in this country? What would be, in general terms, your advice now under this new management?

Maheta Molango: As I was saying before—again, since I am a lawyer maybe the lawyer part of me will speak—on the one hand the players have a right to representation, which does not mean that you agree with their moral position; it is just a right that they have in terms of what we do for our members. You need to see very much on a case-by-case basis what exactly is happening. Ultimately, there is always a process to be followed to then find someone guilty. Hence again we are trying not to make any moral judgment on the situation because as a union what we need to do is afford that right of representation, which does not mean



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that we share the views of some of those people involved, but it is one of our main duties and hence we try to fulfil that duty.

Q578 Julie Elliott: But in this country, and I say this as someone who was a trade union official for many years, suspending somebody on full pay is not casting a judgment on that person. What it is doing is removing them from the situation while due process continues, to no detriment to themselves because they continue being paid. They can continue to train, they can continue to do those things, but representing the club in this situation would not be appropriate, I would suggest. They would be being treated the same as any other employee if they worked in a factory, a shop or anywhere.

Would your advice not be in those situations that without any detriment those people still get their terms and conditions in terms of their pay and continuity of service and all those things but are removed from that workplace while the case continues? Mr Thompson, what is your view?

Geoff Thompson: From an operational board standpoint, that would be completely appropriate. That would be our advice and that is what we do as the interface between the executive and the players' board.

The governance, risk and audit committee looks at all aspects of a threshold that would be to the detriment of the membership or the reputational relationships that the PFA has with its stakeholders and society as a whole. However, that would be completely appropriate and in line with the practice of presumed innocent until proved guilty. None the less, it would be right to put the player on a suspended protocol of training until such time as a judgment is reached either way.

Julie Elliott: I am very happy to hear that. Thank you.

Q579 Damian Green: Can I pick up a different type of case to investigate what happens in practice? Another current issue, sadly, is Kurt Zouma on social media kicking his cat around the room. Somebody close to him who was there has put it on social media, them laughing. They obviously find this funny. Do you have any role to play in either educating him or disciplining him or, if the club disciplines him, will you just go in and represent him blindly, as it were?

Maheta Molango: Obviously, it is not for us to discipline him because it is for the employer to discipline him. Our role is to tell the player the truth, which is that this type of behaviour is not acceptable. It is not acceptable at home, with or without a camera. It is not just that because it is visible then it is bad. It is just bad, full stop. It should not be happening. I have not seen the video, but I have read about it. He has apologised, which hopefully is a sign of him acknowledging that this type of behaviour is not acceptable. I have been a player myself and we have to tell them the truth. Sometimes the truth hurts but we need to tell them what is right and what is not right.



Geoff Thompson: Player education plays a big part. Again, the football ecosystem now has to look at players understanding their responsibility in influencing society. The role of social media, as we can see, can play a massive part, both to the player and to the area of society that may be influenced with a posting of that kind. It is about cultural education. It is about understanding the role and responsibility, and when it is wrong the PFA will communicate that.

I think that player education plays a massive role in this particular instance and in many instances where players are using social media. As we see, it is used against them, as well as highlighting indiscretions, and even positives. There are many positives. I think it is a look at social media as a whole. I know that Maheta is leading a massive data project at the PFA and this will hopefully aim to not only ensure that we can communicate with players, but inform players and ensure that they are properly aware of their role and responsibilities as professional footballers.

Q580 **Damian Green:** Is there any structure to that, by which I mean a PFA code of conduct that you expect from your members? I take the point, of course, that the clubs are employers so they will be the ultimate disciplinary decider, if you like, but do you have the equivalent of a code of conduct that everyone who is a professional footballer is expected to adhere to?

Maheta Molango: Yes. I think it goes back to the point that you were making. It is about education. It is about understanding, and from that perspective I would love to make you aware of the fact that we are going to launch a new PFA business school, which is aimed at providing the tools for the players to not just be successful on the pitch but equally to become skilled citizens who are able to understand complex issues, who are able to have their own informed opinion about stuff. To me, it goes back to an even broader situation, which is about education. We need to make sure that those players take their education seriously, take their training seriously and can be well informed, solid, sophisticated citizens.

Q581 **Damian Green:** Sure, I get that and, of course, that is very welcome, but I just wonder in factual terms whether there is a set of principles or a set of approved behaviours that they are meant to adhere to, as this place has. It is a constant source of discussion as to whether people have broken them or not but there is a ministerial code. Is there a professional footballers' code?

Geoff Thompson: We decided that we would look at ourselves first. The operational board has now introduced a code that is expected of us, and the players' board I know have been looking at how they—and the players' board ultimately as the governing body I think would be an eminently feasible and workable idea to look at a code of conduct that they themselves as a players' board, who are the voice and representation of their members, equally would then be seeking for their membership to observe.



Q582 **Damian Green:** They are looking at that at the moment?

Geoff Thompson: The two boards have only, as I have said, been in a convened setting for the last seven months. We have started a number of joint meetings to have a look at the issues, where the players bring the immediacy of their professional footballing lives, and we then come up with the means by which we can see them able to amplify and take forward issues that we feel we can operationally be effective and efficient in. It would make eminent sense to have a code of conduct, and it certainly would be an idea we would present before the players' board.

Q583 **Steve Brine:** It is nice to see you both. Can I just say what a breath of fresh air it is to see new leadership at the PFA? There is no comment otherwise on what has gone before, but it is nice to see new faces.

Can I touch on the talent pipeline and how young footballers come into the system? Tracey Crouch's fan-led review touched on this. It said at any one time there are between 10,000 and 12,000 boys in football's youth development system, which is incredible; 99% of these are released before their scholarship and of the small number that become scholars, 85% are ultimately released.

I completely understand that this is a highly competitive business, and rightly so because we are trying to produce elite players who can win things for our country. One of the things the review talked about is as a matter of high priority the football stakeholders, including the FA, the men's leagues, the PFA, clubs and the women's league work together to devise a holistic and comprehensive player welfare system to fully support players exiting the game, particularly at academy level but including retired players, including proactive mental health care and support.

When you took over the leadership of the PFA, Mr Molango, were you aware of the situation regarding young players in academies and particularly those figures that I gave at the start of my ridiculously long question?

Maheta Molango: Thank you very much for your question. I am glad to tell you that we actively participated in the review, and I am glad to tell you that some of those stats and figures that you have just mentioned are part of the submission that we made to Tracey in terms of highlighting the importance.

We believe you have two key moments in your career: when you start and when you finish. Because in between typically people pay attention to you, you are in the spotlight, so normally you are okay. The problem is making the right choice at the beginning and making the right choice at the end. We do have a youth advisory department, but it is one person. We right now are talking to the Premier League, for example, to say, "Why don't we grow that department? Why don't we make sure that they make the right decision at the beginning?" Because ultimately the clubs are the clubs and they have their own interests, and hopefully we can be



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that independent sounding board that is best placed to advise those kids in terms of what they do.

Q584 **Steve Brine:** Let's just step through how that would work, then. If I as a parent had a son or a daughter that a club showed an interest in and they brought them into their academy, obviously the club would have lots to say to me as a parent. There would be lots of wraparound conversations, you would like to think, because obviously that is in their interests. You are saying that they could contact the PFA and say, "We would like to talk this through with somebody who does not have a vested interest here." Are you saying that that could not really happen at the moment because it is just too under-resourced?

Maheta Molango: I think we could do a better job and it is a question of manpower. I think we have a great person leading that initiative and we would like to grow it because we believe that ultimately this space has been filled by other people who typically do not serve the club or do not serve the players.

Q585 **Steve Brine:** Who are these other people?

Maheta Molango: We have seen that sometimes the role of the agents could be a difficult one, and again I am not someone who likes to put everyone in the same group. We have some very solid agents but equally we have some people who do not serve the cause in terms of serving the best interest of the players. Hence, we believe that the PFA could play a role there in supporting those kids.

I must say since I have been the chief executive of a club myself, I used to attend those meetings. I would say to the parents, "I need to tell you the truth. The reality is that your kid will not make it. The statistics say that your kid when he joins the academy will not make it. Hence let's work on plan A, which will be the study, the training, the education, and then if football works out, great, but if it does not you need to be conscious of the fact that the reality is that your kid will not make it." This is the reality normally.

Q586 **Steve Brine:** Is the reality that clubs are not saying that to parents? Surely they should be saying, "It may not work out, it probably won't, so don't put all your eggs in our basket." Are you saying that that conversation is not had enough?

Maheta Molango: No, I would not say that they are not doing it because I think that would be an unfair assessment of the situation. I do believe that clubs try to do something about it. What I am saying is: is it the club that needs to say those words or is it someone who has no vested interest? I am not questioning whether the club does it or not. What I am saying is if I am a parent—and I am a parent—I am thinking, "What you are saying to me, is it because it has an interest for them or is it what is best for my son?" Typically, both coincide. I am not saying that is not the case, but what I am saying is as a parent I will feel more comfortable knowing that I have a solid, sophisticated union that has no interest,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

because I do not earn any commission by telling them what they need to do. This is what hopefully we can, I guess, demonstrate to everyone that we can do. We want to be that solid, independent union that has at its heart the interests of the players.

Q587 Steve Brine: I was going to ask you what responsibility you have with regards to the welfare of young children going into an academy. I hear you say what you want to be, and I hear that as a very clear signal of intent from you as the new lead, but you do not actually have any responsibility?

Maheta Molango: That is a very good question. We are very keen to reposition the PFA as to what it is. The PFA is a union. We are the advocates. We are not the employers. We don't write the rules. I think there has been a bit of confusion over the last few years. Ultimately, we are this institution that sits in between the employers and the employees, which only has at heart the interests of the players. We are not the employers, so I think we need to make a distinction between who has the obligation financially to do that versus who is best placed to deliver that service. Hopefully, we would like to be a real partner to the clubs and to the league because we want to be thorough.

Q588 Steve Brine: Do you think the clubs are open to that conversation?

Maheta Molango: I think so.

Q589 Steve Brine: Do any guidelines or advice exist that the PFA has sent to clubs? There was an example that we heard about of a young Manchester United academy lad who learned through Twitter that he had been released. Possibly that was a lucky escape after last week. Are there any guidelines that you push out to the clubs?

Maheta Molango: Yes, there is a guideline, but ultimately it is a question of building a relationship. I think we have a very good example with the scheme that we built for Asian players, with fantastic results. We just had a kid who made his debut for Man U, which is a fantastic example as to how it is not just a piece of paper. What goes with the piece of paper is how much time and interest you show in it.

We have a person within the PFA who said, "This is a group of people who deserve more attention. I am going to be closer to them. I am going to support them". Then you see the end result of a person—again, we are only a small piece of it, so I do not want to take credit for someone making a debut at Man U, but we are extremely proud to be in a situation that only has at heart the interests of the players, with no other interests at stake than this one.

Q590 Steve Brine: Finally, let's try to pivot this to talk about the other moment in a career, which is the exit. One of the recommendations of the fan-led review, as I read out to you, was about getting together to come up with a welfare system and support those at those two life moments in a career. Has anything started in that regard?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Maheta Molango: Yes.

Steve Brine: Okay, tell us about that.

Maheta Molango: The first step is to acknowledge. As I said to you, we want to be self-critical and what we do well, we do well; what we don't do well, we don't do well. We had the feeling that we were not good at handling our own data.

I had a call the other day with a high-profile player of this country who said to me, "I never got the call from the PFA." Maybe he was right, and it was because we do not even have his phone number. This is what we need to improve on. I think we have the data but in siloes, not super organised, and therefore we decided to launch a data transformation project. This is also what we want to change.

We did a tender process. People competed for that job. One company won it and now we are implementing a data transformation project, which hopefully will enable us from now to June to have one single source of truth. If Geoff Thompson is a member, I will be able to click and see what Geoff's age is, what Geoff's preferences are, what is his career, when he last called the PFA and about what, and hopefully get to a stage where if I know that Geoff is out of contract in June, because I have the data, I can send him an email automatically in March saying, "Hey, Geoff, I have the data. I know you like physiotherapy. Why don't you register for this course?"

Steve Brine: Okay, so it is a customer relationship management tool is what you are wanting to put in place?

Maheta Molango: Absolutely.

Steve Brine: Mr Thompson, did you want to come in?

Geoff Thompson: Just to add that it is a priority that, as Maheta has said, we have 1,500 apprenticeships that make up the 5,000 members of the PFA. My work has been with young people from communities where most of these players will come from. I have seen what can happen when they are rejected. They go back to the communities and the streets with equally a doubly disaffected mindset. I do think it is vitally important that the football ecosystem, upon realising that there is an honest discussion to be had with the parents but equally with the player, that the player should be, to my mind, developing both as a footballer and within any of their career potential that might suggest. The career might end with an injury but not many people factor that in.

It is a comprehensive holistic and more integrated approach along the lines that Maheta is proposing and implementing that we can improve the quality that sees players—in some instances players that did not make it in academies were being looked at for other sports. I know of a programme where they went into British cycling. It is about being more



holistic, being appreciative of the fact and being realistic with those young players that their lives or the chances of making it are very limited and for that reason, they have to be able to expand beyond.

The vocational colleges are there. I think they could be given further investment and support. That reality check I think is very important. I think parent education is equally important. I know at some football clubs they do have a holding area for parents and in one instance they are consistently lowering the expectations, I think.

Q591 Steve Brine: Yes, hard to manage. Competitive dad is a well-known phenomenon.

Finally, Mr Molango, are you supporting and are you pleased to see Christian Eriksen back in English football? Obviously, he was not able to play in other elite leagues, but he is able to play in the Premier League. Although as a Spurs fan I would like to have seen him back, it is great to see him back in English football. I just wondered whether you would care to comment.

Maheta Molango: Yes, I am one of those who always want to put players' welfare first. As long as it is safe for him to be back and the experts say he can be back, of course, I think it will be a pity to miss out on such a talent. I think it is not about talent; it is about making sure that they do the right thing. I think it is one of those where sometimes we need to protect the player against himself or herself. Because we want to play. We are desperate to be on the pitch. We love it. We love our profession, but is it safe for you to do so? I think we need to listen to the experts. If the experts say that he can play, it is a luxury to have him back. Since I don't live too far away from the stadium where he is playing, I am looking forward to seeing him live, but only as long as the requirements from a medical perspective are met.

Q592 Clive Efford: I was staggered when I read the fan-led review to see these figures about young people who are taken out of the education system, put into academies and that then 99% of those do not make it to the next stage. Of that group, 85% are then discarded. That is an incredible journey for a young person, to be selected as part of an elite, separated off from your peers, put on a different education path, and then to fail at the end of that and then be put back into the system.

This was an issue that we raised with the FA and the Premier League and others when this system was set up. I remember sitting in a room, it might have even been this one, where we quizzed the people behind this, saying, "What's going to happen to those young players that fall by the wayside?" We were told that there was going to be a wraparound, that it was all going to be cosy, and it is not. Should we be persisting with this system that does this to young people? As a trade union charged with the welfare of people who are going into the game, not specifically your members, I grant you, those members of those academies, but should we be having a good look at this and asking whether we should continue



with this?

Maheta Molango: If you are capable of delivering the right message to the kids, it is a unique experience in the sense of what football gives you. You learn skills in a football environment that are so transferable outside, to normal life. To me, I want my kids to play football because of what it gives them. They do not need to be Christian Eriksen. What I mean is resilience, making decisions under pressure. If we are capable of saying, "This is a unique experience for you that you will be able to transfer into your life, but know that you may or may not make it and hence make sure that you have the plan A which is not football,"—the plan A is education, training, being a solid citizen—then it is a unique opportunity that should not be taken away from a kid. To be in that demanding, high-pressure environment is something that— I say to the players: be conscious of the skills that you have learned unconsciously on the pitch that are so useful. People pay for it outside of football, but only as long as you understand what is at stake.

I think that Geoff made a great point. Sometimes it is not the kid, it is the parents. Can you convince the parent that, yes, the career of your kid is important, but he is not going to be the next Christian Eriksen? Maybe, hopefully, but the reality is that it is not going to be that, so therefore keep him at school as much as you can, make sure that in training versus homework, homework needs to prevail. This is something that the kid does not do on his own. It needs to be the parents who support that. Hopefully, we can foster this healthy conversation to deliver and make them understand what is important.

Q593 **Clive Efford:** Yes, but this is just such a high failure rate, isn't it? In a situation where people are put into a sporting situation where the whole thing is wrapped around football and the whole drive is towards that person eventually becoming a professional footballer, the failure rate is so great and the emotional and mental fallout from that is so great. I have experienced it, although not personally—I was never good enough to even be considered to be a professional footballer—but others that I have seen who were let go, such as sons of friends of mine. It is an incredibly emotional point in their lives for such young people.

Maheta Molango: It is very difficult.

Clive Efford: When they have been put in this situation where they have been separated out and almost treated with kid gloves that they are elite and they are special in that sport, is that the right way we should be doing it? I had reservations when we started it and when I see these figures, I have serious reservations. Don't you think we should have a good long look at this to make sure? If the experience that you are suggesting is that they get a lot of positives out of it, shouldn't we know that? Shouldn't there be some sort of review that tells us that the right response and the right support is being put in place for those young people who fall by this wayside?



Maheta Molango: I agree. Ultimately, if I am not mistaken, you have 4 million people playing football in this country, and 3,500 make it as a professional. This is a fact. This is the number of spots available, so this is not going to change over time. Hence it is important that we have those serious conversations because this is not going to change. It is a reality: 4 million playing and 3,500 make it as a professional. Let's try to work together to make sure that they have the right environment to flourish if they end up being a player but equally that they flourish even if they do not make it as a player. I agree with you, let's have a proper deep conversation on that.

Q594 **Clive Efford:** If I could move on very quickly, there are a lot of black players in the professional game but there are far fewer at coaching level or management level or in the boardroom. What do you think you can do as new faces at the PFA? What can you do to make that breakthrough and make that change that we must have?

Going back to the point we have just been talking about, if there are no black coaches taking through those kids from the academy, if they do not see people like them in charge and making the decisions, what confidence are they going to have at times that they are getting a fair crack of the whip and all the rest of it? It is vital that we have representation at every level of the game, and it is pretty poor at the moment. I am sure you will agree. What can we do about it?

Maheta Molango: I will also let Geoff respond to that one, but I am very proud to be sitting here today. We can talk about policy, we can talk about whatever we want, but the reality is the PFA, the players, have elected someone who looks and sounds like me, just based on merit. I am not the son of any fancy person. All I did is work hard, try to take the opportunities that I have been given, and I went through a process that, by the way, Geoff oversaw, which ultimately saw me being elected as the chief executive of the PFA. I think there were 90-plus candidates. It was not a question of: how many games have you played? It was not about that. It was about: do you have the skills required to be able to run an organisation that has a high profile and a significant budget? Yes, having played football is important but it is much more than that. Hopefully, sometimes actions speak by themselves.

Clive Efford: Do you have anything to add?

Geoff Thompson: I have represented this country and I have served in public life. At every single step of the way, there will have been a barrier but, as Maheta has said, hard work and a dedicated effort will hopefully see you achieve or realise an opportunity. I am equally a face in that crowd now that leads by example, but it has been 30 years. All I would say is there has never been a more important time to see black players not only believe that they can perform on the pitch, but that they can achieve off the pitch.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Back to the point of young players, I would like to see a radical reform of the offer and the ambition that young people are told is the only way out for them. For every football match, I always say there might be 22 players on the pitch, but there are about 120 different careers that have to be professionally delivering that opportunity. Then there is that wider community piece.

Team GB has an excellent system. It already works and they have 6,000 sportsmen and women at the various levels of the development pathway. It would not be too far a stretch for money that has already been publicly invested in seeing how our sportsmen and women who represent Britain at Olympic and Paralympic levels, as they are doing in China, but there is some learning that could be realised and taken forward to assist football.

Leadership diversity code is already in place. We are beginning to see positive representation and I think, with that in mind, we can see a youth culture that might aspire to being in the boardroom as well as on the pitch or other aspects of the football ecosystem.

Q595 Chair: Just before I come on to Kevin, I want to check on this point—one that I raised in the House of Commons. I do remember one story where a young Arsenal player's way of being released, effectively he was told, "The next time you will be coming to the stadium you will be paying." That is how he was told.

Geoff, I will be frank with you, you talked about working in silos, before that lack of sharing information, the fact that there are so few people on the ground effectively helping these young kids. Has the PFA in the past basically failed at the fundamentals of care of its members?

We are obviously going to look at concussion in a minute, but it does look to me as if we have had an individual in charge for four decades who has been paid a huge sum of money, has kept everything incredibly close to him personally as a power base, and these kids are just left to be twisting in the wind. Is that a fair summation of where we have been? We are not holding you or Maheta responsible obviously, but this seems to be a fundamental failure by your union.

Geoff Thompson: To suggest one sole individual would be responsible for the whole football league ecosystem is slightly disingenuous, if I may humbly suggest.

Chair: Even if they are paid £3.5 million per year.

Geoff Thompson: Again I am not involved in the negotiations that would have taken place and seen that remuneration made. But I do remember, as a member of the then Sport England, when the Commission for Racial Equality and Lord Herman Ouseley wished to establish "Kick It Out" it was the PFA that invested first. I remember being the chair of the Racial Equality Advisory Group at Sport England and no one would invest. After the riots in the 1980s, it was "Football in the Community", another investment made by the PFA.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There are both good and bad things that I think reflect and represented what the PFA has done in the past. I have been watching that journey and with the responsibility that I and Maheta, the INEDs and everybody within the PFA who is embracing this transformation or culture change shares, we will meet its members and its beneficiaries on the basis of what I am hoping we have shared with you today, an intention that takes a new way forward and that represents new leadership, new vision, new mission objectives, values and certainly a new era for the PFA.

Q596 Kevin Brennan: Thank you both for appearing before us. We have heard a lot about new eras and so on. Mr Molango, as we have heard, your predecessor was in post for 42 years. Do you intend to emulate his longevity in the role?

Maheta Molango: As I told you, we amended the rules to ensure that the maximum term would be 10 years. At best you will see me for 10 years.

Just going back to the point that the Chair was making, which I think is important. It is very important to separate the institution from individuals. I was lucky enough to play in different countries and to live in different countries and let me tell you that in countries I have played in, there is no standard contract such as the one that we have here so the level of protection of the players is unparalleled.

Secondly, I do not know many institutions that offer £6,000 to members, per season irrespective of their category, and which they do not contribute to. This is a transfer levy that feeds into that £6,000. I work in private practice and £6,000 is rather a lot of money from scheme every year when you do not contribute to it. Ten days ago we had a meeting in Manchester with the president of FIFA, who took a plane to travel from Zurich, together with Arsène Wenger, to meet the PFA and the players because I guess he understood that one-third of the players who played in the last World cup play in this country.

So is the PFA relevant? I do not know, but what I have mentioned hopefully gives you an idea. Again, we all have our flaws, and I am not here to defend Gordon by any means. But what I am trying to say is let us separate for second—I know it is tough—individuals from the institution because I do strongly believe that the PFA is a fantastic institution and, yes, we need to work and improve. But the starting point, the legacy, is a very solid legacy and hence our decision to join.

Q597 Kevin Brennan: This Committee was very critical of the PFA and its leadership over the issue of concussion in our report, which we issued seven months ago. One of the things we said in our report is we would also have expected the Football Association to have been publicly hounded by the Professional Footballers' Association whose key concerns should be player welfare, and that is what you have outlined to us today; that is your key concern. We went on to say in our report, "Over the past 20 years neither the Football Association nor the Professional Footballers'



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Association have fought hard enough or publicly enough to address this issue within the broader football community. Have you read our Select Committee's report on concussion in sport? Given that you may have a 10-year term ahead of you, what are you going to do about it?

Maheta Molango: We did read it with interest, and at the time it was published we applauded it. It was important to put the spotlight on this issue. The first minute I had since I joined the PFA was with families who suffer from dementia. I did proactively meet with Dawn Astle and Rachel Walden. It was not an easy conversation. I think none of them was ready to be complimentary about what we did, and they were very clear about what went wrong and what needs to be addressed. I think we took it on board.

They joined the taskforce that we created in December 2020, so prior to my joining. I do not want to be critical of stuff that does not belong to me. That was previous to my joining. We took the time to sit down with those families and listen. The reality, whether we like it or not, is the family felt let down by the PFA. This is the reality. We do not need to agree with or not on the merits. The question is they felt let down and we need to do something about that.

We have done several things. First, we made the commitment towards research. I made the commitment to donate my own brain for research—hopefully further down the line—and I made that commitment because it is important to lead by example again and to tell the player that if we want to learn more we need to make those brains available for research.

Q598 **Kevin Brennan:** Sorry to cut across you, but that is the point about this topic: to get absolute proof of a connection between, for example, heading the ball and dementia later in life is a very long-term piece of scientific research. In the meantime, the game is being played both at the elite level but also by children and right throughout. Is there not a strong case for a more precautionary principle being adopted more generally and is it not the case that football, and by implication the PFA in speaking out for professional footballers, are not taking this issue seriously?

For example, the issue of concussion substitution during games. What is the PFA's position on that? We had a difficult exchange—I put it that way—with the chief medical officer from the Football Association when she appeared before us. She is a very able and reasonable person, but I felt she was trying to defend a position that was very difficult to defend about the issue of concussion substitutes. What is your view about that as the representative of players' welfare?

Maheta Molango: Our view is very clear. We do not need to wait until the research is completed to do something about it. Absolutely clear. Sorry, I was about to finish my reason, but you made a very valid comment.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Research needs to be ongoing but in the meantime two things need to happen, in our opinion. First, educational awareness. Players need to be aware, need to be able to make an informed choice as to what they do with their career, and they need to be made aware of the potential risk associated with playing football.

We are working now, together with our newly formed department, to try to introduce mandatory compulsory training at the beginning of each year. It does not need to be three hours, just half an hour of proper awareness training about what potentially could be the risk linked to heading the ball. That to us is very important.

But equally, as you were saying, the reality is while research is ongoing people are suffering. We are, together with all the stakeholders, pushing for the creation of a dementia care fund to try to support financially as well the people who are suffering from dementia.

If you allow me to go back to the point that you made about concussion substitution. I am absolutely in favour of that because sometimes you need to protect the player from himself or herself from the pressure of the manager and the club, because the players want to go back on to the pitch. So we believe that it is required to have an independent assessment in case of that and be properly assessed. This goes back to the point we are making about Eriksen: only when we know that you are safe please come back.

Q599 **Kevin Brennan:** Why do you not threaten to go on strike until that is introduced? You are a trade union.

Maheta Molango: Because I hope we can be more sophisticated than threatening to go to strike to achieve things because we believe in working together, we believe in working hand in hand now. Let us be clear about the fact that players know what they want. They know the voice that they have, and I hope they can be listened to because they know the power of their voices.

Q600 **Kevin Brennan:** How long do you think it will be before concussion substitutes are introduced into football?

Maheta Molango: There is no reason why it should be very long.

Kevin Brennan: I know there is no reason but how long do you think it will be?

Maheta Molango: Again, let's make a distinction between what the PFA needs to push for versus the ones who need to change the rules. This is a question I very much welcome you posing to the authorities. We need to change those rules. We, as the PFA, will push as hard as we can to get this implemented because we think it is right.

Just coming back to another point that you made. While research is ongoing, we adopted, together with the rest of the stakeholders,



guidelines that aim at reducing the number of headers during training sessions. As you know that is down to 10 high-intensity headers—we will call them—per week. It is an interesting thing to do.

Again, that is maybe because I was in different countries, but I said to the family, “You should be very proud of having achieved to put dementia CT on to the agenda.” It is not even a topic that is being discussed in most other countries, which to me is incredible. We should not be underestimating the work that the families have done in terms of bringing this to the agenda. We should be proud of what has been achieved. Do we need to do more? Absolutely.

Q601 **Kevin Brennan:** Sorry to press on this point but are you aware of any imminent initiative to introduce concussion substitution either as a trial or across football as a whole, within the UK?

Maheta Molango: We made it clear that we want this to happen, yes.

Kevin Brennan: I know you want it to happen but are you aware of any initiative that it is going to happen?

Geoff Thompson: If we look at rugby and the steps have been taken there, there is an already existing protocol that works. I have tended to be the outsider who looks into football but very much football played a part of my life. Being involved in broader sport, I think it is a pan-sport issue for all the combat and contact sports. We should be looking at this again more holistically and therefore driving with urgency what should be a standard protocol for all sports that have a risk.

Q602 **Kevin Brennan:** As you know, just to take rugby union, which I know more about than perhaps some of the others, of course that is absolutely the standard practice. The issue was taken out of the hands of the player, the manager and the referee and whether someone needs to leave the field and go through a head injury assessment before they are allowed to return to the field is independently determined. Even so, in my opinion, they are still allowed to return to play too soon in rugby union.

Geoff Thompson: This is where the Players’ Board, our governing body, comes in. We have the captains’ call, which Maheta consults regularly. I think there is an issue about the time and urgency that needs to be afforded to this important issue and, as I have said, rugby has set a model that could be easily transferrable into football.

Q603 **Chair:** Finally on that point, I remember the exchange we had with the chief medical officer at the FA, and she refused to tell us how much was being spent. World Rugby told us it was £400,000 in their sport. We believe £125,000 is the figure that the FA was contributing to research into the effects of heading the ball and concussion. Is there enough resource put into that area and, as the players’ organisation, what are you going to do about it?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Maheta Molango: As I said to you before, we are very keen to re-establish what our role is. We are the advocates. We are the union. The first step is to get our own house in order, which we are actively working on and acknowledge what is working and what is not working. But after that I want to be very clear that those players have never played for the PFA. They have played for clubs. They have played for leagues. They have played for the federation who ultimately also benefited in terms of the FA cup, and national teams. Our role will be to make sure that we push the rest of the stakeholders to do what they need to do but again, starting by getting our own house in order, which we are actively doing.

Q604 **Chair:** What about the research? Do you think there is enough across the game—£125,000?

Geoff Thompson: It is paltry, with all due respect, when you look at the economic activity of football. We have eminent research institutions in this country that could do justice and provide an investment equivalent to that of our American counterparts who are way ahead on this.

Q605 **Chair:** Most of the contributions in fact come from the NFL to the British institution in that regard. What are you going to specifically do? Are you going agitate? How are you going to bring about that change that needs to happen?

Maheta Molango: The reality—I think we need to be fair with the resource—is there has been a change of guard in each of the major institutions. The reality is that we have felt welcome, and we do believe there is a willingness to try to work together. A good example of that is the joint initiative that we launched together; so the Premier League, the FA, the EFL, ourselves, the LMA, to work together in dementia CT, and this goes in three different directions.

we are going to be joint funding research, education and awareness again, and this fund. So it is an existing ongoing initiative, which is a joint initiative of all stakeholders. Everyone has a different role to play. Our role is to push. I would like to make clear that there is a collective willingness to do something but every day that goes by is a missed opportunity to support people while travelling. We want to see action move faster.

Q606 **Chair:** What would be helpful for the Committee is if the PFA, say on a six-monthly basis, could write to us to say exactly what meetings are going ahead, what sort of action is being taken, which stakeholders are involved and precisely what is agreed in terms of the push into research. You also mentioned the benevolent fund, which we know was relatively ad hoc in the past and needs perhaps to be supercharged, because we are seeing a wash of people who are coming forward now with very serious conditions that seem to be related to concussive injury.

Maheta Molango: We would be delighted to not only come every six months, but we are working on a strategic plan. We have a strategic brief, which was approved in October, and we are now working to put



HOUSE OF COMMONS

together a comprehensive strategic plan that we are happy to come back here and share with you. There is absolutely no problem.

Chair: You do not have to come in every six months—don't worry; we are not going to subject you to that—but what we would like please is written updates and as transparent as possible, and they will be published.

Geoff Thompson: Absolutely.

Chair: Thank you. That concludes our session. Geoff Thompson and Maheta Molango, thank you very much.