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Culture, Media and Sport
Committee

Equity in Cricket

Fourth Report of Session 2023–24

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Culture, Media and Sport Committee

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1 Introduction

1. In our January 2022 report, *Racism in Cricket*, we concluded that “there is a deep-seated issue of racism in cricket.”¹ This followed evidence from former Yorkshire cricketer Azeem Rafiq on the discrimination that he had faced while at the club and the endemic nature of this abuse across the sport.² At the same time as our initial work on cricket, an Independent Commission into Equity in Cricket (ICEC), established by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), was working to “evaluate the state of equity in cricket and expose the realities of people’s experiences within cricket.”³

2. The ICEC published its report, *Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket*, on 26 June 2023, in which it agreed with our finding of a deep-seated issue of racism in cricket, and found that little has changed in the sport since the previous substantive review into racism in cricket in 1999.⁴ The Commission also highlighted that some members of the ECB Board at the time of their work were equivocal in their acknowledgement of racism.⁵ The ICEC’s remit went beyond racism, considering “inequalities and discrimination of all forms” within the game, with the final report identifying that “sexism, elitism and class-based discrimination” are also part of the “culture and institutions of English and Welsh cricket”.⁶ At the conclusion of the ICEC’s work, the ECB board—with a substantially changed membership⁷—committed to responding to the report within three months. It did so on 25 September 2023, when it published *Making Cricket a More Inclusive Sport*.⁸

3. We invited the ECB to appear before us in February 2024 to scrutinise its progress on implementing the Commission’s recommendations. We also invited the Chair and commissioners from the ICEC to appear at the same session to discuss their findings and the ECB’s response. We consider these issues in Chapter 2.

4. In January this year, Yorkshire County Cricket Club (Yorkshire CCC), which had been a focus of our previous sessions on cricket as the club at which Mr Rafiq was subject to racism, announced a loan deal that was conditional on the return of Colin Graves CBE as Chair of the club.⁹ Mr Graves had previously been the Chair of Yorkshire CCC during part of the period that Mr Rafiq was at the club, and subsequently was the Chair of the ECB between 2015 and 2020. The potential return of Mr Graves led to criticism from Mr Rafiq and others, including the charity Sporting Equals.¹⁰ We invited Mr Graves to appear before us as part of our hearing on equity in cricket, alongside outgoing Yorkshire CCC Chair, Harry Chathli. We consider the specific case of Yorkshire CCC in Chapter 3.

5. We are grateful to all those who gave evidence to us, and those who contacted us ahead of the session to provide information and raise questions and concerns. However, our decision to scrutinise racism and wider issues of equity in cricket has been the subject

1 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Seventh report of session 2021–22, [Racism in cricket](#), HC 1001, para 5

2 [Oral evidence taken on 16 November 2021](#) HC (2021–22) 855

3 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Our Story](#) (accessed 15 March 2024)

4 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), (27 June 2023), para 5.2.17

5 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), (27 June 2023), para 1.2.1

6 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), 27 June 2023, para 1.1.2

7 [ECB board set for further change as five non-executive roles advertised](#), *The Cricketer*, 6 November 2022

8 Sporting Equals, [An Open Letter Regarding Colin Graves](#), (8 January 2024)

9 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting](#), (11 January 2024)

10 [Moral and financial failure at Yorkshire is set to allow Colin Graves back in the door](#), *The Guardian*, 6 January 2024 and Sporting Equals, [An Open Letter Regarding Colin Graves](#), (8 January 2024)

of sustained criticism from some people involved in or reporting on the sport.¹¹ The ICEC too has faced criticism from people unwilling to accept or challenge the deep-seated racism in cricket.¹² Its Chair noted in July 2023 that the report had “touched a nerve.”¹³ Worse still, Azeem Rafiq and his family have been the subject of continued threats and abuse for his decision to raise the issue of racism in public.¹⁴ Part of the core role of select committees is to scrutinise matters of public concern.¹⁵ While we should expect scrutiny of our work we regret that, despite the vast evidence to the contrary, there is a small but significant minority who remain unwilling to accept either the presence of racism and inequity in cricket or the public interest in tackling it.

11 See, for example: [Letters: Yorkshire cricket racism hearing shows a review of parliamentary select committees is needed](#), The Yorkshire Post, 29 February 2024; and [Ex-England physio Wayne Morton lets rip over Yorkshire CCC racism ordeal](#), The Yorkshire Post, 16 February 2024.

12 [Ian Botham: I threw racism report on the floor, it was nonsense](#), The Times, 19 July 2023. Lord Botham’s claims were disputed by ICEC Chair, Cindy Butts during our hearing (Q15)

13 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Chair’s Open Letter Response to ECB Chair Richard Thompson](#), (17 July 2023)

14 Oral evidence taken on 13 December 2022, HC (2022–23) 812, Q731

15 Liaison Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2017–19, [The effectiveness and influence of the select committee system](#), HC 1860, para 16 and Box 3.

2 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket

6. On 25 November 2020, the ECB announced its intention to establish a Commission to “examine questions of equity in relation to race, gender and class within the sport including access to the sport, the pathways to professional level cricket, and barriers to access and progression through such pathways.”¹⁶ This work was part of a new equality, diversity and inclusion plan from the ECB, and came in the period following the Black Lives Matter movement and the sharing by former professional cricketers, including Michael Carberry, Ebony Rainford-Brent, Michael Holding and Azeem Rafiq, of their experiences of racism in the sport.¹⁷

7. In March 2021, Cindy Butts was appointed Chair of the ICEC, with the Commission’s terms of reference and four further Commissioners announced in July 2021. The Commission’s work included a literature review, meetings with stakeholders, and engagement including an online survey seeking lived experiences in cricket. The latter coincided with Mr Rafiq’s appearance before us. Cindy Butts noted in her introduction to the ICEC’s report:

This [appearance] resulted in significantly increased media and public interest in our work and a response to our Call for Evidence that was so large it had the unfortunate but inevitable consequence that our work took far longer to complete than was expected.¹⁸

The survey was complemented by a separate call for written evidence launched in the spring of 2022 which was targeted at cricket and equalities organisations, and by a County and Regional Cricket Survey sent to all Women’s Regional Teams, First Class Counties and County Cricket Boards. This was further supplemented by primary research into the backgrounds of cricketers and on connections between schools and talent pathways.

8. The Commission’s report, *Holding Up a Mirror to Cricket*, made the overarching recommendation:

that the ECB makes an unqualified public apology for its own failings and those of the game it governs. The apology should acknowledge that racism, sexism, elitism and class-based discrimination have existed, and still exist, in the game, and recognise the impact on victims of discrimination. It should include, in particular, a direct apology for the ECB’s and the wider game’s historic failures in relation to women’s and girls’ cricket and its failure to adequately support Black cricket in England and Wales.¹⁹

The Commission made 43 further recommendations and many more sub-recommendations on the state of equity in cricket, culture, the approach to equality, diversity and inclusion [EDI], governance and leadership, complaints, and schools and the talent pathway.

16 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), (27 June 2023), Appendix 1: para 1.2

17 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), (27 June 2023), para 6.2.3

18 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), (27 June 2023), page 5

19 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), (27 June 2023), Recommendation 1 (page 25)

ECB Response

9. Immediately following the publication of the ICEC’s report, the ECB issued an unreserved apology for “those who have faced discrimination in cricket” and “anyone who has been excluded from cricket or made to feel like they don’t belong” and committed to “strive to be the most inclusive sport in England and Wales.”²⁰ The ECB’s substantive response to the ICEC report, *Making Cricket a More Inclusive Sport*, was published on 25 September 2023. While the ECB did not provide a detailed respond to each specific recommendation in turn, it provided a narrative that set out its approach and included an update on progress. A further update was provided to us shortly before our evidence session on 20 February 2024.²¹

10. This oral evidence session with the ICEC and ECB focused on areas in which there was disagreement between the recommendations and the ECB’s response and also those in which the ECB had agreed to further investigation without committing to action. The response included a reluctance to strengthen and widen sanctions for EDI breaches in country cricket and the rejection of governance changes to the ECB to include board-level EDI and women’s cricket representation.²²

11. We also considered the decision by the ECB not to prioritise equalising pay and conditions between men’s and women’s cricket throughout the game.²³ Cindy Butts questioned the board’s approach:

Why does women’s cricket have to take the hit? Why isn’t it that the ECB and cricket are looking at the entirety of the resources they have and asking questions about, “Where is it right and proper to place our funding based on our priorities?” as opposed to, “If we take it from women here, they will have to pay the price elsewhere”? I think that is the wrong way of looking at this.²⁴

The ECB told us that equalised working conditions were delayed because they are “the process of establishing a brand new women’s professional system”, while women’s pay in The Hundred—the 100-ball tournament launched in both the men’s and women’s game in 2021—is “not quite ready in the commercial model to equalise.”²⁵

12. Cricket’s talent pathway, the route by which the most talented players move from recreational cricket to a “performance environment” and potentially into professional cricket, was identified by both the ECB and ICEC as crucial to tackling the inequity that persists in cricket. The ICEC found that:

The structure and operation of the talent pathway remains a barrier to equity and inclusion across gender, class and race. As such, it repeats and reinforces wider structural inequalities that exist across cricket in England and Wales. The scarce provision of cricket in state schools, the widespread links between cricket and private schools, the cost and time associated with

20 [ECB responds to ICEC report on equity in cricket, which finds evidence of discrimination across the game](#), England and Wales Cricket Board press release, 26 June 2023

21 England and Wales Cricket Board, [ICEC Progress Update](#), February 2024

22 [Qq4–5, Q34, Qq46–51](#)

23 [Q55, Qq65–68](#)

24 [Q8](#)

25 [Q55](#)

playing youth cricket, the lack of a systematic, contextual process for talent identification, and the relative absence of diversity amongst coaches on the talent pathway: these are all important factors which present significant barriers to an equitable system.²⁶

It recommended changes to the structures and costs of the talent pathway to ensure that it is meritocratic, inclusive, accountable, transparent and consistent, and that the talent pathway should be made free of direct costs.²⁷

13. The ECB has committed to working within the game to “clarify best practice”, introduce mandatory training and “ensure finance is not a barrier to talent pathways.”²⁸ However, it has not fully accepted the recommended actions of the ICEC of making the talent pathway free of direct costs. Both the ICEC and ECB agree that widening access to cricket at a young age, especially in the state school system, is integral to making the talent pathway more inclusive.²⁹ We recognise that the ECB itself cannot fix school sport, and we hope that its forthcoming State Schools Action Plan, in line with the recommendations of the ICEC, will provide an opportunity for the game and the Government to come together to tackle this continued inequity.³⁰

14. The ICEC found that “[i]n many cases, EDI and wider commercial goals will complement each other” but that “where EDI objectives and commercial objectives do not clearly align, EDI can be deprioritised and/or ignored” by the ECB and growth will likely take precedence.³¹ The areas in which the ECB has failed to meet the ambition of the ICEC are often those in which commercial considerations still appear to have trumped the moral imperative for action, such as on equal pay and on talent pathway costs.

15. While much of the game has supported the work of the ICEC and the ECB has begun to implement its work, there remains the ability to sanction those who fail to meet the standards required. The ICEC recommended that the role of the ECB as both regulator and promoter of the game should end with the establishment of an independent regulator “responsible for investigating alleged regulatory breaches and for making decisions about whether to bring charges.”³² The ECB has established a new “Cricket Regulator” which will be overseen by an “independent Cricket Regulatory Board” from the start of the 2024 season, which will operate at “arm’s length”³³ Whether this can achieve the independence proposed by the ICEC remains to be seen.

16. We welcome the ECB’s unreserved apology to those affected by discrimination in cricket, and the commitments the board have made to acting on much of the report of the Independent Commission into Equity in Cricket. However, we are concerned that their ambition may not translate into action on some of the ICEC’s most powerful recommendations. If this happens the ECB’s aim to be the most inclusive sport in

26 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), 27 June 2023, para 1.2.30

27 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), 27 June 2023, Recommendation 35 (pp 215–6) and Recommendation 36 (p 229)

28 England and Wales Cricket Board, [Making Cricket a More Inclusive Sport](#), (September 2023), p27

29 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), 27 June 2023, para 9.4.37 and ECB p19

30 England and Wales Cricket Board, [Making Cricket a More Inclusive Sport](#) (September 2023), p19

31 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), 27 June 2023, para 6.3.24

32 Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket, [Holding Up A Mirror To Cricket](#), 27 June 2023, Recommendation 22 (p 168)

33 England and Wales Cricket Board, [Making Cricket a More Inclusive Sport](#) (September 2023), p25 and [Q51](#)

England and Wales may not be reached. *We recommend that the ECB publish a progress report on the first anniversary of the publication of the ICEC's report responding to each recommendation and an assessment of the impact on equity on cricket.*

Chapter 3: Yorkshire County Cricket Club

17. The treatment of Azeem Rafiq at Yorkshire County Cricket Club and the club’s subsequent handling of his complaints was the catalyst for our work on equity in cricket during this Parliament. Our January 2022 report, *Racism in Cricket*, came shortly after Lord Patel of Bradford OBE had been appointed as Chair of Yorkshire CCC and taken urgent action to restore the reputation of the club and overturn the ECB’s suspension of international and major-match cricket at Headingley.³⁴

18. In December 2022, we took further evidence from Mr Rafiq and from Lord Patel. We also heard from former Essex County Cricket Club cricketer Jahid Ahmed and cricket journalist George Dobell. We sought to examine: progress on tackling racism and discrimination in cricket and specifically at Yorkshire CCC; the actions being taken by the ECB; and the ongoing experiences of players, supporters and others involved in the sport. At that time, Mr Rafiq welcomed the progress made at Yorkshire CCC, but expressed anxiety that the club “could go back to business as usual” rather than continue to reform.³⁵

The return of Colin Graves

19. Yorkshire CCC has held substantial debts since Colin Graves provided the club a multi-million pound loan in the early 2000s.³⁶ By January 2024 the club’s overall debt stood at nearly £17 million, with the club’s most recent accounts showing £14.9 million still owed to the Graves’ family trusts.³⁷ The club’s revenues had been affected by the November 2021 suspension of test cricket as a result of the racism scandal—lifted in February 2022—and the further lack of a test match in 2024. Its costs had also increased as result of sanctions from the ECB’s Cricket Discipline Commission relating to racism, and legal fees following employment tribunal claims.³⁸ In March 2023, the club was reported to be “months away from administration” and involved in discussions with “a number of potential sources of finance.”³⁹

20. In January 2024 the then Chair of Yorkshire CCC Harry Chathli confirmed that the club had spoken to more than 350 interested parties but found that “many potential suitors were primarily interested in purchasing the Club outright, thereby ending its member-owned society status.”⁴⁰ The Yorkshire CCC board announced on 10 January 2024 that it was recommending a new loan agreement with Colin Graves, who had previously withdrawn from a 2023 bid for the club, over which he claimed that the board “may have acted negligently to the impending financial crisis that the club is facing”⁴¹ The 2024 loan agreement was contingent on constitutional changes to the club enabling Mr Graves to

34 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Seventh report of session 2021–22, *Racism in cricket*, HC 1001, para 5 and Oral evidence taken on 13 December 2022, HC (2022–23) 812, [Q729](#)

35 Oral evidence taken on 13 December 2022, HC (2022–23) 812, [Qq766–7](#)

36 *Colin Graves set to return to Yorkshire as board ‘agree to recommend’ loan offer from former chairman*, Sky Sports News, 11 January 2024

37 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, *Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting*, (11 January 2024) and Yorkshire County Cricket Club, *Annual Report and Accounts 2022*, (March 2023), p25

38 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, *Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting*, (11 January 2024)

39 *Yorkshire months away from administration after racism scandal*, The Telegraph, 24 March 2023

40 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, *Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting*, (11 January 2024)

41 *Colin Graves withdraws Yorkshire chair bid in acrimonious row with club*, The Telegraph, 5 June 2023

return as Chair and to make substantial changes to the membership of the board.⁴² These were put to and accepted by an Emergency General Meeting of the club's members on 2 February.⁴³

21. Mr Graves was chief executive of Yorkshire CCC from 2002 to 2007 and its chair until 2015, when he was appointed Chair of the ECB. Although Mr Graves had no formal role with the club after this time and was not responsible for the Graves trusts, former Yorkshire CCC Chair, Roger Hutton, claimed to us that:

Whilst the trust has independent trustees and a full-time observer on the board reporting to it, what was happening on a weekly basis sometimes appeared to me as if Mr Graves was influencing the trust and sometimes spoke as if he was. Mr Graves expressed concern on how the investigation [into Azeem Rafiq's claims] had taken place.⁴⁴

Lord Patel disclosed to us in December 2022 that the ECB had told him that Mr Graves "could not be associated with the governance of the club" and that he had sought to rejoin the board of Yorkshire CCC that year but was rejected at the interview stage.⁴⁵ The return of test cricket to Headingley was reportedly contingent on "ending Colin Graves influence" on the club through the removal of veto powers from the Graves' trusts.⁴⁶

22. In a 2023 interview, Mr Graves denied that there was institutional racism at Yorkshire CCC and described the abuse, which the Cricket Discipline Commission found to be racist, as "banter".⁴⁷ Mr Graves subsequently apologised, telling us that he "did not realise the insensitivity of that word",⁴⁸ although in the 2023 interview he had already said: "I know people don't like the word".⁴⁹ Between the announcement of the February 2024 EGM to ratify the changes required for the further loan to the club, Mr Graves issued a statement, which included a statement that he had "apologised for any and all mistakes either I or the club has made over the painful and difficult years of the recent past" and that "[l]essons have been learned and will continue to be acted on as we move forward and focus on the future of our great club."⁵⁰ The statement did not include details of the mistakes or lessons to which Mr Graves was referring.

23. Following the announcement of Mr Graves' refinancing agreement, the ECB issued a statement noting the work undertaken at Yorkshire CCC to make cricket more inclusive and calling for Mr Graves to put the words of his apology "into action". The ECB also noted that "there are also significant powers which can be used to hold Yorkshire County Cricket Club to account if it does not continue with the progress and reform we have seen over the last few years."⁵¹

42 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting](#), (11 January 2024)

43 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [YCCC Statement on approval of Colin Graves' loan agreement](#), (10 January 2024), Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting](#), (11 January 2024) and Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Members vote in favour of amendments to rules relating to Colin Graves' Financing Proposal](#), (2 February 2024)

44 Oral Evidence taken on 25 January 2022: HC (2021–22) 855, [Q370](#)

45 Oral evidence taken on 13 December 2022, HC (2022–23) 812, [Q735](#)

46 [Return of international cricket to Yorkshire contingent on ending Colin Graves influence](#), *The Cricketer*, (11 February 2022)

47 [Former Yorkshire chairman says he never witnessed racism at the club](#), *Sky Sports News*, (12 June 2023)

48 [Q108](#)

49 [Former Yorkshire chairman says he never witnessed racism at the club](#), *Sky Sports News*, (12 June 2023)

50 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Statement from Colin Graves to YCCC Members](#), (16 January 2024)

51 England and Wales Cricket Board, [ECB statement on Yorkshire County Cricket Club](#), 11 January 2024

24. Ahead of the return of Mr Graves to Yorkshire CCC, Azeem Rafiq wrote of the “moral and financial failure” at Yorkshire that made such a return possible, and suggested:

[Colin Graves] has to show he has accepted what has happened in the past, and is ready to take substantial action and offer clear direction now and when difficult decisions are necessary in the future.⁵²

Sporting Equals, a charity established by Sport England to promote ethnic diversity across sport and physical activity, published an open letter to the sports minister the Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP, the ECB, professional County Cricket Clubs and their sponsors that warned:

the potential reinstatement of Colin Graves as Chairman of Yorkshire County Cricket Club would undermine the progress made. His reinstatement would send a message that emboldens those who perpetuate the myth that racism is simply banter, that it is enough to pay lip service to policies and procedures. It would make a mockery of the suffering of ethnically diverse players across the country. It would be a rejection of the ICEC Report’s thorough investigation and well considered conclusions.⁵³

In contrast, The Cricketer magazine published an editorial that argued “there was no realistic alternative to Graves” and that it was “time to move on”.⁵⁴

The culture at Yorkshire CCC

25. We invited Mr Graves to appear before us, alongside his predecessor as Chair Harry Chathli, to discuss the circumstances of his return and his vision for the future of the club in the context of equity in cricket,

26. At the evidence session, Harry Chathli told us that Yorkshire CCC “has been transformed completely from what we had read about the club back in 2019.” He highlighted the decision to make the talent pathway free, the near-doubling of the membership of the club and the creation of a board-level safeguarding lead.⁵⁵ Colin Graves reassured us that “everything that has been put in place will be left as is and will be even enhanced when we can” and that he is “200%” committed to the club’s equality, diversity and inclusion plan.⁵⁶

27. Among the changes made as part of the reform of Yorkshire CCC since the racism scandal was the decision during Lord Patel’s tenure as Chair to remove the entire coaching and medical staff, many of whom contested Azeem Rafiq’s claims of racism that were subsequently upheld by the CDC.⁵⁷ These dismissals were subject to legal action and led to costs of at least £3.9 million for the club.⁵⁸ Lord Patel argued that the ECB required him

52 [Moral and financial failure at Yorkshire is set to allow Colin Graves back in the door](#), The Guardian, 6 January 2024

53 Sporting Equals, [An Open Letter Regarding Colin Graves](#), (8 January 2024)

54 [Colin Graves’ return to Yorkshire was the only option](#), The Cricketer, 9 January 2024

55 [Q130](#)

56 [Q131](#), [Q112](#)

57 [Full letter from sacked Yorkshire CCC staff over Azeem Rafiq affair that led to all 14 losing their jobs](#), The Yorkshire Post, 4 October 2022 and Cricket Discipline Commission, [ECB and Yorkshire CCC: Decision of the disciplinary panel as to sanction](#), 28 July 2023

58 [Q102](#)

to remove the staff, which the ECB denies.⁵⁹ We asked Mr Graves whether he intended to reappoint any of those sacked staff members, to which he told it “has never even been discussed or even thought about” and that the Yorkshire CCC board will “look at positions as and when they become available”.⁶⁰ Following the session, Director of Cricket Darren Gough stepped down, making a position available.⁶¹ The club subsequently denied reports that dismissed former staff members are poised to return,⁶² although the club’s former CEO Mark Arthur, who resigned in November 2021 in the wake of the racism scandal, is reported to have been appointed as a consultant to Mr Graves.⁶³

28. We invited Mr Graves to expand on the apologies he had made following the announcement of his return. He told us that his apology came “because basically my offer then was being discussed with the board and I needed to get that out there as a proper full apology.”⁶⁴ Despite having spoken to the media about the club in June 2023,⁶⁵ he argued that January 2024 was the first opportunity he had to make an apology.⁶⁶ We also asked Mr Graves whether he had spoken to Azeem Rafiq to apologise for his treatment at the club. He had not, but after prompting during our hearing he “put on record” his apology.⁶⁷ Following the hearing, Mr Graves emailed an apology to Mr Rafiq.⁶⁸

The future of Yorkshire CCC

29. The governance changes proposed as part of Mr Graves’ loan to the club were endorsed by 88% of those who took part the club’s EGM (around 13% of the overall membership, based on the 2023 membership figure).⁶⁹ The deal had been recommended by the board on the basis that it was the “one viable option”, and that the ECB “is unable to provide longer term assistance or financial support”.⁷⁰ We subsequently asked the ECB whether it would have allowed Yorkshire CCC to collapse. Richard Gould, chief executive of the ECB, told us it would not.⁷¹

30. Mr Graves made at least two attempts to return to the club as part of a financing deal since the beginning of 2023 and prior to the board’s acceptance of the January 2024 deal. He is reported to have been approached in January 2023 of that year, but announced in June he was removing himself from contention as he was only the “chairman of last

59 [Lord Kamlesh Patel defends time in charge at Headingley](#), The Yorkshire Post, 18 February 2023 and [ECB chiefs dismiss Lord Patel’s claims he sacked 16 members of Yorkshire staff on their instructions](#), Daily Mail, 8 March 2023

60 [Q134](#)

61 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Darren Gough steps down from role as Managing Director of Cricket](#), (14 March 2024)

62 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Statement from the Yorkshire County Cricket Club](#), (15 March 2024)

63 [Yorkshire chief executive Mark Arthur resigns in wake of Azeem Rafiq racism case](#), Sky Sports News, 12 November 2021 and [Yorkshire return beckons for individual “dismissive” of racism complaints](#), The Cricketer, 27 February 2024

64 [Q108](#)

65 See, for example, [Colin Graves withdraws Yorkshire chair bid in acrimonious row with club](#), The Telegraph, 5 June 2023 and [Former Yorkshire chairman says he never witnessed racism at the club](#), Sky Sports News, (12 June 2023)

66 [Q108](#)

67 [Qq109–110, Qq118–122](#)

68 Letter from Colin Graves to Azeem Rafiq, 4 March 2024 (Not published)

69 The deal was approved by 746 votes to 99, with 48 invalid votes (Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Members vote in favour of amendments to rules relating to Colin Graves’ Financing Proposal](#), (2 February 2024)). Harry Chathli told us the club membership in 2023 was 5,782. ([Q130](#))

70 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting](#), (11 January 2024)

71 [Q96](#)

resort” while the Yorkshire CCC board was seeking alternatives. The then Yorkshire CCC board responded that “the terms of his return would require total control of the board and executive.”⁷² The successful proposal from January 2024 included a requirement that all but two of the ten members of the Yorkshire CCC board would step down, and that Mr Graves and three directors nominated by him would be appointed, creating a controlling majority prior to the remaining vacancies being filled.⁷³

31. In 2020, when Mr Graves was its Chair, the ECB introduced the County Governance Framework [CGF] as part of its County Partnership Agreements with county clubs such as Yorkshire. The CGF includes requirements for “a formal and transparent process for the appointment and/or election of new members to the Board”, a point explicitly highlighted to Mr Graves by ECB Chair Richard Thompson in a letter sent following his return to the club.⁷⁴ The CGF also requires term limits on chairs (6 years) and directors generally (12 years).⁷⁵ Mr Graves has previously served 7 years as Chair of Yorkshire CCC and 12 years on the board overall. The ECB denied that Mr Graves was in breach of the governance arrangements set out in the CGF; however, Mr Graves told us that he intended to serve an additional two to three years as Chair and Mr Chathli had previously indicated that the appointment would breach Yorkshire CCC’s constitutional arrangements.⁷⁶ Breaches of County Partnership Agreements, including governance and other issues such as on equality, diversity and inclusion standards, can lead to sanctions being made on clubs.

32. In his statement to Yorkshire CCC Members prior to the EGM, Colin Graves set out his manifesto for the future of the club. In it, he affirmed: “I want to make it clear that there are no discussions or plans to change the mutual status of YCCC”. This was subject to the caveat that “in the changing and challenging arena of both UK and World sport, nothing can be ruled out in the future.”⁷⁷ Mr Chathli told us that the board had ruled out offers from bidders that “would like to buy the club wholesale”.⁷⁸

33. During our evidence session, Mr Graves denied a report from *The Guardian* that he had been seeking to demutualise the club as part of his attempt to return.⁷⁹ However, during our hearing, we presented a copy of a letter addressed from him to the club from September 2023 that included the requirement “in terms of the key terms and conditions related to the offer, YCCC converting from a mutual society into a private limited company before the loan is made, or the board of YCCC using all reasonable levers to effect the restructure.” The terms of this deal would have enabled a refinancing of the Graves trust debt, to be replaced by a consortium led by Mr Graves. That debt would have been repayable in full after two years, although at any time, this loan could have been converted into shares in the club, leaving its members with a stake as low as 10%. This

72 [Colin Graves withdraws Yorkshire chair bid in acrimonious row with club](#), The Telegraph, 5 June 2023

73 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting](#), (11 January 2024). Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, previously acting Chair of Yorkshire CCC and Leslie Ferrar, a board member since May 2022 remained on the board.

74 England and Wales Cricket Board, County Governance Framework 2020–2024, Section 9.1, [Letter from England and Wales Cricket Board to the Chair](#), relating to oral evidence follow-up, dated 1 March 2024 and [Letter from England and Wales Cricket Board to Colin Graves](#), relating Yorkshire Cricket County Club, dated 15 February 2024

75 England and Wales Cricket Board, County Governance Framework 2020–2024, Section 3

76 [Qq92–93](#), [Q147](#)

77 Yorkshire County Cricket Club, [Statement from Colin Graves to YCCC Members](#), (16 January 2024)

78 [Q98](#)

79 [Q149](#)

bid was accompanied by a statement that Mr Graves was “committed to protecting and enhancing the interests of YCCC’s members.” The letter did not explain how ending the member-led status of the club would achieve this.⁸⁰

34. Mr Graves eventually remembered his September bid.⁸¹ He nonetheless told us that he had “no ambition to own Yorkshire County Cricket Club” and that he did not believe the future of Yorkshire CCC was best served being owned by him, rather than the members of Yorkshire County Cricket Club.⁸² We agree.

35. Decisions on the future of Yorkshire County Cricket Club are best made by its members, with good governance and a continued commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion led by an independent, open and transparent board. We want Yorkshire CCC to continue to reform and to succeed.

36. We expect the ECB to closely monitor Yorkshire CCC to their work and ensure that there is no return to the ‘business as usual’ that allowed a culture of discrimination to take root and thrive at the club. We urge the ECB and the Cricket Regulatory to pay particular attention to the future performance of Yorkshire CCC in relation to inequality. The Committee will take close interest in their performance.

80 Letter from Colin Graves to Yorkshire CCC, 25 September 2023 (not published)

81 [Qq150–155](#)

82 [Q157](#)

Conclusions and recommendations

Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket

1. We welcome the ECB's unreserved apology to those affected by discrimination in cricket, and the commitments the board have made to acting on much of the report of the Independent Commission into Equity in Cricket. However, we are concerned that their ambition may not translate into action on some of the ICEC's most powerful recommendations. If this happens the ECB's aim to be the most inclusive sport in England and Wales may not be reached. *We recommend that the ECB publish a progress report on the first anniversary of the publication of the ICEC's report responding to each recommendation and an assessment of the impact on equity on cricket.* (Paragraph 16)

Yorkshire County Cricket Club

2. Decisions on the future of Yorkshire County Cricket Club are best made by its members, with good governance and a continued commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion led by an independent, open and transparent board. We want Yorkshire CCC to continue to reform and to succeed. (Paragraph 35)
3. We expect the ECB to closely monitor Yorkshire CCC to their work and ensure that there is no return to the 'business as usual' that allowed a culture of discrimination to take root and thrive at the club. We urge the ECB and the Cricket Regulatory to pay particular attention to the future performance of Yorkshire CCC in relation to inequality. The Committee will take close interest in their performance. (Paragraph 36)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 26 March 2024

Members present:

Dame Caroline Dinenage, in the Chair

Clive Efford

Julie Elliott

Rt Hon Damian Green

Dr Rupa Huq

Simon Jupp

Giles Watling

Draft Report (*Equity in Cricket*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 36 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No.134.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 16 April at 9.30 am.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 20 February 2024

Cindy Butts, Chair, Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket; **Sir Brendan Barber**, Commissioner, Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket; **Dr Michael Collins**, Commissioner, Independent Commission on Equity in Cricket [Q1–35](#)

Richard Thompson, Chair, England and Wales Cricket Board; **Richard Gould**, Chief Executive, England and Wales Cricket Board; **Clare Connor CBE**, Deputy Chief Executive, England and Wales Cricket Board [Q36–96](#)

Harry Chathli, Former Chair, Yorkshire County Cricket Club; **Colin Graves CBE**, Chair, Yorkshire County Cricket Club [Q97–161](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2023–24

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| 1st | Safety at major sporting events | HC 174 |
| 2nd | Gambling regulation | HC 176 |
| 3rd | Pre-appointment hearing for Chair of the BBC Board | HC 383 |
| 1st Special | Draft Media Bill: Government Responses to the Committee's Twelfth and Thirteenth Reports of Session 2022–23 | HC 155 |
| 2nd Special | Connected tech: smart or sinister?: Government and the Information Commissioner's Office Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2022–23 | HC 302 |
| 3rd Special | Connected tech: AI and creative technology: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2022–23 | HC 441 |
| 4th Special | NFTs and the Blockchain: the risks to sport and culture: Government Response to the Committee's Fourteenth Report of Session 2022–23 | HC 461 |
| 5th Special | Safety at major sporting events: Government Response to the Committee's First Report | HC 617 |

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| 1st | Amending the Online Safety Bill | HC 271 |
| 2nd | Promoting Britain abroad | HC 156 |
| 3rd | Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda | HC 155 |
| 4th | What next for the National Lottery? | HC 154 |
| 5th | Economics of music streaming: follow-up | HC 874 |
| 6th | Current issues in rugby union | HC 1018 |
| 7th | Sustainability of local journalism | HC 153 |
| 8th | Appointment of Richard Sharp as Chair of the BBC | HC 1147 |
| 9th | Football governance | HC 1288 |
| 10th | Connected tech: smart or sinister? | HC 157 |
| 11th | Connected tech: AI and creative technology | HC 1643 |
| 12th | Draft Media Bill: Radio Measures | HC 1287 |

| Number | Title | Reference |
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| 13th | Draft Media Bill: Final Report | HC 1807 |
| 14th | NFTs and the Blockchain: the risks to sport and culture | HC 598 |
| 1st Special | Major cultural and sporting events: Government Response to Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2021–22 | HC 452 |
| 2nd Special | Influencer Culture: Lights, camera, inaction?: ASA System and CMA Responses to the Committee's Twelfth Report of Session 2021–22 | HC 610 |
| 3rd Special | Influencer Culture: Lights, camera, inaction?: Government Response to the Committee's Twelfth Report of Session 2021–22 | HC 687 |
| 4th Special | Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP | HC 801 |
| 5th Special | Promoting Britain abroad | HC 1103 |
| 6th Special | Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda | HC 1104 |
| 7th Special | What next for the National Lottery?: Government and Gambling Commission Responses to the Committee's Fourth Report | HC 1208 |
| 8th Special | Economics of music streaming: follow-up: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report | HC 1245 |
| 9th Special | The sustainability of local journalism: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report | HC 1378 |
| 10th Special | Appointment of Richard Sharp as Chair of the BBC: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report | HC 1641 |
| 11th Special | Football Governance: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report | HC 1850 |
| 12th | What next for the National Lottery?: National Lottery Distributors' Response to the Committee's Fourth Report | HC 1913 |

Session 2021–22

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| 1st | The future of UK music festivals | HC 49 |
| 2nd | Economics of music streaming | HC 50 |
| 3rd | Concussion in sport | HC 46 |
| 4th | Sport in our communities | HC 45 |
| 5th | Pre-appointment hearing for Information Commissioner | HC 260 |
| 6th | Pre-appointment hearing for Chair of the Charity Commission | HC 261 |
| 7th | Racism in cricket | HC 1001 |
| 8th | The Draft Online Safety Bill and the legal but harmful debate | HC 1039 |

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| 9th | Major cultural and sporting events | HC 259 |
| 10th | Another pre-appointment hearing for Chair of the Charity Commission | HC 1200 |
| 11th | Pre-appointment hearing for Chair of Ofcom | HC 48 |
| 12th | Influencer culture: Lights, camera, inaction? | HC 258 |
| 1st Special Report | The future of public service broadcasting: Government Response to Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2019–21 | HC 273 |
| 2nd Special Report | Economics of music streaming: Government and Competition and Markets Authority Responses to Committee's Second Report | HC 719 |
| 3rd Special Report | Sport in our communities: Government Response to Committee's Fourth Report | HC 761 |
| 4th Special Report | The future of public service broadcasting: Ofcom Response to Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2019–21 | HC 832 |
| 5th Special Report | The Draft Online Safety Bill and the legal but harmful debate: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report | HC 1039 |

Session 2019–21

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| 1st | The Covid-19 crisis and charities | HC 281 |
| 2nd | Misinformation in the COVID-19 Infodemic | HC 234 |
| 3rd | Impact of COVID-19 on DCMS sectors: First Report | HC 291 |
| 4th | Broadband and the road to 5G | HC 153 |
| 5th | Pre-appointment hearing for Chair of the BBC | HC 1119 |
| 6th | The future of public service broadcasting | HC 156 |
| 1st Special Report | BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2018–19: TV licences for over 75s Government and the BBC's Responses to the Committee's Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19 | HC 98 |
| 2nd Special Report | The Covid-19 crisis and charities: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019–21 | HC 438 |
| 3rd Special Report | Impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors: First Report: Government Response to Committee's Third Report of Session 2019–21 | HC 885 |
| 4th Special Report | Misinformation in the COVID-19 Infodemic: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report | HC 894 |