

Written evidence submitted by the England and Wales Cricket Board

**Submission to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Select Committee Call for evidence**

Sport in Our Communities Inquiry

December 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the National Governing Body (NGB) for cricket in England and Wales (ECB), we are responsible for all aspects of the game from grassroots through to the elite level. We are a not-for-profit organisation, with all revenue generated being reinvested to sustain and grow cricket. We are the only NGB which funds every aspect of our sport: international teams (men's, women's, and disabilities), professional clubs and the recreational game.

COVID-19 continues to be the single biggest challenge cricket has faced. Throughout this crisis, we have been guided by three key principles:

- to prioritise the safety of everyone in the game;
- to support society's efforts in tackling the pandemic; and
- to act as a responsible guardian of the game by protecting the cricket network as far as possible.

2. HOW CRICKET IS GOVERNED

As the NGB for cricket, the ECB exists to grow the game of cricket in England and Wales. We do this by working with our network of 39 county cricket clubs and boards who are the bedrock of the game.

At the beginning of 2020, we embarked on our 5-year strategy *Inspiring Generations* to deliver six key priorities:

1) Grow and nurture the core, 2) Inspire through elite teams, 3) Make cricket accessible, 4) Engage children and young people, 5) Transform women's and girls' cricket, and 6) Support our communities.

While these priorities remain the right ones, COVID-19 continues to threaten our ability to deliver them.

All the revenue we generate, including from broadcast and sponsorship contracts, is reinvested back into the game to maintain and grow the cricket infrastructure; from modernising our 6,500 cricket clubs to investing in the future development of our professional county cricket clubs.

Over half of our annual revenue is distributed directly into the cricket network to deliver the six priority areas. The remainder covers the running of the England teams, competitions, reserves and central running costs for the long term development of the game.

Our six priorities areas were agreed following an 18 month period of consultation with the game. The ECB's independent Board of Directors oversees the implementation of our strategic plan and holds the ECB and the wider network to account.

The ECB is fully compliant with the Sport England's Governance Code and we are working on plans to foster greater diversity and inclusivity throughout the wider game.

3. IMPACT OF COVID ON CRICKET IN OUR COMMUNITIES

We estimate that the game has lost between £70-80m this year because of the following changes Covid-19 has created:

- A disrupted international and domestic schedule for men's, women's and international cricket;
- An entire season (six months) without crowds attending matches;
- Five months of no grassroots cricket activity whatsoever;

- A further three months of severely impacted recreational cricket.

Our approach throughout the pandemic has been to try and support ourselves as a game as best we can. The ECB provided an emergency support package of £86.5m to the cricket network and we have guaranteed its current levels of core funding until at least February 2022 to help provide some security.

So far, the ECB has issued more than 700 grants and 40 loans to the recreational game via our Return to Cricket Grant and Emergency loan schemes. The schemes are both still open and we are continuing to get a steady flow of applications.

The ECB funded over 3,200 PPE packs for clubs this summer and are on track to complete 60 new non-turf pitches in parks (working with local authorities in places such as London, Luton, Manchester and Bradford). In addition, we delivered £1.94m in strategic grants towards projects including pavilions, indoor centres, new grounds and practice facilities.

The ECB also delivered non-turf pitches in park sites with a total value of £6.26m including 34 new cricket pitches built this summer in park sites – a further 30 in development to be built this winter in time for use in the spring, regulations permitting. The ECB further issued £555,000 in emergency grants to support 42 clubs in crisis due to flooding and drought this year.

The ECB has also supported professional cricket clubs and the recreational game to access nearly £25m worth of government, Sport England and Sport Wales support to date. This funding has been an absolute lifeline in addressing the immediate cashflow challenges of clubs big and small. However, the financial support is merely buying time and keeping the clubs in existence, as the big financial hole continues to grow.

The Committee should note that ongoing lockdown restrictions are continuing to hurt both the professional and recreational game. At the professional level, many of our First Class County Cricket Clubs who have diversified their revenues streams in the winter through conference and events to set them up for the next season, have seen these revenue streams turned off. With no means to generate revenue over the coming winter months, their finances have been decimated.

Similarly at the recreational level, many of our clubs have diversified their cricket activity to get them through the winter months including running coach education courses, children's indoor cricket activity sessions and winter training camps, all of which has been impacted by the recent lockdown announcements.

4. RISKS TO THE GAME

The game has sadly seen losses to almost every part our cricket workforce as we try to weather this storm. These are highly skilled jobs that once lost are difficult to recover. On average, county cricket clubs employ 150 people directly in their local economy. These highly skilled and valuable jobs range from cricketers, coaches, umpires, physios, doctors to HR, retail, marketing, communication, finance, groundsmanship, facilities and security roles. In addition, those clubs with conference and event businesses employ a further 100-200 people in catering, hotel, retail, administration, and sponsorship roles. Cricket supports these ancillary roles through the local supply chain. In normal times, many of these roles are excellent entry level roles for young people giving them local employment opportunities.

In addition, our 39 county cricket boards employ on average 20 people each directly in highly valuable roles from coaches, sport development officers to finance, marketing, digital,

groundsmanship, facilities management and HR roles. It is precisely these high value roles that are at risk to the long-term future of the game as the pandemic continues.

A lack of returning crowds and a severely impacted 2021 season remains the biggest risk to the overall game. A second season of effectively no income for county cricket clubs and the ECB through no attendances at matches would be catastrophic. Even the partial return of fans will severely impact on our sport.

If 2021 is severely impacted, ECB support will be critical again for the very survival of our County Clubs. However, to do this, we will have to make very difficult decisions about how we fund that, which could mean significant cuts to other growth areas such as women's and girls, inner-city facilities, and schools' cricket.

The impact of COVID-19 on participation levels remains the biggest risk to grassroots cricket. While we do not yet have specific figures on the impact of lockdown on cricket participation, initial feedback from our clubs suggests that despite their best efforts to put in COVID-safe protocols and the socially distanced nature of cricket itself, the lockdown restrictions continue to negatively impact on participation levels at a time where physical activity should be playing a greater role in how the nation emerges from the pandemic.

This inactivity trend is worryingly replicated in schools with recent figures suggesting up to 25% of secondary schools are not able to consistently offer regular physical education.

Whilst our own research indicates that 49% of teachers interviewed wanted their school to put a greater emphasis on physical activity this year, they remain concerned about how to deliver physical activity safely in a COVID-secure way.

Without regular and consistent opportunities to participate, our 2.5m players and 42,000 volunteers are in danger of being lost to the game in the long term. We are especially concerned about the impact inactivity is having on children and young people, the women's game and people from disadvantaged communities. We risk losing a generation to sport, depriving them of the physical and mental wellbeing benefits of taking part in sport, whether it's playing, coaching, volunteering or indeed deriving a living from the game.

Our professional and recreational cricket clubs are needed now more than ever and yet without additional targeted support from Government, these community assets, with ties going back over the generations, risk being lost for good.

5. THE BENEFITS OF CRICKET TO COMMUNITIES

Cricket is a special game. A team game, where individuals perform. It is a simple game, with layers of complexity. And whilst it is just a game, it is also so much more than that. It has respect, resilience and leadership at its heart, allowing the game to transcend age, gender, race and ability. It connects communities and improves lives by bringing people together, and binds them through a shared passion for cricket. It delivers profound mental, physical and cultural benefits and can help to positively shape the individuals, communities and societies involved.

We've seen cricket's ability to bring communities together in abundance throughout the pandemic. *Together Through This Test* was cricket's response to COVID-19. The initiative had three key areas of focus: Health, Children and Young People and Connecting Communities. The campaign delivered 432 separate local initiatives including: 144 fundraising ideas generating £1,241,221, 128 projects around mental health and wellbeing and 52 Children and Young people schemes to support learning during lockdown such as BBC Bitesize Sports Week (with over 100,000 downloads accessed).

Cricket is uniquely placed to help Government deliver on many of its policy priorities as we emerge from the pandemic; from tackling the obesity crisis, especially in children and fostering greater community cohesion to boosting educational attainment through developing key life skills.

However, our ability to capitalise on these opportunities remains in jeopardy without urgent government support to ensure our sport can not only survive but thrive and help the nation come back stronger after the pandemic.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS: KEY MEASURES OF SUPPORT TO INCREASE THE RESILIENCE OF CRICKET CLUBS AND VENUES

1. A renewed focus from Government on the importance and value of sport in making our nation healthy and well:

- Recognise the importance of an active nation in the fight against coronavirus and in supporting the nation to emerge stronger from the pandemic.
- Prioritise the physical and mental health of the nation through supporting sporting activity in future reviews of COVID restrictions.

2. A Sports Recovery Fund, administered by Sport England, with targeted new investment to provide:

- Support for community cricket clubs to build back stronger from COVID-19; including Women and Girls and targeted projects in disadvantaged communities (extending Sport England's Return to Play Fund to cover summer sports).
- Targeted capital investment into greener pavilions and pitches for long term sustainability.
- Support for ECB should supporters not return from the start of the next cricket season (which will mean ECB will struggle to support community cricket in the way it has to date).

3. Regulatory and Policy change to help cricket support ourselves:

- VAT reduction on future events and activity to generate cashflow, akin to that given to the culture and hospitality sectors earlier in the pandemic.
- Indemnify against future ticket losses should the 2021 season be impacted (unlike 2020, market insurance is no longer available owing to COVID-19).
- Further extension of business rates relief for community cricket clubs beyond March 2021.
- A Sports Betting Right to protect sporting integrity and create a new income stream to invest into community sport.

4. Return to Play guidance to support cricket activity

Following the end of national lockdown restrictions on 2nd December, Government should continue to recognise the importance of playing sport to physical and mental health and the low risk of transmission so that outdoor team sport can continue. We stand ready to support Government's scientific and medical advisers on what further assurances they may need to support the return to play.

5. Transform the delivery of school sport

We call upon the Government to deliver on their commitment in the 2019 School Sport and Activity Action Plan for an hour of dedicated time in the school day to physical activity.

The advent of the pandemic has exposed weaknesses in the delivery of the Primary schools PE and Sport premium, which is reliant on external coaches to deliver quality physical activity provision in schools. We wish to see the expansion of a sustainable sport and physical activity teaching workforce

who work closely with NGBs and community clubs to connect schools with community club opportunities.

Finally, we wish to see greater and improved school sport delivery included in teacher training and continuous career professional development to ensure that teachers are competent and confident to deliver quality physical activity as we emerge from the pandemic.

Ends.