

Croquet Association – Written evidence (NPS0066)

Introduction

The Croquet Association (CA), which was formed as the United All England Croquet Association in 1897, is the national governing body for the sport of croquet in England with over 8000 members. The sport is organised through nine regional, autonomous federations. Nationally, there are around 250 clubs; most of which are a member of their local federation and of the CA. Members elect a Council to represent their interests and the Council delegates day to day management to an Executive Board. The sport is run almost entirely by voluntary effort, having only one full time paid manager.

There are several forms of croquet but the most popular by far are Association Croquet (AC) and Golf Croquet (GC). England currently stands second in the world at AC and third at GC.

Both forms of Croquet are competitive sports that test players' physical, mental and strategic skills and numerous national, regional, county and club tournaments are held throughout the year. In addition, the CA hosts, in turn, both AC and GC world championships. Many members however are content to play the sport socially and greatly enjoy the opportunities it provides for exercise and social interaction.

The CA is one of eleven full members of the World Croquet Federation which also has a further eighteen associate and observer member nations.

Answers to questions raised:

1 *How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?*

Croquet clubs often face problems; of not being taken seriously, of a lack of recognition of the sport, difficulties in finding the right person to speak to about promoting events, community involvement, making connections, and getting help and guidance in general.

Croquet is a sport that is taken up by many upon retirement. Many reports show the financial benefits to the NHS and the economy in keeping older people active and yet croquet never seems to be considered or included in strategies. In fact, far too many initiatives aimed at older people can be very patronising and seem to assume that they are all in care homes or suffering from illnesses. There is insufficient emphasis given to keeping people active when they retire.

Croquet is an activity that provides competition as well as social, physical and mental engagement. Just because a person has reached a certain age, they do not all suddenly want to give up all sport – they may find a sport they have

played for many years has become impossible to continue but they still want to be part of sport and suitable sports should be promoted.

A proposal by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) to extend its Active Across Ages intergenerational programme to sport was developed with the Croquet Association and Bowls England but has not got off the ground because the YST was unable to obtain funding. This was an exciting idea that seemed to fulfil many of the aspirations of these bodies but there was no means found to fund it.

Social prescribing receives much attention and it is a fundamentally great idea. However, in practice it is exceedingly difficult to get a club engaged with the local link workers and when they do, they are expected to cover all the financial costs themselves. This may be acceptable to large clubs from professional sports, but it is not realistic for small clubs and minority sports who may be able to offer exactly the thing that inspires someone to get active. A good example of forming a more co-ordinated approach can be found in Nailsea near Bristol where the GP practice, Tyntesfield Medical Group has given a grant to the Nailsea Community Group to co-ordinate a health and well-being initiative in the town, of which Nailsea Croquet Club is a part.

We would like to see much better communication between all the bodies listed above and the NGBs of ALL sports. There also needs to be a recognition that many sports operate on a shoestring with volunteers being the most important element at all levels of the sport's structure. Having officers in these bodies specifically dedicated to minority sports may raise awareness of the issues faced by these organisations.

2 How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

Over the years croquet has struggled to attract younger players and although we do have some successful young players, these are few. In fact, less than 2% of our members are juniors.

The CA is currently investigating how to attract more younger players. We have considered several potential barriers that may prevent younger people taking up our sport:

- The sport's image (perceived as a sport for older people)
- Lack of visibility – they do not know about croquet.
- Poor information – they do not know where to find out about our sport.
- The concept of being a sport rather than simply an activity or a way to keep fit may deter less competitive children.

Once onboard young people may find some barriers to their progression, e.g., the cost of equipment, which may need to change as they grow taller; although generally, clubs provide all the equipment required.

Actions being considered to increase the number of young players include:

- An improved social media presence using images and presentation attractive to young people.
- Identify target groups among the young and providing marketing material and advice for clubs.
- Re-skilling some of our many coaches with differentiated approaches to coaching younger people and developing specific coaching programmes for young people at club level.
- Offering introduction sessions led, or supported by, younger players.
- Identifying volunteers with a particular interest in coaching young player.
- Family friendly fees for coaching and for annual club subscriptions.
- Taking steps to avoid disenfranchisement of older players who may prefer to have quiet times.
- Encouraging older club members to bring along family and friends – e.g., grandchildren days.
- Encourage club members to share their love of the sport with youth organisations.

One club, Nottingham Croquet Club, has been leading the way. In 2019, dismayed by a report from the Sports and Recreation Alliance that showed less than 14% of children in Nottinghamshire are active for 60 minutes a day, the club launched a “Croquet for All” initiative to attract younger players. They looked for examples of good practice and found it in New Zealand, who had 10 of the 24 players that took part in a recent Under-21 GC World Championship. With help from the National Development Officer of New Zealand they embarked on a “mallet sports” initiative involving 5 local schools and nearly 400 children trying the sport through a fun form called “Pirates”. The programme continued with an after-school club that culminated in a “finals day” during the U-21 World Championship and a presentation from the President of World Croquet. Lessons learned included:

- Use of “mallet sports” as a label to overcome a perceived prejudice to croquet as an activity for “posh old people”,
- More traction was gained with pupils in years 5 and 6 than with secondary pupils,
- Primary schools have some funding to encourage sports, particularly for children who do not usually join in,
- Croquet is attractive to children who do not like team games, and
- It is essential to fully integrate juniors into a club.

Although progress on this initiative in 2020 was hampered by the pandemic, it proved possible to run a summer school that built on several lessons learned in the previous year.

3 How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

The CA is actively considering how to improve both the approach to inclusivity across our sport and how our sport can benefit from increased diversity among our players. The first significant step has been a consultation and the adoption of an inclusivity and diversity policy. Implementation, including a tool kit of actionable steps to be taken at central, federation and club levels, will be rolled out in 2021.

The working party has investigated the barriers to improved inclusivity and diversity within croquet across four principal areas:

1. Race and religion
2. Disability and long-term health conditions
3. Age and gender, including women and girls, older people and LGBT.
4. Background and income

Suggestions have been made in every category for all levels of the croquet organisation to try to tackle these specific areas but there is a high degree of commonality of barriers. For example:

- Not seeing or identifying with people of similar background (e.g., visible ethnicity).
- Self-exclusion based on previous experiences elsewhere of self or others.
- Perceptions that they will not be welcomed and will be the "other".
- Perceptions of costs
- Games and club sessions may be at inconvenient times (e.g., during a working day)
- Physical access difficulties or inconvenient facilities

The next steps proposed for the CA (and yet to be ratified by Council) includes support to the federations and clubs through guides and webinars focussed upon:

- identifying local demographics and communities
- reaching out to diverse demographics
- modernising modus operandi
- IT and social media up-skill.

In addition, the CA is to be asked to "lead by example" including improving the diversity in its communication material, engaging with national community and faith leaders and national organisations and promoting the sport to influencers, opinion makers, politicians and leaders from diverse backgrounds.

The report calls for action by our clubs that includes:

- Endeavour to be open and have training sessions during the day, evenings, and weekends.
- Display "Welcome" signs in various languages regardless of local demographics.
- Pavilions to have baby changing and children friendly environment where possible.

- Ensuring players feel secure when arriving, playing and departing.
- Proactively reaching out to local communities, being part of their celebrations and key events, inviting them to the club to celebrate.
- Use of social media to reach and stay in touch with local communities.
- Keep the diversity and inclusion policy very visible in pavilions as a celebratory colourful document.
- Improve access to lawns and facilities (e.g., handrails, changing rooms and toilets) for those less able.
- Upskill coaches and create coaching sessions attractive to different age, gender or ethnicity groups.
- Engage with a broad range of local organisations to promote the physical and mental health benefits of croquet.

Although these proposals are yet to be ratified, we believe that many other sports may share similar challenges and opportunities for improvement.

4 *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?*

This strategy was superseded on 26th January with the Sport England 10-year plan "Uniting the Movement" with the priorities being Recover and Reinvent; Connecting Communities; Positive Experience for young people; Health and Well-being and Active environments.

We consider these are the right priorities, but it is important that robust links are forged with grass roots sports which is where most of this will be delivered. Talking to, and providing routes to funding, for ALL NGBs, not just the spectator, professional and Olympic sports, is vital if a substantial difference is to be made. In the words of this report "£1 spent on community sport and physical activity generates nearly £4 for England's economy and society".

5 *Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?*

This question is not answered.

6 *How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?*

This question is not answered.

7 *What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation actives at all levels?*

The CA has a policy on safeguarding in relation to children and is in the process of preparing one for vulnerable adults.

The CA has a national safeguarding officer and has mandated that every Federation, club and coaching academy must appoint a safeguarding officer, the details of whom will be kept on a central register.

Guidance, model policies and incident reporting forms on child safeguarding are provided. Additional guidance is provided for those who organise tournaments that involve children.

As can be seen from our answer to question 2, the CA is keen to increase the number of junior players.

To do so requires that several areas be addressed:

- The sport must become more attractive to children and young people.
- Clubs must be welcoming and give encouragement to children and young people.
- Clubs and tournaments must provide an environment in which both adults and young people can play safely and be at ease with each other.
- Adult members have policies and guidance that, while not being bureaucratically burdensome, reassure them that they can engage with, coach, encourage and support young players legally and effectively and without risk to themselves.

8 What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite sports in the UK and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable? For example, accountability for representing and protecting their membership, promoting their sport and maximising participation.

Although England has many of the best croquet players in the world, the CA does not have sufficient resources to fund anything other than the 4 yearly test matches. This means that all our elite players must cover the cost of travelling to championships themselves and to do so using up their leave from work. This is a huge barrier to anyone with the highest level of skill but limited personal resources. New Zealand croquet players by contrast are funded by the NZ government if they are representing their country.

The CA ensures accountability to its members through direct elections to the Council by members on a regional basis. The constituency of each council position is based upon the size of the federation(s) and number of members each council member represents. In addition, our constitution reserves decisions on some of the most important matters for a vote by all members at our AGM. With some exceptions (e.g., those pertaining to individuals or employees) the agenda, minutes and reports of the Council, the Executive Board and the committees of those two bodies are available (on-line) for members to read. Since the federations are autonomous, they are entirely free to comment on, or influence, the work of the CA. This is in addition to their representation on the Council.

Much of the work of the CA is carried out by committees comprised of members from across the federations reinforcing the ability of members to influence almost all aspects of the administration and organisation of the sport.

Responsibility for the promotion of our sport rests with both the CA and with the Federations. The Executive Board has two director roles focussed upon the promotion and development of the sport; a Director for Marketing & Communication and a Director for Development, who oversee a Marketing Committee and a Development Committee. Additionally, each federation has a Federation Development Officer, all of whom sit on the Development Committee. The purpose of the Development Committee is the development of croquet in all its forms through gaining more members playing in improved facilities at more locations, while encouraging a more diverse and inclusive membership.

9 *What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?*

In 2013, Croquet New Zealand appointed a National Development Officer whose role included liaising with the nine provincial education co-ordinators. These officers encouraged schools to offer croquet as an option as part of a Sport for All initiative, with the less athletic pupils as the main focus. Schools were paired with nearby croquet clubs whose members were willing to provide time for coaching. All the schools had to do was to bus the children to and from the clubs. GC was the code offered and proved popular with both athletic and non-athletic children, but especially the athletic types who made rapid progress. Demand for more frequent sessions (from once a week to three times a week) was met and some of the children joined the clubs and began to play regularly. The NZ Secondary Schools Championship is now a major event which requires a qualifying tournament to handle demand. Three of the NZ team that won the GC World Team Championship in January 2020 were current or former Under 21 World Champions who came into the sport through the schools' program.

10 *Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?*

One of the few positive aspects of the covid-19 pandemic is a realisation that sport and physical activity plays a huge part in the physical and mental health and well-being of the population. If a national plan for sport and recreation could draw all the various agencies together including DCMS, NHS, Sport England, all the NGBs, funding agencies, charities etc and devise a co-ordinated plan for achieving a properly funded national strategy that really changes the ethos of sport in this country, then we would be fully supportive.

Yet another report that says all the right things but does not really change things on the ground is not worthwhile – there are plenty of those already!

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