

SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION FOR EQUITY IN CRICKET

Call for written evidence: Discrimination in Cricket

29th April 2022

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2. Introduction

This submission to the ICEC is made by Bristol's Mayoral Commission on Race Equality (CoRE).

Chaired by Museji Ahmed Takolia CBE. The work undertaken by CoRE on racism in cricket involved the chair and fellow commissioners.

Set up by Mayor Marvin Rees, CoRE was established to look at race and ethnicity discrimination in Bristol to:

- Work with Bristol's communities and organisations to improve and prioritise race equality to achieve an inclusive, cohesive, thriving and representative city;
- Guide Bristol's policy and strategy developers to make sure race equality is included in all their work;
- Hold public, private, and voluntary sectors to account in relation to race equality to uphold the Bristol Race Equality Manifesto; and
- Report on progress on race equality and the general impact of inequality and discrimination on the Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic communities of Bristol.

According to the last census around 60,000 of Bristol's residents were *not* born in the UK. Of this, 8.5% do not use English as their main language and around 16% have lived here for less than 2 years. While this brings its own set of challenges, these new residents offer an opportunity to bring new skills and innovative solutions to longstanding problems. Innovation is driven by diversity of thought and experience. CoRE and other mayoral commissions champion inclusion across the city, not only because it helps overcome social divisions, but we see it as vital to creating inclusive growth. CoRE believes that diversity is an asset. This has proven true at the highest levels of competitive sport including as a value underpinned our successful bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games. It is there to be seen in the diversity of representation in some of our national sports, including cricket.

3. Background and context

In the aftermath of the high-profile cases of racism brought against Yorkshire County Cricket Club and later at Essex County Cricket Club by professional cricketers of Asian heritage, in one fell swoop the national game became a source of national disgrace. It quickly became clear from the growing body of evidence; including early reports from ICEC that these few cases were not isolated. Indeed, as we report in this submission there is anecdotal evidence of a creeping and deeper malaise across the game at every level, affecting people from all minoritised communities who spoke to us about leaving the game completely. CoRE acted because we would like to see resolute action towards positive change being taken by those who lead and represent the game, here in Bristol and the wider region. We started a dialogue with clubs and regional organisers of the game, and this forms the foundations of our evidence to the ICEC.

Those from ethnic minority backgrounds account for around 14 percent of the UK population (ONS, 2011) and while all British ethnic minority groups have made progress in employment, occupational mix; and despite our general sense that things have improved in terms of diversity of representation in some sports the prevailing culture in cricket is of concern and hindering the best talent from coming into and progressing through to the highest levels of the sport. The vital testimony of former professional cricketer Azeem Rafiq to parliamentarians is a once in a lifetime opportunity to take stock, save what is best about this sport and recognise that to progress locally, nationally, and internationally, we need to value diversity and make the game's culture far more inclusive.

We have followed the ICEC's guidance and provided our responses to the Commission's five areas around talent pathway and progression, culture, good practice, complaints and discipline, and governance and leadership below.

4. Our approach

In preparation for this, we held two evidence gathering sessions. The first was with individuals from local cricket clubs, the second with the leadership of local and regional cricket boards. In terms of the latter, we were keen to hear from the leadership and therefore our correspondence was at chair and CEO levels. Leading up to these sessions we wrote to several leaders in December 2021, including:

- Cindy Butts, Chair, Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket
- Pam Brown, Director of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, England & Wales Cricket Board
- Trevor Crouch, Chairperson of Bristol & District League
- David Jones, Chairperson and Will Brown, Chief Executive of Gloucestershire Cricket
- Allan Taylor, Standards Committee Chairperson and David Derrick, Bristol & Somerset Secretary of West of England Premiere League
- Steve Silk, CEO of Gloucestershire Cricket Board

In our original letter dated 01 December 2021 (copied to ICEC) we were interested to engagement and support with a view to potential future collaboration, but we were short of basic facts.

We therefore asked how, as local leaders, they proposed addressing growing concerns about a prevailing culture of racism in cricket, how has it impacted on the game of cricket they administer and if they were thinking already about changes related to how the game is administered, governed, organised, and played in Bristol. With an emphasis on engagement CoRE's offer was one of support, guidance, and advice, with a particular eye on developing positive action locally e.g., the Bristol & District (B&D) and the West of England Premiere League (WEPL) in particular.

As lovers of the game of cricket we too wanted to support our region to become better placed to foster, nurture, and grow talent, irrespective of background, race, or cultural differences. As part of this letter, we posed eight questions:

1. What has been the experience of Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic players and supporters in your league and clubs?
2. Do they have an effective process for people to report racist incidents?
3. Do they have an effective process for investigating and actioning racist incidents?
4. How do you know the above processes are effective?
5. Are they collecting data on the (ethnic) backgrounds of their players, committees, volunteers, and visitors/public?

6. How successful are their players, committees, volunteers, and members in progressing through the club or their league? How do they track this?
7. How many players of Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic backgrounds are given opportunities to reach the top of the game at each level? How many do they retain at that level? If they do not, do they have effective measures to know why they did not stay?
8. How are opportunities developed and fostered for all members/players?

As a Bristol based Commission, we are willing to play our part to help make racial equality a reality in cricket in our region, **but to begin with, we wanted to know just how seriously the leadership are taking the issues that are unfolding about racism in the sport.**

The BDCA responded quickly, providing CoRE with a list of the eleven (11) clubs that were deemed by them to be “BAME”. Due to GDPR regulations we were unable to make direct contact and therefore approached each club through their club secretaries, setting out information about CoRE and the background to our probe into racism in cricket. It is fair to say that the initial responses were very lukewarm. This suggested a lack of confidence in coming forward with a public body where individual clubs, players and officials might be identified. We made a further approach in February 2022 but this time emphasising confidentiality, the offer to meet individually rather than together in a “safe space” and an assurance that testimonies would be anonymised.

4.1 CoRE’s first evidence gathering session was held on the 8th of March 2022:

Despite our best efforts only two (2) local cricket clubs from the above list came forward to share their experiences with us.

What we found is reported here in summary. Please note we did not set out with any powers or authority and no attempt was made given our role, remit, and limited resources to investigate the issues we report here. We await the outcome of the ICEC’s call for evidence nationally, but feel that the experiences we are reporting from Bristol are not unique, rather that they are likely to be reported to the ICEC from many other parts of the country where cricket is played. This is despite the fact that there has been a dominant culture that has made players feel they *“should not rock the boat, leading to isolation and possibly worse”*.

The game is clearly worse off because players of minority ethnic backgrounds have not felt safe coming forward when faced with racism, bullying or harassment. There is an overriding sense that non-white clubs are treated differently to predominantly white clubs. We discuss this in more depth in section 4 of this submission, but note some key points here for brevity:

- They face constant abuse and racism on the field and have done for many years by officials. the opposition teams and their supporters.
- They say when incidents are reported, nothing is done either at the time or afterwards.
- They say issues are brushed under the carpet for white clubs, but others (Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic clubs) must follow the rules exactly.
- They report a palpable sense of unfairness and injustice illustrated according to the testimonies we heard by the fact that they are more likely to bans/relegations compared to non-white clubs.
- They report that when racist incidents are reported, they are told to *“keep quiet if they want to keep playing”* - with threats of being kicked out of the league (direct intimidation and bullying).
- Some were told *not* to speak in their first language by umpires or *“the game would be called off”*.
- Reports of clubs being demoted with no clear reason why.
- Being regularly told off by umpires for *“being aggressive and loud”* when they celebrate a wicket.
- An opposition team is reported to have written a post-match review on their website which contained racist comments, making fun of the people of colour and their language. When reported, felt no action was taken.
- Statement made by a white umpire: *“Why don’t you lot [Black and Asian teams] have your own league?”* following on with *“English teams don’t like playing with Black/Asian teams so they should create their own league”*
- The context for this is not clear, but some players were asked to identify themselves by passport.
- Lack of cultural understanding or willingness to understand is a huge issue for players from these clubs. Basically, people are expected to conform or fit in.

4.1.1 The impact this is having on participation and enjoyment of cricket

- People are leaving cricket due to the stress as well as mental ill-health and effect on their wellbeing from the persistent highly racialised microaggressions, to overt racism.
- Those who stay, do not enjoy the game as they used to.
- People do not feel comfortable putting their children in the game as they don't want them to face the same issues.
- The younger generation in predominantly white clubs continue the microaggression and racism as it is not being stamped out.

The younger generation in predominantly non-white clubs continue to be discriminated against and when they react, they are the ones penalised.

4.2 CoRE's 2nd evidence gathering session with local/regional cricket boards on the 13th of April 2022:

The primary purpose of this group of meetings was to engage with, understand and identify ways CoRE might harness support for the leadership while also facilitating the process through which the ECB Action 12-point Action Plan takes shape locally. Our approach was to foster confidence and collaboration. It is very early days, but it proved productive from our perspective. We have agreed to meet again in six months to review progress. We were keen to maintain momentum on this issue and in particular; to find out how the administrators of the game in our area are going about implementing the ECB's Action Plan on Racial Equality.

The discussion began with a brief overview of our role in the city and interest in cricket. We set out our proposed way forward and hopes for collaboration in the future. We then briefly (and anonymously) revealed some of the comments we received at the first session from clubs and players.

It is fair to say that many around the table were shocked at our findings. Hidden behind some specific comments which we report below is a theme. It highlights just how far behind the recreational game is compared to the pronouncements from national leadership and governing bodies in the professional game at county level vis making practical changes in policy and practice that changes the culture *locally*. It is as though the ECB has pulled a lever to lead change across the game on DE&I nationally, but the lever isn't connected to anything?

It was therefore unsurprising to CoRE that some participants sought to minimise the prevalence of the issue. Comments were made that the findings are "*very negative*" and are more than likely "*genuine misunderstandings*". While some went on to say that they acknowledged the "*presence of racist players*", it is evident that there was a lack of understanding of systemic issues impacting individual players and cricket more broadly. For example, there was a lot of time given over to the "*lack of facilities*" impacting, in particular, on Black, Asian and other minority ethnic teams but this was not discussed or identified as a structural and systemic issue - likely to leave clubs dealing with the same set of issues in the future. When the conversation turned to how the game tackles systematic racism, we came away with the sense that they were (perhaps unintentionally) pushing

the responsibility onto the “BAME” clubs themselves by for example asserting that, “clubs must take the initiative” and that, “there is a ‘mind shift’ to be made in some of the Asian clubs”.

On the issue of the “lack of reporting of racist incidents” (for fear of repercussions) some were ready to apportion this to “clubs have only said racism is the reason why they’ve been relegated after the Azeem Rafiq testimony”.

5. Summary of Findings

This section summarises our evidence into the Commission’s five areas of talent pathway and progression, culture, good practice, complaints and discipline, and governance and leadership.

5.1 Talent Pathway and Progression

Access is the first entry point, and progression is the next step. It is estimated that 30% of recreational cricket players are from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds (ECB, 2018), this figure dwindles as we move through to professional level. It is therefore important for clubs to track the progression of their players to understand the discrepancy between Black, Asian, and minority ethnic players in the recreational game compared to professional cricket. There are some role models, but these are rarely home grown and, according to leadership, we are still not seeing progress to professional leagues for *local* Black, Asian, and minority ethnic young people.

The ICEC should therefore recommend the collection of data by the games administrators to track progress of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic players through the game.

It is evident from the leagues we engaged with that many do not monitor the progression of their players. While there may be pathways for young people to access cricket, there is a distinct lack of data on whether any of the new talent coming through are those from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds. Nor do the local and regional cricket clubs and leagues have the capacity to collect this data due to resource limitations. Some assigned the problem to “an *unwillingness [or inability] to travel*”. There may be some legitimacy behind this observation, but the thesis has not been tested with players or clubs. It would be interesting to hear if this emerges from the wider evidence gathering being undertaken by the ICEC, as it may mask a more complex set of underlying systemic issues affecting the inability of city-based clubs to travel or having to play far away from where they are based due to a lack of appropriate facilities.

5.2 Culture

The ICEC is presented in earlier testimony from clubs and players to their lived experiences. These are having a deep and damaging impact on them and the game and unless there is a high level, strategic and suitably funded response that reaches into the recreational game, CoRE's view is that the ECB's aspirations will not be met.

On a positive note, we did find a broad acceptance from players and leadership of the need for cultural awareness, as well as a need to better respond to racist reports. Whilst there was a general agreement on the existence of racism in cricket, there is still disagreement on its prevalence. Some leaders are still too quick to assign it as 'banter' and say that "*most of this comes from outside the city*". We found some interest in and an appetite to undertake proper surveys about the issues thrown up about racism in the game and the experiences of Black, Asian, and other minority groups here in Bristol and more widely. This needs practical and financial support from on high. Without it the game stand's little practical chance on advancing the discussion beyond the contested anecdotal testimonies that emerge from sessions like this.

We heard testimony from leaders in the professional game that clearly demonstrated a genuine willingness to address racism in the sport. This is encouraging locally. There is a recognition too that many Black, Asian and other minority ethnic clubs are disproportionately under-funded. It is beyond our remit to advise on the response here, but it begs the question for the game nationally, to what extent targeted investment will reach this level of the game. The prevailing culture of cricket as it is played in the country is being defined by the (negative) experiences of players in the recreational game. The disconnect between national strategy and funding leaves a gaping hole between the best laid action plans and reality. This dissonance will have lasting effects on culture and is a product in CoRE's view of weaknesses in national and county level leadership and governance, giving rise to poor or the more likely "nil" accountability for bad behaviour.

5.3 Good Practice

All those in the leadership session were open to and requested further assistance from CoRE with their EDI policies, and we hope to connect clubs with local community organisations to address issues around diversity and inclusion, not only for players but also for leadership and administration in the sport.

More engagement with community organisations will demonstrate to communities that clubs want to make change. A key issue around good practice is, however, the lack of ethnicity data recording.

We have touched upon this earlier in this submission. Whilst some saw this as a “*huge task to ask clubs for*” there was a tacit recognition that it is possible to include a set of questions into the annual surveys, where a few questions about ethnicity could be very easily added. The absence of Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic-specific data in many areas is therefore a weakness in moving forward. Without the data, planning and decision-making will have limited impact on the challenges the leagues face.

South Asian Cricket Association (SACA) is supposedly set up to support talented Asian players to reach success. However, whilst it might be good in principle, the way it is being used locally by (e.g., professional GCB selectors) is to deflect players already identified through the talent pathways to be ‘palmed off’, thereby relieving them of developing/selecting that player themselves. There is a perverse effect here whereby the existence of SACA risks perpetuating the exclusion of players who went through the academy programme. We are seeing here in Bristol several young players going through the talent pathways but effectively ‘dropped’ at the end of the programme, especially as they may not have the social capital or other ‘networks’ to enable them to progress to a professional level. This risks high level talent simply dissolving as they have nowhere to go – and SACA is not necessarily the right place – it is becoming known as the place for Asian players who the white people do not select and so ‘they have their own league’.

We would wish to take this opportunity to celebrate examples of good practice, such as African Caribbean Engagement (ACE) programme. The ACE Programme aims to support diverse talent from the grassroots to the elite through talent pathways, elite academies, and workforce development using the wider game to support reconnection with the Black community. With less than 1% of people from the African Caribbean community playing cricket, the ACE Programme aims to engage young people, nurture their talent, and re-ignite the community’s passion for the game. ACE also develops quality coaches and volunteers from the community as well as provide mentoring to support players, coaches, and families. The programme can help ensure a diverse community from players to coaches at the recreational and professional game.

Another positive development is the one from the Gloucestershire Cricket Foundation. GCF hopes to specifically address racism in their “GRACE” campaign which is being launched before the 2022 cricket season starts. The anti-discrimination campaign outlines 5 principles, one of which specifically states, “Racism has no place in Gloucestershire Cricket”.

ACE and SACA are programmes that are nurturing exceptional talent, but it is not clear how this talent will feed into the professional talent pathway. A strategy needs to be in place for this and a

plan published as to how the gap will be bridged. MCC is another similar programme for non-private school children to help address the class issue in cricket.

There are other spheres of professional practice where “positive action programmes” have been introduced to identify and nurture talent from previously under-represented groups. The most successful examples of these in say the civil service, law and other professional services have integrated the offer, so it is a guaranteed pathway into the mainstreams of the professions. The ECB may wish to look at other international examples including sports in the USA.

5.4 Complaints and Discipline

The examples summarised for ICEC from our first evidence gathering session with players and clubs makes for harrowing reading and further reinforces the need for the ICEC’s enquiry. A summary of these accounts is provided below.

Many individuals were too scared to say anything and wanted to keep things confidential because there was a fear that they will be kicked out of a league or that something would happen i.e., be victimised for coming forward. This is something Azeem Rafik spoke of. One account we heard provides a rather extreme example of this. They recall a situation in which a racist incident was *“reported to a body that deals specifically with racist incidents but could not proceed further, because they were threatened by officials in the league. That if they pursued it, they will be kicked out of the league!”*. When discussing a particular incident of racism, a player highlighted a case where a senior leadership member said that *“all his colleagues would quit if [the case] was taken to a Tribunal”*. Players talked about being *“intimidated”* and told to *“zip it and keep playing or they won’t be allowed to play in the league”*.

Players generally talked about being threatened, *“called slurs at the game by the crowd”*, being told that White players *“don’t like it when you don’t speak English”*, being made fun of because of the way they look or *“the languages they were speaking”*. In one incident, *“players had to show their passports”* to prove residency, something the predominantly white club did not have to do. Players talked about how predominantly *“non-white clubs [feel] they’re treated differently to predominantly white clubs”*. Many feel that *“issues have brushed under the carpet for predominantly white clubs while others have to follow the rules exactly”* whereby *“more bands and regulations are handed out to predominantly non-white clubs”*.

There is a clear lack of cultural awareness whereby *“celebrating during the game is seen as being aggressive [because they are] very loud”*. There were accounts of people being told by umpires and/or officials that they cannot speak in their first language. A member of leadership mentioned that *“if people speak another language they may be communicating (illegal) tactics which the umpires cannot police”* but of course, players speak their own language in international games. In another incident a member of leadership allegedly said, *“Why don’t you lot [Black and Asian teams] have your own league? The English teams do not like playing with Black/Asian teams so they should create their own league”*.

Complaints handling and procedures seem to sit at the centre of a rotten culture. According to players, they are wholly inadequate and unfit for purpose. This may partly reflect the role of volunteers and limited resources as *“there’s no one to deal with the complaints”* and partly because those investigating the offence are often perpetrators or close to the perpetrators. The process seems infested with conflicts of interest, lack of transparency and openness. Leading to a perception that there can be no fairness and justice because *“they will turn a blind eye”*.

5.5 Governance and Leadership

There is a clear asymmetry of power in the game, by which we mean between the home of the national sport (MCC, ECB) and recreational cricket. This results in the kind of examples of poor or inconsistent implementation of policy, guidance and near total lack of transparency and accountability we found playing out in Bristol and the wider region. The lack of resources is a clear sticking point for the leadership, many of whom are volunteers. Many of the leadership are sincere in their approach and show a desire to deal with racism in their respective areas but lack the capacity to address it meaningfully. The ECB’s 12-point plan has impacted many of the leaders enormously, adding a layer of bureaucracy to running their leagues but this too was something they felt ill-equipped and resourced to deal with. The lower down the league the more remote the plan became.

6. Conclusion

The lack of understanding among some of the leadership we met, of the impact of systemic racism is notable. In an unexpected way, the importance of facilities for recreational cricket was mentioned often. With Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic clubs saying they must play *“on council pitches which are not well looked after due to a lack of funding and clubs have not been able to move to a higher level due to their facilities.”* This is a structural and systematic issue, that alongside some other aspects of the game allows cultural prejudices and racism to fester unchallenged and unlikely

to change. One person said that *“Predominantly White clubs have had their grounds for over a century, whereas the newer predominantly Black and Asian and other minority ethnic clubs must travel elsewhere.”* This is clearly a systemic issue and impacts on the promotion prospects for smaller Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic led clubs to a higher division or league, as promotion is just not dependent on playing performance but also facilities. This then results in talented young players not being able to progress up the league and leaves them out of sight of the scouting system because he/she is never able to move up the divisions through their team.

We have serious concerns about the disconnect between the higher echelons of the game, as organised and played professionally and recreational cricket. Many of those who gave evidence felt that the ECB has focused on professional cricket but shows little understanding of recreational cricket. Though this may raise questions for the ICEC about scope, in our experience the testimonies about negative lived experiences are almost entirely from the game as it is organised and played at a recreational level. There is a distinct danger that by ignoring the issues playing out at this level of the game, the ECB may target interventions through policy and resources that leave large part of known orthodoxies, conventions, and cultures in tack.

The leadership shown by GCF, and the success of the ACE programmes are notable. Another positive move is the appointment of David ‘Syd’ Lawrence as Gloucestershire CCC President who is the first Black president of the club and one of the first Black presidents of any county cricket club in the country. Leagues lower down like BDCA and WEPL show a willingness to embrace change but need support, some of which we can help with locally but many rest on the governance of the game and leadership from the top.

Our submission reveals some hard truths, but at the same time this period provides us with an opportunity to create meaningful change in which we address the fact that change strategies for DE&I in cricket cannot be race neutral. Treating “everyone the same” will serve to entrench known disparities and inequalities.

Finally, our engagement with ICEC has been constructive, insightful, and really helpful. We welcome the opportunity to continue to play our part in helping the ICEC deliver on its mission and purposes.

7. Consent

I understand that my information will be used, shared, and protected in accordance with the ICEC's Privacy Notice .	Yes
Please indicate your consent for how we can use your submission:	
- I consent to my submission being used to inform the ICEC's report and to my name and role being listed as having provided evidence	No
- I consent to my submission being used to inform the ICEC's report and to the name of my organisation being listed as having provided evidence	Yes
- I consent to attributed quotes from my submission being used in the ICEC's report	Yes
- I consent to my submission being used to inform the ICEC's report but on an anonymous basis only	Yes