

## ICEC – Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket

### Written Evidence

Submission from the *Breaking Boundaries* steering group: a £1.8m grant funded project to increase community cohesion using cricket and physical activity

Submission coordinated by: Amy Finch, Head of Policy & Impact, Spirit of 2012

[Amy.finch@spiritof2012.org.uk](mailto:Amy.finch@spiritof2012.org.uk)

On behalf of: Spirit of 2012 (funder of *Breaking Boundaries*), Youth Sport Trust (grant holder and project lead), Sporting Equals (lead partner)

Like many others, we have been appalled at the abhorrent revelations of racism in cricket which have emerged in recent weeks. Our organisations all passionately believe in the life-changing power of sport to bring people together, tackle discrimination and improve lives. It is imperative that racism within sport is challenged and routed out. Sport must be inclusive, safe and welcoming for everyone.

The recent review carried out by UK Sport and the five sports councils,<sup>1</sup> demonstrated that racism and racial inequalities still exist within sport in the UK and there are longstanding issues, which have resulted in ethnically diverse communities being consistently disadvantaged.

The review highlighted the detrimental impact that this has had on individuals, leading to mistrust and exclusion and makes clear areas where we must see change. The review is a step towards recognising that problems exist however a more concerted effort is needed to engage with experts and partners in this area to help tackle these problems and provide support for a shift in thinking and resources.

For the past three years we have been working together on *Breaking Boundaries*, a programme to unite diverse communities and help young people and their families connect through cricket and other sports. We believe it, and programmes like it, demonstrate cricket's power to unite communities around a shared love of the game. *Breaking Boundaries* has helped to bridge divides and unite communities in Bradford, Birmingham, Manchester, Slough and the London borough of Barking and Dagenham. More than 3,500 people from different communities have been brought together through community sport to develop their sense of belonging and mutual understanding.

The *Breaking Boundaries* project has led the way in bridging divides between communities, supporting young people to engage with people from different cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uksport.gov.uk/news/2021/06/23/tackling-racism-and-racial-inequality-in-sport-review>

and religious background, helping to build friendships and a sense of belonging within communities. Projects like these are however just the start of a sector wide approach necessary to help support social impact and equitable inclusion of communities. Greater support for similar citywide projects would help utilise the power of cricket to make change in communities, and in institutions.

## **A) Talent Pathways**

***Why do you think there is a lack of progression into the men's professional game for minority ethnic cricketers including Black and South Asian players and how can this be addressed? Do you think this pattern is also reflected in the women's professional game? If so, please explain why you think that is the case?***

*Breaking Boundaries* was not designed to increase the number of cricketers from minoritized ethnic backgrounds taking part in the professional game, but we know that the cricket clubs and foundations who were involved in the project (both during the design and delivery phase) saw this as a potential, long term by-product.

The *Breaking Boundaries* team carried out a consultation with young people involved in the project in January 2022. They strongly believed that if you are from a minoritized ethnic background, you will not get the same opportunities or life chances as your white counterparts. They argued that wider societal levels of racism and discrimination have a ripple affect into sectors like sport.

Several respondents to our consultation felt that discrimination in cricket was pervasive, and were reluctant to report things for fear of it not being dealt with or it not given any importance. Some young people highlighted how vulnerable they sometimes feel and questioned what support victims or witnesses like themselves would be given if they shared concerns. These experiences in themselves may be causing barriers to progression in the game.

Alongside this many young people in our consultation felt alienated, and that they do not get the same opportunities as their white counterparts. This perception itself is worrying, regardless of its "objective" accuracy. Pathways need to be visible and those responsible for progressions need to look at wider strategies around local engagement and equality of access to opportunities.

The importance of local projects and initiatives like *Breaking Boundaries* which bring different people together can have a big positive impact at bringing young people together and building bridges caused by wider societal divides. However these types of projects need resource over the longer term with formalised partnerships supporting integration of groups through sporting activities to effect sector wide change.

Sporting Equals research in the past has found that informal sport structures exist for Black and Asian players which are not part of mainstream structures. This is something the ECB discussed during the planning phase for *Breaking Boundaries*.

These separate structures have been set up as a result of some communities feeling unable to engage with more formalised club structures, which further perpetuates the lack of progression and opportunity for young people within these clubs. More therefore needs to be done to support greater collaboration between partners supporting local level community groups enabling pathways and opportunities into the professional game.

Grassroots communities often feel token gestures are provided by way of representation or policy discharging responsibilities without the commitment and desire needed to effect system change.

## **B) Culture**

***6. How would you describe the culture of cricket? Please use evidence and examples to describe why you have reached your conclusions. If you cite examples, please indicate how recently they took place.***

In late 2021, in the wake of Azeem Rafiq's testimony about his experiences of racism, Sporting Equals staff offered to lead a discussion with young people at each of the community partners working on *Breaking Boundaries*, reflecting on their own experiences of racism in sport. There is no doubt that the publicity surrounding Rafiq's experiences had left young people searching for an avenue to share their own thoughts about racism in sport in general, and negatively affected perceptions of the culture of cricket in particular.

Some comments in the consultation which reflect the culture of sport including cricket are given below:

*'In light of BLM, I feel that Asians in particular are seen as 'fair game', 'Oh it's just Asians' and this perhaps had led to the indigenous community behaving towards them differently'*

*'A couple of times on the pitch and once in the changing room when I overheard a guy being like ...All these monkeys jumping all over us'*

*'No one likes to think of themselves as being unfair, discriminatory or racist, but we all have some sort of prejudices and we need to be aware of these prejudices, it's only when we act on these prejudices that disadvantage or racism happens'*

*'We need people coming out of the woodwork to talk about these issues and but who are these and are we speaking to the very grass roots, coaches, volunteers, parents who see this in everyday life'*

*'We always do well for our club but some of our teammates when they get selected for district or county teams don't get treated fairly, you must be much better than white teammates to get opportunities'*

'Racism was still rife in society but was not as apparent or as one young person said, *'as in your face as it used to be'*.

A separate survey carried out by Sporting Equals with community networks about sporting 'banter'<sup>2</sup> and the extent to which this may, or may not, on occasions involve racism was initiated in response to the extensive media coverage regarding the use of 'banter' in sport. Sporting Equals received 102 responses to the survey, with 90% of respondents saying that in their experience, racism is sometimes disguised as 'banter' by people involved in the sport and physical activity sector. This is worrying and highlights that the culture of sport as a whole need to change.

No specific research is available around cricket and how sporting 'banter' impacts on individuals at all levels, with Rafiq's experiences demonstrating the challenges the sector and sports providers face. The importance of local projects and initiatives like *Breaking Boundaries* which bring different people together can have a big positive impact at bringing young people together and building bridges caused by wider societal divides.

### **C) Good Practice**

***(11) Please provide any examples/evidence of initiatives that have delivered improved equity in cricket or other professional sports, and explain why you think they were successful.***

We believe that cricket at a grassroots level has a powerful role to play in bridging divides. *Breaking Boundaries*, and projects such as Lord Taverner's Wicketz, are working in partnership with local communities. They run fun activities, reaching out to people who have not traditionally taken part, and prioritise social time as well as physical activity. The [Power of Sport](#) toolkit, produced by Belong is a model for how to design and evaluate activities that aim to improve cohesion and integration, and we would urge more organisations to adopt the approaches it outlines.<sup>3</sup>

However, both established and emerging good practice at a community level is fundamentally undermined by failures at an institutional level to understand the extent of racism and discrimination, to tackle it robustly and to demonstrate publicly that cricket is inclusive for all.

---

<sup>2</sup> Sporting Equals Banter Survey, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Spirit of 2012 and Sport England funded the production of the toolkit in 2020-21.

Spirit of 2012 launched the funding round that led to *Breaking Boundaries* in 2017 because we knew that cricket had the potential to build common ground between communities that all enjoyed the game, but were in some cases participating in it separately, rather than together. Our aim was to use the catalyst of the Cricket World Cup, held in England and Wales in 2019, and the successes of the Women's Team to inspire young people to take part in a way that purposefully brought together people from different communities and backgrounds. From the outset, we were keen to explore how community cricket clubs might better open themselves up to communities with a proud cricketing heritage, but who were underrepresented within the formal structures of the game, and also how non-cricketing venues might use cricket as a starting point for meaningful social mixing across divides.

However, before you can get to better understanding and friendship, you must have psychological safety and freedom from discrimination. Whilst this project was never intended to reach out to and change the minds of those with entrenched racist beliefs, it was clear from the outset that working in communities with historic tensions would potentially expose participants from minoritized ethnic communities to difficult conversations and experiences.

We have developed a number of resources for project teams to use in order to facilitate conversations with confidence, using cricket as a tool to improve social integration and cohesion. These include:

Faith Guide - <https://ystcms.youthsporttrust.org/media/3ryakpnq/breaking-boundaries-faith-guide-pdf.pdf>

- Community Champion handbook - <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/media/cwejfksl/community-champion-handbook.pdf>
- Conversation prompt cards - <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/media/tsubvuzs/conversation-prompt-cards.pdf>

Sporting Equals used its 'Making Equals' model deliver cultural awareness, respect and inclusion training to young people as part of the wider *Breaking Boundaries* training. The training acts as a mechanism to challenge thoughts and tackle unconscious bias alongside supporting people to engage with people who they would not otherwise meet. The activities help build mutual trust, respect and understanding between groups, once people are engaged and talking to each other, sport can then be used as a mechanism to build friendships, trust and a sense of belonging.

Partnership working is integral to *Breaking Boundaries*, and should be built into any project that aims to address diversity and inclusion through cricket. The programme has

found that it is critical to train individuals to help build respect, support local empowerment and work collaboratively to embed inclusion into delivery.

Our biggest success has been building trusted relationships between these providers and local community partners to ensure a level playing field and understanding of local issues and tensions.

Strengthened links established with local cohesion staff through preparation for and development of Community Leader Forums, have helped to focus the delivery on cohesion outcomes, alongside expert cohesion support. This consistent partnership engagement and facilitation is key to effective delivery.

Evaluation findings show that *Breaking Boundaries* is enabling the funded areas to undertake deliberate approaches to facilitating social connectedness between groups that had not previously come together, using local intelligence to identify and connect key groups where there are existing tensions or a lack of integration. This in turn allows for more equitable access to community activities, including cricket, because individuals feel more part of their wider community.

The best examples illustrate how the connectedness is used to underpin the development of a shared group ethos so that the participants work together during activities and therefore have a better understanding of each other, and better attitudes to diversity result. Weaker examples show how, without facilitation the groups fail to fully mix, do not develop a shared codesigned group ethos and thus facilitate improved attitudes to diversity. The message here for the ECB is therefore that it should actively facilitate the connecting of different community groups to help tackle discrimination in all forms.

### **Delivery Example: Building Partnership Connections, Manchester**

In Manchester, the *Breaking Boundaries* City Team, which included the project Coordinator and Local Authority Neighbourhood Teams, engaged local community organisation leads to come together monthly for social cricket themed get togethers known as Community Leader Forums.

Each get together involved a cricket themed activity, food, and an opportunity for organisations to share their views on local tensions and parallel lives. Each get together was 'hosted' at a different venue, the host provided a tour of their venue and background on the work their organisation does.

The first meeting was based at St Edmunds Church with a Christmas theme which involved a talk on the Spirit of Christmas, Christianity, and a tour of the church. The second meeting was held at the British Muslim Heritage Centre which included a tour of the venue and a talk on the contributions of British Muslims to UK society. Future meetings took place in the Sikh Temple, Community Youth Club and Black African based community centre.

The get togethers provide an opportunity for organisations to connect better with each other and increase attitudes to diversity by learning about other cultures and religions.

The groups now work as pairs, co designing and delivering regular activities, to learn more about each other's faiths, cultures and beliefs using sport as a tool. These sessions include a social opportunity that encourages conversations through a series of prompt cards, that encourages discussion about each other in a safe and closed environment.

*"The project has made the groups think about other organisations they may or may not share interests with and encouraged them to reach out. This is something that probably wouldn't happen, due to the nature of people's work, now they have a reason to get to know another organisation they wouldn't normally do."* (**Community Coordinator, Manchester**)

## **D) Complaints**

### ***(16) What do you consider to be the main barriers to making a complaint related to discrimination or unfair treatment? How can they be removed?***

None of the young people taking part in *Breaking Boundaries* raised a specific grievance about unfair treatment they had experienced playing cricket.

However, young people taking part in our consultation explained that they were not confident that if they had concerns about racism and discrimination that these would be treated seriously. They explained that it was not clear how to report incidences of racism or discrimination, and young people did not have faith that these would be tackled appropriately if they did. The young people questioned what support was available for direct victims of racism if they were to report an incident, and also said that there needed to be clearer support for witnesses to racist incidents, especially where those witnesses also came from minoritized ethnic backgrounds themselves.

Grassroots organisations appear to be more adept at dealing with and preventing discrimination than more formal structures, and could lead the way in passing on their experiences. The consultation however did highlight that incidents often go unreported because the reporter may be seen as a troublemaker, and that people lack the confidence the matters will be dealt with.

There is a need for the ECB and individual clubs to be more transparent about how to report, deal with things quickly, and keep victims informed about the progress of a complaint throughout.

## **E) Governance**

19. Do you think that the ECB's Inspiring Generations strategy and its associated plans (including the South Asian Action Plan, Transforming Women's and Girls' Cricket Action Plan and the EDI Plan) will be effective in engaging and supporting people from underrepresented groups to play cricket at both the recreational and professional level? -

Yes/No/Somewhat/Don't know - Please explain why

Somewhat. We whole heartedly endorse aspects of this strategy for example that the ECB must "Develop cricket's role as a vehicle for delivering positive social impact" and that "Cricket has a unique opportunity to use its purpose of connecting communities and improving lives to make a positive difference in our modern and diverse society". This is what *Breaking Boundaries* is about. But to do this successfully we must move beyond a "South Asian Strategy" aimed at increasing participant numbers without fully engaging with why it is that some cricket clubs are not seen as places that are open to every community.

There has also been too much reliance, in our view, on "inter-faith" competitions, with different faith or ethnic groups competing against each other, rather than alongside each other as teammates. Where these occur, they should be seen as stepping stones to more integrated teams and events, and organisers must pay attention to the meaningful social mixing that can happen pre/post matches.

### Strategies

Please find below 2 examples from *Breaking Boundaries* where different groups of people have socially mixed to participate together as one in cricket activities, with positive outcomes.

#### **Bolly Bhangra, Birmingham.**

Aim was to facilitate mixing between women from different South Asian ethnic groups, to tackle underlying tensions between different groups of South Asian Women from Bangladeshi, Gujarati, and Pakistani backgrounds.

Activity was specifically designed to getting women active and improve cohesion, using elements of Bhangra fitness activities, and All Stars cricket sessions. Dance provided something that was familiar as a gateway into cricket which was less familiar to them.

*"I think getting the ladies in with the bhangra, and then introducing them to the cricket slowly has been the key here. They've enjoyed it, they don't realise their talents, when they think of cricket, they think it's a man's sport or they've never had an opportunity to play. Then [working together]...we'd incorporate bhangra moves and cricket moves together, and they really loved it." (Project Lead).*

Improved Social Connectedness: Starting the sessions as strangers and mixing from the start, by the end they became a bit of 'family'. This positive group dynamic was attributed in part to the women having the space to have open conversation – being out of their usual social circle or extended family. The local Coordinator also identified that



good links were made to celebrate faith festivals relevant to participants increasing understanding of each other

Feeling empowered: From some participants there was a sense that they had been empowered to be open with others in the group about their challenges and issues, to women from other South Asian groups they had not met before.

Understanding the needs of targeted groups is key to developing and delivering engaging activities that support engagement and moves towards cricket and community participation

*"There's a lot of Asian communities here and a lot of Somalian communities so it is breaking down boundaries."* (Breaking Boundaries Participant, Birmingham)

## **2. Sri Lankan Youth Association and Slough Mitra Mandal, Slough**

Activity focused on regular cricket and badminton sessions to socially mix two community groups: Sri Lankan Muslim Association and Slough Mitra Mandal, a Sri-Lankan group, and an Indian group respectively, who have been noted as living parallel lives in the Baylis and Stoke wards.

The combination of two sports improved social connectedness using shared interests as a starting point and a neutral venue.

**Increased attitudes to diversity and community involvement** – Teams were mixed, and this shared approach encouraged them to feel more comfortable with each other and widen conversations beyond sport, exploring issues that might be affecting participant's lives, particularly those of the Sri Lankan community which is relatively new in the area.

**Sense of belonging-** The activity has newly brought together two groups who have then begun to understand each other better and therefore understand each other's place better within the local community and be engaged with others through facilitated social mixing.

*It's been very good, meeting people who live in the same community as me, it's a very mixed group now...so it's doing exactly what it intended to do."* (**Female participant, Indian**).

You can find further case studies and examples in this [Review and Reflection Report](#).

*20. Do you think that the ECB effectively and sensitively engages relevant stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to develop its plans and strategies? - Yes/No/Somewhat/Don't know - Please explain why*

More work is needed in this area to support wider engagement beyond ECB current networks, a lot of community and faith groups feel excluded as often they are not

within the systems. Working through partners is critical to get the reach into stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.

*22. What actions do you think the ECB and leaders within cricket more widely should be taking to make the game more equitable and inclusive? Of those actions, please identify the one you think is the most urgent.*

- Support existing initiatives like Breaking Boundaries and Wicketz over the long term to help use the power of sport to increase cohesion
- Work with community partners: We've worked with some fantastic community partners on *Breaking Boundaries*, such as [Aik Saath](#) in Slough and St Edmund's Church and the British Muslim Heritage Centre in Manchester . These lynchpin organisations have the expertise and relationships that we need in order to bring people together through physical activity. The organisations - which include schools, community hubs and faith centres - will also reap the benefits of partnership working well beyond the project itself.
- Take time to understand the history of relationships between people from different communities, and between communities and local institutions. Local authority input has been key to *Breaking Boundaries* - with apprentices on the programme being hosted by, and learning from, the councils' cohesion and physical activity teams. But not everyone has a positive view of their local council, and so building trusting relationships between project leads and local organisations takes a long time. Likewise, if a community group has had a negative experience with a cricket club or foundation before, however thoughtful the new initiative, it will take time and effort to repair that damage.
- Ensure that activities build meaningful social mixing opportunities: A cricket match itself is not enough to bring people together, particularly if you have groups travelling to the grounds separately, playing a competitive match against each other and going home. All of our sessions include social time - ideally with food - before and after the sport, focus on games and activities more often than formal matches, and allow whole families to mix together across generations, rather than concentrating just on children.
- Give genuine leadership opportunities to young people from all backgrounds: *Breaking Boundaries* puts young people in the lead at all levels, with an apprentice in each city coordinating the programme, and young community champions who can shape the activities (and apply for funding to do put them on!) In our evidence, we share findings from a youth consultation conducted

after Azeem Rafiq's select committee evidence, in which young participants shared their views about what needs to change.

- Be proactive and comprehensive when it comes to creating an inclusive environment – and act quickly to deal with negative incidents of racism. It is vital that in reviewing their complaints procedure the ECB think not only about a fair and expedient process, but about clear, open communication. Young people not directly involved in an incident can still be deeply affected by it – but, according to our consultation, witnesses felt that their experiences were often completely overlooked. You must ensure that equality and diversity policies (and other relevant policies) are cascaded across the organisation, monitored for effectiveness, and used to establish a culture that has a zero-tolerance policy for racism on the pitch, among staff, spectators and in the boardroom.
- Empower those who are facing racism to report their concerns and be given confidence that their experiences will not be minimised. The role of an independent body should be investigated to take a lead on monitoring complaints and holding sport organisations to account.
- Promote the [Power of Sport](#) toolkit – training the ECB's workforce on effective practice for designing and measuring inclusive sports interventions
- Address a lack of equality of access to opportunity for individuals and organisations. This requires organisations to have greater accountability internally and externally to sport regulators.
- More training and support around 'banter', racism and how to tackle issues quickly and escalate as appropriate.
- Fundamentally, sector wide acknowledgement is needed that racism is a reality for many. A more co-ordinated approach, collaboration and education across the sport sector working in partnership with both national and grassroots organisations is needed. This requires an institutional shift and a willingness to challenge the status quo to create an environment of progression and change across the sport sector from the grassroots to the elite.