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Over and Out? A report into the state and status of cricket in northern, working-class schools.

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Study Overview

Evidence suggests that active and inclusive introductory versions of the game that utilise a softer ball remain popular and effective in terms of promoting engagement and participation in the game of cricket for young people of primary school age. However, in recent years, research, policy documents and anecdotal responses from teachers have suggested that many PE staff have become increasingly less likely and/or able to introduce and develop the hardball game to boys attending state secondary schools via the PE curriculum as well as extra-curricular practices and fixtures. Seemingly constrained by access to appropriate facilities and equipment, the confidence and competence of many PE staff to effectively teach a hardball version of the game, and broader cultural issues associated with young, working-class boys' contemporary leisure preferences, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that participation and interest in the game of cricket – and the hardball version of the game in particular – has decreased significantly among many young working-class male pupils.

In contrast, there appears to be continued prominence and growth of the game within the private education sector, and with many fee-paying (often single-sex) schools able to offer a range of indoor training facilities, maintained grass cricket wickets, specialist elite cricket coaches, and regular competitive fixtures, it is perhaps not surprising that male county cricket talent pathways, professional county cricket clubs and England international squads are becoming increasingly dominated by players who have benefitted from the opportunities, guidance, and support associated with a private education.

Whilst there are many state secondary schools that continue to successfully promote and develop the hardball game for male pupils in PE and via inter-school fixtures, it is apparent that cricket in many state schools is in a state of concern and crisis – particularly in certain areas of the country. It is within this context that this report aims to gain a picture of the state of the game for young males living in working-class communities, to understand how and why the apparent constraints on interest, participation and development have emerged, and perhaps more importantly to suggest some realistic and effective recommendations for increasing participation, progress, and performance in the game of cricket and the hard ball version of the game in particular.

Executive Summary

Context

Amid increasing concerns regarding the quality and amount of hardball cricket being delivered and played in many state, secondary schools, the study sought to explore the current state and status of the game with a range of mainstream schools across the north of England located in predominantly working-class areas.

What do we know?

Increasing numbers of male cricketers within youth talent pathways and/or playing elite, professional cricket have been within the private education sector while those from working-class backgrounds become increasingly under-represented in these areas. This trend is perhaps not surprising given the fact that delivery of hardball cricket in many state secondary schools becomes increasingly less likely and effective whilst young males attending fee paying schools are exposed to greater opportunities and levels of support that enhance progression and achievement in the hardball game via elite coaching, superior facilities and regular competitive fixtures.

The study

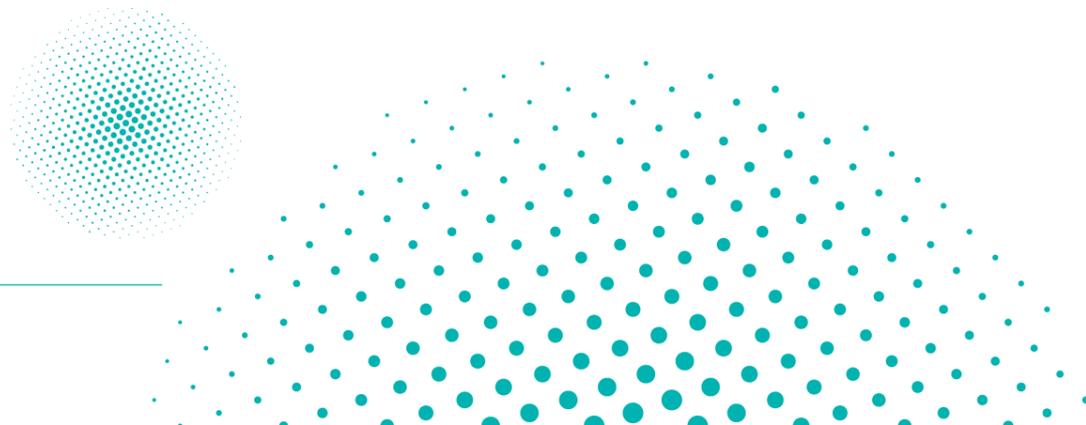
The study focused on exploring the state and status of boys cricket in northern, working class schools by identifying all state secondary schools across nine counties in England that were defined as socio-economically deprived using the Department for Education's measure of 23% (and above) students on roll being eligible for free school meals. Using this measure, 427 state, secondary schools were contacted via email to complete a Qualtrics survey designed to collect data relating to PE curriculum hours allocated to cricket, the type and availability of equipment and facilities at each school, extra-curricular participation, the number of inter-school fixtures, the number of pupils participating in cricket outside of school, and the amount of cricket related trips (e.g. The Hundred) organized by the school with 92 schools subsequently completing the survey. Following this stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 male PE teachers who had indicated that they would be willing to engage in a follow up interview.

Findings

Whilst participation and engagement in softball cricket amongst primary school age children is high and the delivery of cricket using fast-paced, active and inclusion lessons in key stage 3 is largely positive, the ability and opportunity for many state educated secondary school pupils to make the transition to playing the hardball version of the game is extremely limited. In many cases, this was due to limited or inadequate equipment and facilities. There was also evidence this transition had been constrained by staff confidence and competence to teach more technical aspects of the game as well as the negative attitudes of many pupils towards the hard ball as well as the traditional game of cricket more broadly. Further to this evidence to suggest that this transition towards the hardball game was being hampered by the quality and amount of extra-curricular opportunities and competitive fixtures as a result of a lack of student uptake, staff time and the availability of suitable equipment and facilities.

Recommendations

The report suggests that a significant financial, professional and cultural investment is required in order to address the apparent decline in working-class male pupils actively engaging and participating in the more traditional, hardball version of the game – both inside and outside of the school environment. This should involve greater funding for improved and accessible cricket facilities and equipment in state schools as well as the development and implementation of a transitional form of the game played at the age of 12 or 13 that uses a hybrid ball and limited protective equipment to increase experience and confidence with more technical aspects of the same and bridge the gap between softball and traditional harder ball cricket. In addition, greater numbers of current and future PE teachers should be provided with additional support and guidance to plan and deliver more technically-based lessons as a result of bespoke, accessible and affordable cricketer teaching courses and qualifications. Finally, the report recommends the creation of local cricket network hubs that are overseen and supported by the ECB in order to provide clearer and more effective links between state primary and secondary schools, local cricket clubs, county cricket clubs, and families and communities as a way of providing more consistent and effective opportunities for young people from working-class backgrounds to make a successful transition towards playing the harder ball version of the game.



Policy Context

Holding a Mirror up to Cricket (2023) – The Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC)

Following public revelations of racism and wider discrimination in the game of cricket as well as widespread concerns regarding the extent to which these matters had been handled, the ECB announced its intention to establish a commission to assist them in 'assessing the inequalities and discrimination within cricket as well as the actions required to tackle these issues' (ICEC, 2023. p.6). As a result, the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) was established in March 2021 and immediately charged with gathering and collating evidence and experiences from a wide range of people involved in all aspects and levels of the game in order to highlight and facilitate institutional change towards making cricket a game for everyone. Following a thorough and wide-ranging two-year investigation, the ICEC published their 300-page report *Holding a Mirror up to Cricket* in June 2023 which not only included 44 recommendations on how best to address all forms of discrimination present in the game, but also led to an unreserved public apology on behalf of the ECB for its failure to acknowledge and address the wide-ranging discrimination present within the culture and institutions of all forms of cricket in England and Wales. By extension, the ICEC commission used the report to highlight a need for an 'urgent and radical overhaul of the policies, practices, systems and structures' (ICEC, 2023. p6) in the game in order to address the 'deeply rooted and widespread forms of structural and institutional racism, sexism and class-based discrimination' (ICEC, 2023. p8) present in the game of cricket.

In relation to the issue of social class discrimination more specifically, the report indicated that many 'people's experiences with the sport are structured by their socio-economic profile' and that an elitist and exclusionary culture 'prevails with English and Welsh cricket (ICEC, 2023. p9). Indeed, despite a range of initiatives and policies aimed at promoting participation among those from lower down the social scale in the UK (see All Stars, Dynamos, Chance to Shine Schools, Chance to Shine Street, MCC Foundation Hubs and Wicketz) the ICEC report stated that there had been 'neither the focus on, nor sufficient will to address, class barriers in cricket' (ICEC, 2023. p15).

As an extension to this, the report also indicated that this class-based discrimination in cricket had been partly driven by a lack of access to cricket in state schools, with private schools and 'old boys' cliques historically permeating the game 'to the exclusion of many' (ICEC, 2023. p14) and that social class, schooling and socio-economic background currently had as much constraining influence on participation and progress in the game as a person's ethnicity (ICEC, 2023). Indeed, at the time of the report being published, 58% of the centrally contracted male England players had been privately educated and 20% of ECB staff had attended fee paying schools. In relation to schools cricket more specifically, much of the report focuses on both the tangible (kit, fees, travel and coaching) and non-tangible constraints related to the involvement in, and progress through the county-based talent pathway for those young people not attending private schools. Whilst selection for an ability-based elite pathway is theoretically based on talent and potential, the report indicates that a distinct advantage is held by young people attending private schools due to their access to appropriate facilities at school, the regularity and standard of inter-school fixtures, their ability to purchase superior equipment and their access to elite coaching as part of their school experience (ICEC, 2023). As an extension to this, the report indicates that the average state school 'cannot compete with private schools' in the provision of cricket due to a lack of funding, poor facilities, a less flexible curriculum, and insufficient training for PE staff that limits any opportunity for teachers to develop skills and additional nuances of the game (ICEC, 2023. p237) - subsequently placing state educated pupils at a distinct disadvantage in relation to their selection for, and progression through, county talent pathways. For Green and Kynaston (2019) an access, provision and cultural imbalance exists and is sustained by the fact that the independent sector provides a quality of education and sporting provision that state schools simply cannot match.

When viewed more broadly, it does appear that the relative under-representation of state school pupils in male county talent pathways as well as the elite, professional game need to be seen as an outcome of a more complex and longer term social and educational process. Whilst the ICEC rightly acknowledges the success of primary aged cricket in many clubs and primary schools via ECB initiatives such as Kwik Cricket, Chance to Shine, All Stars and Dynamos cricket, it is the progression into the hardball version of the game at late primary and early secondary school age that the ICEC report highlights as being an additional obstacle in the progress and development of young, working-class pupils in the more 'traditional' version of the game. For the ICEC (2023), this is primarily due to the lack of appropriate facilities/equipment in many state secondary schools, the levels of competence and confidence of many PE staff to deliver the hardball version of the game effectively and the distinct lack of inter-school games currently being played by and between state secondary schools in England (ICEC, 2023). In this regard, the report states that further effort needs to be made to 'increase (hardball) cricket participation between the ages of 11 to 14' for young people in the state education sector due to the fact that most primary and early KS3 aged pupils will 'not have played competitive, hardball cricket and almost non will have access to high-level cricket coaching within the school context' (ICEC, 2023. p.239). As a result, the report is also keen to point out that 'cricketing organisations have largely failed to find systemic solutions to the unacceptable level of inequity between state and private schools (ICEC, 2023. p239) and that 'it is perhaps understandable that the lack of cricket played in most state schools' stands as 'an almost impossible obstacle to overcome' due to an apparent 'passive acceptance within the game that state school provision has become inadequate' and 'is likely to remain so' (ICEC, 2023. p239) unless a significant amount of resource is provided.



ECB State Schools Action Plan (2024)

As a direct result of the findings and recommendations in the ICEC (2023) report (2023) and the specific concerns regarding the current state and status of cricket in many state, secondary schools, the ECB published the State School Action Plan in 2024. Contained within this report were specific aims associated with the creation of 'a focused and targeted strategy for state school cricket' (ECB, 2024. p9) in order to address the fact that 'state educated pupils are underrepresented and independent school students overrepresented at all levels (of the game) from the entry to the talent pathway through to the professional game' (ECB, 2024. p11). Not only does the report state that a young person at an independent school is 2.4 times more likely to play cricket than a young person attending another school, it also highlights the fact that just 55% of boys and 58% of girls involved in County Age Group programmes attended state schools (ECB, 2024). As part of a focused and strategic attempt to address these access and participation anomalies by 'prioritising the needs of state schools, students and the cricket network' in order to 'ensure they have everything they need to succeed' (ECB, 2024. p.7) the report rightly acknowledges the constraining influences of teacher confidence, the availability of equipment and facilities, access to appropriate formats of the game, cost, transport, and parental involvement for those pupils – often from working-class communities and families – that attend mainstream state schools. In order to address this, the ECB highlighted a commitment to significantly boost participation by making cricket accessible to all students by providing the necessary resources and removing barriers (ECB, 2024) and 'better support a diverse talent base' in order to 'ensure that every young cricketer has the chance to realise their potential' (ECB, 2024. p.7). More specifically, the ECB ambitions by 2030 are stated as:

- (i) Invest up to 30m to able up to provide 4 million people with access cricket
- (ii) Invest up to £26 million in 16 state school hubs providing opportunities for over 130,000 people.
- (iii) Support and train hundreds of teachers to deliver quality and inclusive cricket.
- (iv) Provide opportunities for SEND pupils to play cricket.
- (v) Deliver a school competition review.
- (vi) Provide state school players (at county level) with 50% more coaching.

When these aims are viewed in relation to the support and provision for increasing the participation of cricket in mainstream, state secondary schools the report states three main objectives of (i) participation, (ii) access to facilities, and (iii) inter-school competition. In relation to increasing participation specifically, the report acknowledges the 'fantastic ability' of secondary PE teachers to introduce pupils to a wide range of sports but also highlights the fact that many staff lack the confidence to lead cricket in PE lessons in a way that is appropriate for their school, facilities and students and promotes confident and effective participation among their pupils. In order to address this the ECB commit to 'a bespoke training offer' for state school teachers, the provision of appropriate playing equipment, and acknowledges the need for a 'fast-paced format' of the game 'that can be played at any time throughout the academic year, indoors and out' (ECB, 2024. p13).

With regards to objective two (access to facilities), the ECB acknowledge the historical reliance of playing hardball cricket on appropriate space and grass pitches and indicates that independent schools are eight times more likely to have a grass cricket pitch than a state school (ECB, 2024). In order to address this issue, the report commits to move towards 'new, innovative and accessible formats of the game' and the need to 'continue to develop and champion non-hardball formats which can be delivered within the current infrastructure restrictions that many state schools face' (ECB, 2024. p20). In addition, the ECB also acknowledges the need for greater collaboration and sharing of facilities between cricket clubs, independent schools and state schools and in doing so highlights ambitious plans to build 16 new cricket domes in urban areas for community and school usage and investment in key state school secondary hubs in order to adapt to local need by refurbishing sports halls, installing non-turf pitches and providing training facilities in order to provide a 'beacon for state school children to connect with lifelong cricketing opportunities' (ECB, 2024. p19).

Thirdly, the ECB also acknowledge the need to create and grow 'an appropriate and accessible competition' offer (ECB, 2024. p5) by engaging in a school competition review in order to provide a clear and aligned competition pathway' that is 'suitable for every student and every school regardless of experience, facilities and time available' (ECB, 2024. p21).

Social Class and Cricket – An Historical context

For many, the game of cricket is the English class system, with the history and structure of the game, many of its players, and even the way that the game is played having been shaped and guarded for generations by influential players, administrators and commentators from the English upper classes (Horspool, 2024). As a result, the link between education, schooling and the social-class system within this country is ingrained within the very fabric of the game due to the strong links that have long existed between the game of cricket and English elitism (Szymanski & Wigmore, 2023). Due to these significant and long-term social and cultural influences, claims have been made that the game has long been controlled by an elite group resulting in the game of cricket developing and perpetuating barriers to access that have resulted in many excluded groups – such as those from working-class communities and state schools - being forced to 'go to extraordinary lengths to gain admittance to privileged spaces' of the field, club and administrative roles (ICEC, 2023. p36). As a result, the ICEC (2023) suggest that the game of cricket has not only long 'reflected conflicts in wider society' but has been central to fostering these constraints and discriminatory actions due to the fact that 'elite social groups have commanded the most power and control' over the game – a process that has led to the seemingly accepted idea that cricket exemplifies a form of Englishness that is 'white, middle to upper-class and male dominated' (ICEC, 2023. p.36).

With records of the game dating back to the 17th Century, more recognised and formal origins of the game emerged in the early 18th century where cricket was played widely by both peasantry and aristocracy in England, attracting large crowds and quickly rising in popularity in all sections of society. During this period, the game was largely played in rural areas and more diverse in its social make up - although gambling on the outcome of matches was often central to the charm of cricket for the English elites (Malcolm, 2014). However, by the mid to late 18th century the centre of gravity shifted towards a greater influence from the middle and upper classes on the game of cricket as a result of the power and wealth that emerged for these groups from the industrial revolution and the emergence and expansion of major cities. As a result, the ruling elite began to influence and change the structure and nature of the game by paying the best rural players to play in urban matches (Underdown, 2000) – an outcome that did lead to a dramatic expansion in the popularity of cricket but inadvertently caused the game to 'embody and epitomise an idealised version of middle and upper-class manly Englishness' (ICEC, 2023. p38). These class-based divisions and influences were further accentuated by the division between upper-class gentlemen amateurs and working-class

paid professionals that endured well into the late 20th century that served to perpetuate and retain the formal distinction between the two groups via tangible distinctions such as separate entry gates and changing rooms (Horspool, 2024).

In terms of the game of cricket in schools in England more specifically, the game can also be traced back to having a significant influence in the curriculum and sporting provision of the elite English public schools during a time when a more rudimentary educational and sporting provision would have been commonplace for working-class children. Indeed, influenced by Victorian cult of athleticism and 'muscular Christianity' that was associated with physical and moral improvement, the game of cricket became a 'primary device used by the guardians of England's' public schools to write a cultural code upon their youthful charges' (Baucom, 1999. p147). Perpetuated by the popular novel Tom Brown's School Days and the English public school notions of 'honour and chivalry' and the 'moral purpose of competition and physical endeavour' (Holt, 1996. p53-54) contained within it, the game of cricket quickly became associated with the public school ethos of strong moral and cultural codes and playing, winning and losing within the proper 'spirit of the game'. As a result of these ingrained and enduring associations between cricket and the elite school system in England, it has been impossible to disentangle schooling from the development of English cricket talent (Szymanski & Wigmore, 2023) with discrimination based on social class grounds seemingly entrenched within the game (Horspool, 2024).

In relation to the impact on the number and proportion of elite, cricketers in England attending fee paying schools more specifically, data suggests that privately educated players have come to dominate the men's international team with 19 of 33 of England's test captains since Len Hutton (1952-1955) attending private schools and the probability of playing in the ashes for England in the post-war era six times larger if you were privately educated (Szymanski & Wigmore, 2023). However, such trends based on social class background and state and private schooling are not as linear and prevalent as one might initially think, and it seems important for the future that one should accurately acknowledge the past. Indeed, before the abandonment of selective grammar schools and secondary moderns in favour of the comprehensive system in the 1970s, male pupils attending grammar schools were exposed to the types of PE curriculum, sports facilities and competitive sports fixtures more synonymous with boys attending fee paying schools which for many provided the levels and types of participation in sports such as rugby union and cricket that promoted the opportunity to progress

and even excel in the game via school-based opportunities and experiences. Partly as a result of this former education system, therefore, only 22% of the country's county cricketers between 1945 and 1965 came from independent schools and it was not uncommon in the early post war years for the majority of the England cricket team to be made up of an even split between privately educated and state grammar school pupils (Szymanski & Wigmore, 2023). By extension, a more in-depth analysis of the comprehensive system and a roll call of leading English male players since 1963 would also suggest that cricket became much less divided by social class as it historically once was, with a look back at the last 50 years highlighting the wide range of successful and prominent English cricketers from Boycott to Botham and Flintoff to Stokes who were all educated in English state schools. Indeed, for some, the apparent success of the state school system in producing the country's elite cricketers during this period may suggest that cricket no longer seems to stop first at the public schools to source its talent (Horspool, 2024). Not only was the 1980s dominated by state school educated players – only two of Botham's Ashes team were privately educated – but the Ashes winning team of 2005 were very much a product of the comprehensive system with only Strauss and Bell privately educated at this time (Szymanski & Wigmore, 2023). However, in recent years trends have seen a significant move towards the dominance of privately educated players at the top of the English game. Of the 16-man test squad that toured India in 2021, 44% attended an independent school and 43% of franchised players in the first season on The Hundred were privately educated (Borooah, 2023) despite just over 7% of young people attending private schools in the UK. Even apparent state school success stories Joe Root and Harry Brook are among several other high profile professional cricketers in recent years who have benefitted from scholarships to local private secondary schools in order to benefit from elite fixtures, facilities and coaching and maximise their chances of cricketing success. As fee paying schools have historically sought to attract and admit the smartest pupils and focus on increasing academic achievement, independent schools also continue to place considerable emphasis on the significance and status of sporting and cricketing success. The highly significant annual publication of the Top 100 cricket schools by Wisden reads as a promotional brochure for the educational elite, with the cricket facilities, elite coaching provision and former successes proudly and prominently advertised to potential new students and their parents in return for substantial termly fees (Szymanski & Wigmore, 2023). As a result, as state schools in England face ever-increasing constraints linked to funding, staffing, pupil behaviour and the narrowing sporting interests of its pupils (Scattergood, 2023), it is perhaps not surprising that privately educated pupils are



making up increasingly higher proportions of those involved in county talent pathways and county and national squads. From early exposure to the hard ball game via preparatory schools to opportunity to access sport-specific coaching through allocated session, practices and fixtures played in elite facilities, it seems clear how and why pupils paying privately for their education are increasingly emerging to be the country's elite hardball cricketers whilst so many working-class boys are left behind.

For Borooah (2023, p.11) 'it is very easy to underestimate the importance of opportunities in sculpting sporting success' but the game of cricket currently faces a choice on whether to turn its back on diversity and maintain the status quo in the game of cricket or to actively seek change through, long-term, policies 'aimed at spreading the jam of success more evenly over the national bread'. Put simply, we should not be at all surprised by the increasing dominance of privately educated cricketers in the youth talent pathways and elite professional game given the obvious disparity in resources and opportunities between privately and state educated pupils. However, a clearer picture of the situation in our state school system is required if we are to attempt to redress this balance or even if we are to continue to promote the participation and progress of pupils into the hardball version of the game within our working-class communities – before it is too late.

The Study

Aims

Set within this context, the aims of the study were to examine the current state and status of cricket in mainstream, state secondary schools located in predominantly working-class areas by exploring the level and nature of cricket provision within the PE curriculum as well opportunities in extra-curricular clubs and inter-school fixtures. By gathering data on curriculum PE, equipment, facilities and extra-curricular provision alongside the views of PE staff working in working-class state schools the report aims to shine a light on the extent to which cricket is taught in PE and viewed by staff and pupils, as well as the challenges faced in relation to promoting the game effectively in order to increase the chances of pupils being introduced to, and remaining involved in, the game. In doing so, the report aims to supplement the initial findings of the ECB state school action plan in order to provide greater detail and context for future strategies and initiatives focused on increasing the participation of pupils in working-class communities in the game of cricket at all levels. Whilst acknowledging the important and valuable role of alternative versions of the game currently available to young people in the UK, the report focuses primarily on the target of promoting and increasing participation of the hardball version of the game. Therefore, whilst acknowledging the important role of all forms of cricket in the processual move towards an increase in hardball cricket participation for pupils from state, secondary schools, the recommendations contained in the report focus on ways in which the increasingly uneven participation trends at the elite end of the game can be addressed.

Design

Following approval from the ethics committee at York St John University, a 10 question, online Qualtrics survey was distributed electronically to all relevant, state-funded, 'working-class' secondary schools across the north of England. For the purpose of the study, working-class secondary schools were identified as those with 25% or more pupils on roll eligible for free school meals (an accepted measure of the level of social deprivation at a school) based on data available from the Department for Education. For the purpose of this study, the North of England pertained to the counties of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Durham, Merseyside, Cumbria, Northumberland, North Lincolnshire and led to a total of 427 schools emerging as eligible for inclusion in the study. Questions 1 - 7 required quantitative responses associated with PE curriculum hours for cricket, type and amount of equipment and facilities, extra-curricular participation, number of inter-school fixtures, number of pupils participating in cricket outside of school, and the number of



cricket related trips (e.g. The Hundred) organized by the school. In addition, ten further Likert-style questions (e.g. strongly agree, disagree) were included designed to ascertain the views of PE staff (one per school) in relation to the popularity of cricket among the study body and local community, the demand for cricket in PE and after school, and the extent to which cricket is valued and delivered by the department as a whole.

A total of 92 responses were received from schools contacted over a 6-month period. Schools were initially contacted via school email addresses with follow emails one month after initial distribution of the survey. The average FSM percentage for schools that responded was 34% and local authority (LA) distribution was as follows:

LA Breakdown – North Lincs – 2, Barnsley – 6, Rotherham – 9, Chester – 2, Doncaster – 8, Wakefield – 4, Sheffield – 10, Salford – 1, Wirral – 3, Newcastle – 4, Leeds – 8, Halifax – 2, Manchester – 6, Hartlepool – 2, Liverpool – 4, Bolton – 3, Oldham – 6, Harrogate – 1, Sunderland – 2, Hull – 5, Stockport – 4.

Following this, 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Heads of PE or teachers i/c cricket in order to triangulate data and gain greater depth and context on the specific survey responses of the school as well as the issues and trends emerging more generally. Interviews lasted an average of 42 minutes and were all completed via Microsoft Teams given the location of the majority of participants. The average FSM percentage of schools involved in semi-structured interviews was 37%.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to a structured thematic analysis in order to highlight key themes to emerge from the data and begin to form the basis of the main findings of the study.

Staff responses at glance

58% of all staff disagreed or strongly disagreed

with the statement **'Cricket is popular game for pupils at this school'**
(15% Neither)

41% of all staff agreed or strongly agreed

with the statement **'Cricket is a socially acceptable game to play or be interested in at this school'** (23% Neither)

62% of all staff agreed or strongly agreed

with the statement **'Cricket is becoming less popular for pupils at this school'**
(19% Neither)

84% of all staff agreed or strongly agreed

with the statement **'family members have a significant impact on pupils' interest and participation in cricket'** (13% neither)

40% of all staff agreed or strongly agreed and 41% disagreed or strongly disagreed

with the statement **'Cricket is a popular game in our local community'** (19% neither)

40% of all staff agreed or strongly agreed and 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed

with the statement **'There is a demand for extra-curricular cricket clubs and fixtures at this school'**
(20% neither)

70% of all staff agreed or strongly agreed

with the statement **'Pupils enjoy cricket in PE at this school'** (24% neither)

78% of all staff agreed or strongly agreed

with the statement **'the PE department plan and deliver effective cricket lessons at this school'** (10% neither)

68% of all staff agreed or strongly agreed

with the statement **'The PE department enjoy teaching cricket and work hard to promote the game in school'**
(24% neither)



Participation in cricket with primary school aged pupils

It was clear that secondary school PE staff were aware of the relative success of pupils being introduced to, and participating in wind ball versions of the game in primary school:

We do get a lot of kids, especially from certain primary schools that have clearly played a bit of non-stop or cricket with soft balls in PE. These are the ones that tend to look favourably on playing the game.
(Steve: Haugh Academy)

There was also evidence of the fact that when primary schools were delivering cricket on the curriculum or as part of an after-school club, the secondary school PE departments, their staff and even some pupils were keen to support the delivery and organisation of this:

I get into the primary schools a lot during the spring and summer when exam classes are fewer. We know that there's a great deal of things like diamond cricket and non-stop cricket being played in our primary schools.
(Tom: Woodchurch Academy)

We're aware of primary competitions where they play diamond cricket, matches where four can effectively be batting at any one time. Our students often go and help out and they're really good events.
(Will: Burgh Academy)

By extension, there was also evidence that secondary PE staff were aware of the relative popularity of softball cricket at primary-school aged level through the delivery of Dynamos and All Stars cricket initiatives at local cricket clubs. This was either via the involvement of their own children:

Both of mine play All Stars down at our local club and have been for a few years now. Seeing the amount of kids – both boys and girls – playing cricket on a Friday night is amazing really.
(Chris: Moorham Academy)

Or via an awareness of high participation levels more generally at cricket clubs in the local area:

We often have a walk down to the cricket club for a drink on a Friday and to sit outside and watch so many kids engaged and active is amazing really. All playing cricket too. One night last year, there must have been nearly 200 kids down there taking part.
(Luke: Lonton Academy)

"kids at primary age seem to love their cricket and are enthusiastic about the game"

Cricket in timetabled PE lessons

The data responses via the Qualtrics survey suggest that the vast majority of state secondary schools are offering cricket as part of a broad and balanced curriculum, with cricket appearing on the curriculum map of the vast majority of schools who responded. Perhaps not surprisingly, by far the highest allocation of teaching hours was given over to Year 7 boys with an average of 7 hours (7.12 hours) per academic year appearing on the PE department timetable. Indeed, although five schools did not offer cricket to Year 7 boys at all, a total of 29 schools offered between 8 and 20 hours on the summer timetable suggesting that these schools were delivering two terms of cricket to Year 7 boys or double lessons over a half term period. By extension it was apparent that the boys' KS3 PE timetables continued to include the formal delivery of cricket with survey responses indicating that Year 8 boys were offered 6.8 hours on average and Year 9 boys 6.1 hours on average. Again, whilst a proportion of schools did not offer any cricket on the PE curriculum at all (eight schools at Y8 and eleven schools at Y9) it did seem that the majority of schools responding to the survey had at least a term (typically 6 or 7 weeks) of cricket on their PE curricular offer for male pupils in key stage 3.

It did seem, however, that the average number of hours on the PE curriculum for male pupils in KS4 decreased markedly, with a drop to 3.8 hours on average in Year 10 and 2.58 hours in Year 11. It is worth highlighting the fact that many state, mainstream secondary schools move towards option-based PE delivery at this time which may well account for the drop as well as the diverse and wide-ranging offers presented in the survey responses across the 92 schools. In relation to the latter (Year 11), the lower figure is also perhaps not surprising given the constraining influence of examinations starting in early May. For Year 10 specifically, whilst six schools did state that male pupils were able to access 10 or more hours of cricket on their KS4 PE offer, 27 of the schools involved in the study did not offer cricket at all to male pupils in this year group which evidently accounts for the drop-in curriculum time.

Overall, it does seem that the overall picture – at least in theory – is relatively positive in that PE appears in the structured PE curriculum for the vast majority of male pupils in KS3 and appears to be a relatively static and significant offer for male pupils in Year 7 in particular. It is apparent, however, that this PE offer of cricket on the department curriculum decreases as pupils move into Y10 as a result of an apparent move towards an option-based PE curriculum at KS4 and the constraining impact of GCSE/BTEC examination schedules in Y11.

Interview Responses

As highlighted above, the data did indicate that cricket is seemingly a clear and consistent offer on the PE curriculum maps of most state secondary schools. By extension, the interview responses from staff indicated that lesson planning and delivery in these sessions was based on a structured department scheme of work with a clear focus on the introduction and development of some of the basic batting, bowling and fielding skills required to play a version of the game.

At Year 7 and 8 we'd be teaching different concepts around fielding, batting and bowling so they'd be learning and developing those skills and concepts and then how to apply that into a more game like situation. (Liam: Ushington College)

Yes, we have a curriculum map at KS3 that we follow where we look at bowling technique, some basic shots and fielding. We do then try to get them to apply these into a form of the game. (James: Barlow Academy)

The scheme of work is pretty much how you would expect it to look. Lots of skill development at a basic level where you look at fielding, basic batting and bowling then try to play some small-sided conditioned games like diamond cricket or Kwik Cricket. (Matt: Bright High)

We are trying to deliver our blocks so we start with the foundations of cricket and how to bowl and how to bat, then we look to layer this up. We want it to be progressive so the drills get more kind of complicated. It's a traditional way of doing it I suppose. (Karl: Twinbridge Academy)

However, despite an apparent focus on the delivery of key and basic skills in lessons at this age group, the main focus in these KS3 cricket lessons appeared to be on ensuring that physical activity and inclusive participation of the whole class was maximised via fast-paced, highly active and non-traditional, game-based activities:

We try and keep pupils as interested as possible so it's not uncommon for us to predominantly play diamond cricket and Kwik Cricket. Basically, any way to keep them all involved really. (James: Barlow Academy)

The main bit of our PE lesson wouldn't look too much like a traditional cricket game because obviously we want to try and create inclusion and everybody playing something. So we tend to do things like pairs cricket or diamond cricket where everybody's involved and it's, you know, maximum participation... it's an adaptation of cricket, but it's not what formal standard cricket might look like to someone else. (Liam: Ushington College)

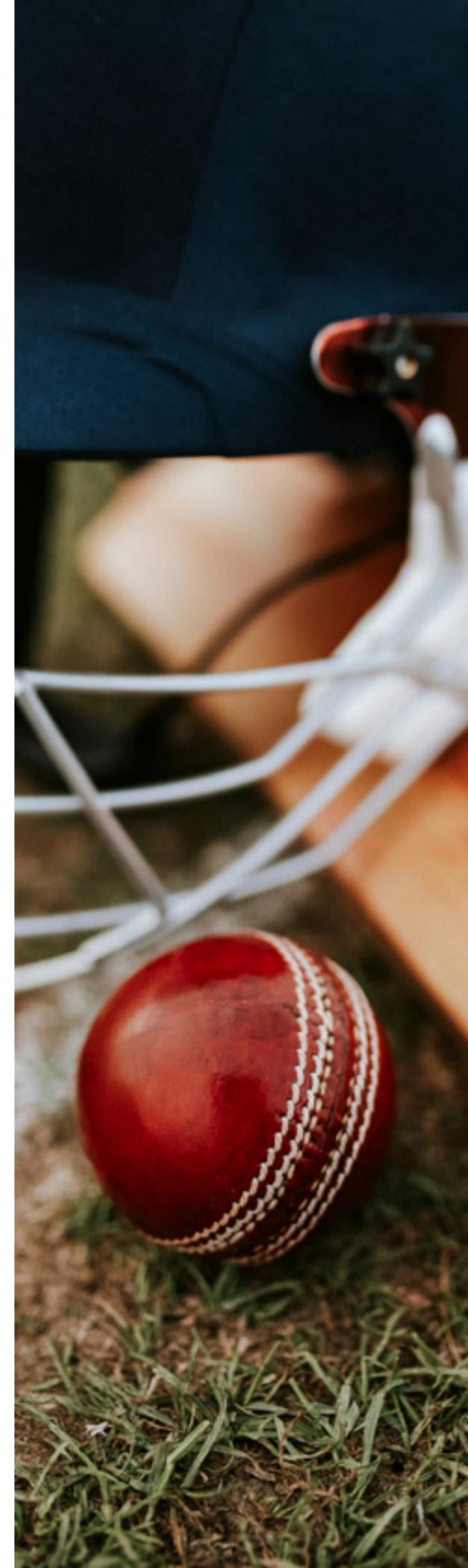
A typical cricket lesson would mainly be wind ball cricket. We would try to do some batting focus but we'd then move onto pairs cricket in the sports hall fairly quickly before they get too bored. (Jim: Durton Academy)

Windball and Kwik Cricket is basically what we deliver when we do cricket. We've got plastic bats, batting tees and that kind of thing. It's all very basic and always softball stuff and we'll try to get in to some form of game where they're all involved as soon as we can. (Andy: Doveside Academy)

Key Stage 4 lessons were delivered almost exclusively as part option-based offers to male pupils in PE. Whilst Y11 involvement was limited to due to involvement in examinations during the summer term, there was evidence of some Y10 pupils consistently selecting to play cricket in PE. However, interview responses suggested that these lessons were almost exclusively focus on paired, windball-based games within small groups of pupils where skill acquisition and development was minimal and students who already played outside of school took part alongside friends and/or pupils – often keen to avoid other options available to them (i.e. softball, athletics).

We have it as one of the options at KS4 but it's a very relaxed version of the game. The Y11s aren't really here long enough to do anything so some will just go on the field. Some of the Y10s like a game too so they go as group of about 10-15 to play on the bottom field. (Chris: Moorham Academy)

There are a few Y10s who will choose to play if it's an option but I think they just want to get outside, you know, outside the classroom and in the sun. In fact, it's either that or athletics so I think some chose cricket as there's less running about. (Tom: Woodchurch Academy)





We do have a scheme of work for cricket at Y10 and Y11 but we don't really follow it. It's been written a long time from when other staff were here and we had the nets in the sports hall. We don't have the time to get the pads and gloves and that out now and the sports hall is out of action from May so we just play games of pairs cricket on the field with a windball. (Luke: Lonton Academy)

Hardball cricket in PE

In both key stages, perhaps the starkest issue impacting on the structure and delivery of cricket in curriculum PE lessons was the very clear and consistent aversion that pupils had to using the hard ball in any capacity. The fear of injury, the lack of confidence and even the notion that hardball cricket was a different game entirely to the one that they had experienced in KS3 all came to mean that staff very rarely – if at all – attempted to include the hardball in PE lessons:

The minute we even mention hardball cricket they just don't want to know. They see it as a completely different game to the wind ball stuff because of all the gear they need to put on and the fact that the ball is hard. It's easier just to play pairs cricket so that's what we do. (Jim: Durton Academy)

The biggest problem that we have is the transition between wind ball and hardball, particularly if they are not that confident. We don't have the staff or facilities to teach them properly and attempt to bridge that gap between wind ball and hardball. The kids just don't want to know anyway as they're scared of getting hit so it's just too much effort for little reward. (Karl: Tonbridge Academy)

You do everything with wind ball and the plastic equipment and then you say 'we'll get the hardball out' and the vast majority suddenly don't want to get involved because they just say it's too hard, dangerous or complicated. (James: Barlow Academy)

We try to just introduce the hardball with some fielding drills to get them used to it, but they're really not bothered. Just even catching it in some Y9 or Y10 lessons they say that it stings and refuse to do it. How can we then say we're going to bowl at each other or I'll bowl at you? (Liam: Ushington College)

As an extension to this, however, there was also a stark but consistent feeling from participants that working-class males were far less likely to take an interest in the hardball game generally and in many cases even saw the game as something that was 'not for the likes of them':

They just see the hardball version of the game as something completely different and they are just not interested. They don't see the game as a realistic option for them mate. They play kwikcricket and pairs in year 7 and 8 but there just doesn't seem to be any interest in them moving into playing the with the hardball. (Lewis: Fordham Academy)

You don't see them talking about cricket at all now. I mean it's not even on their radar. A decade or so ago there might be a bit of chat about the test match, especially the ashes but I can't imagine for one minute that the majority of lads here would even know what a test match is. (Chris: Moorham Academy)

There's a strong working-class tradition of cricket around here. Much of it goes back to mining and working-men's clubs. But all that's gone now as have many of the clubs. No doubt their grandads' would have played and watched cricket on TV but the clubs have gone and it's not on tele so I suppose we shouldn't really be surprised. (Jack: Ridgeway Academy)

If I'm honest I don't think many lads see cricket as a sport they could or should play any more. If you asked them, I think they'd say that it was a posh people's sport. It's shame really living in Yorkshire as so many players and members have been working-class people but the game seems to have shifted massively in the last ten years or so. (Jamie: Inwood Academy)

I suppose The Hundred helps a bit with it being on BBC but I watch it and even I don't understand what 's happening sometimes and who the teams are. Lads get behind England don't they and they want to watch that. Cricket wasn't on my radar at all growing up until England played the West Indies in the late 80s on BBC and I was hooked. Remember when it was on Channel 4 for a bit too? For the Ashes in 2005? That coverage was brilliant. (Steve: Hough Academy)

"I don't think many lads see cricket as a sport that they could or should play any more"

Confidence and competence of PE staff to deliver hardball cricket in PE

In relation to the apparent reluctance of pupils to engage in lessons that involve the use of a leather ball, it did initially seem that this response was predominantly initiated by the pupils themselves. However, responses indicated that many PE staff had low levels of confidence and competence to teach appropriate skills and techniques that would promote successful engagement and progress in the hardball version of the game:

I think most of staff lose all confidence to teach cricket once the hardball comes out. I mean, it's not just keeping a class full of kids interested in the nets, I think it comes down to staff just not wanting to teach it because they don't really know how to. (Ryan: Gillthorpe Academy)

I have worked in three secondary schools around here now and I would have to say that I haven't encountered one member of staff that would be keen or able to teach anything meaningful by way of hardball cricket. (Craig: Woodhouse Academy)

We're quite a big department but I know that there are no cricket specialists amongst us. In fact, I'd be hard pushed to say anyone could teach proper cricket with any real confidence here. (Jamie: Inwood Academy)

Where there was an apparent level of confidence and/or ability to deliver structured cricket lessons that could focus on skill development via the use of the hardball, these staff were generally PE teachers who had generally played the game for a prolonged period and had consciously sought to deliver hardball cricket in lessons as a result of their own experience or accumulated knowledge of playing the game either at school themselves or at club level. Even then, however, there was some evidence that not only was this type of PE teacher quite rare in the majority of schools but that some staff who *did* play the game themselves were reluctant or seemingly unable to deliver hardball cricket drills or lessons due to their lack of subject knowledge and confidence.

I'll be totally honest, I've played cricket since I was in my teens and now I'm the chairman of my local cricket club but I would struggle to teach pupils proper technique with the hardball. I just haven't ever really been shown how to do it, and it's really quite technical really isn't it and I just play. It seems daft really but I just know how to play the game not teach it. (Jim: Durton Academy)



I played a bit of cricket and I watch it regularly but I wouldn't have any confidence to teach some of the more complex aspects of cricket certainly not some of the more technical shots or things like spin bowling. That's really why we just end up doing a lot of the wind ball stuff on the 3G pitch.
(Jack: Ridgeway Academy)

I'm the cricket specialist I suppose because I used to play a bit, but I would struggle to teach anything meaningful after year 8. It's partly that the kids are just not interested and partly that we struggle to deliver lessons as a department because we just don't have the expertise in the department.
(Tom: Woodchurch Academy)

The preparedness of PE staff to deliver hardball cricket in PE

It did seem that the main reason behind this apparent lack of confidence and competence to teach hardball cricket in PE was seemingly due to the fact that PE staff were professional products of their own PE experiences. That is to say, as many of the PE staff interviewed or referred to indirectly by participants had not been exposed to hardball cricket lessons in PE whilst at school themselves they had very little to draw upon by way of previous knowledge, experience or confidence in relation to demonstrating more advance technique, designing and delivering progressive hardball lessons, and providing effective feedback and guidance to pupils:

I mean we just never did any cricket at our school, it just wasn't that type of school so when I was asked to teach it, I didn't have a clue really. **(Chris: Moorham Academy)**

Cricket is just not my thing and we never really played it in PE at school. We just did football, gym and softball games so it's just never been something I've known or been in to.
(Rich: Cramlin Academy)

Clearly, it does seem that there would be an expectation for PE staff to have received some support, guidance and resources as part of their professional training and in this regard there was evidence that some participants had 'got lucky' with the school placements. Several PE staff indicated that their school placements in independent schools had been instrumental in developing their knowledge of the game and most importantly, their ability to teach well-structured and effective hardball lessons:

I went to a grammar school for my second teaching placement and given the expectation and the staff there I was just expected to deliver bang on cricket and hockey lessons from day one...I spent four months teaching high end cricket lessons in the nets and umpiring matches. I went from a lad from Liverpool who knew nothing about cricket to a relative expert and loving the game in a matter of weeks. **(Will: Burgh Academy)**

My second teaching placement was at a private boys school in Durham...we had loads who were already playing the game. It was more like coaching than teaching in those lessons to be honest, but I learnt so much and I'm so grateful for that...it was an absolute blessing getting that placement. **(Jim: Durton Academy)**

Despite these relative success stories, however, much more common were responses in interviews that indicated a distinct lack of effective taught sessions by university tutors delivering practical sessions on initial teacher training programmes (ITT) or relevant experience of teaching the game during school-based placements. Supposedly aimed at developing future PE teachers' confidence and competence to teach all aspects of the game of cricket from beginners to advanced, it was apparent that school placement guidance and experience was erratic at best, with the vast majority of ITT sessions rarely going beyond inclusive games and basic fielding and bowling techniques via the use of a soft ball, whilst in several cases these sessions did not take place at all:

We did an afternoon on cricket from what I can remember but it was quite clear that the lecturer teaching us wasn't a cricketer and we just did some bowling, fielding and played a game of pairs cricket from what I remember. All very frustrating really.
(Karl: Tonbridge Academy)

There were probably about 80 people on my PGCE course and we were never taught or shown anything in relation to teaching cricket **(Dave: Bridge High)**

It's like training to become a maths teacher and nobody teaching you how to teach quadratic equations or fractions. It's like, yeah I know that I should be teaching it well, but nobody's ever shown me how to do it.
(Lewis: Fordham CS)

Cricket sessions on my PGCE? None. Zero. I just picked bits up as I went along once I started teaching really.
(Liam: Ushington College)

I did literally no cricket from what I can remember other than teaching a bit of Y7 girls cricket on my second teaching placement. I certainly did no cricket sessions on my teacher training – none at all.
(Luke: Lonton Academy)

**“Cricket lessons in my PGCE?
None. Zero”**



Cricket Equipment and Facilities

It was apparent from school responses that the availability of equipment and facilities had the potential to limit the opportunity for cricket to be delivered in PE and as part of an extra-curricular offer. Just six schools highlighted that they had a grass cricket wicket and only 27 schools had permanent, outdoor artificial wickets. Whilst 'Flixpitches' had been an initiative of the early 2000s it seemed that these were no longer popular or available today with just three schools indicating that they owned one. There was strong evidence that many schools still had access to pull out, indoor cricket nets usually located in sports halls with 49 schools stating that these were still part of the facilities available to teach cricket.

In terms of equipment, there was also evidence that equipment to be potentially used as part of hardball lessons or practices was relatively limited. In terms of wooden bats, the average number of bats owned by schools involved in the survey was 12, although five schools indicated that they did not own a single bat and 18 schools stated that they owned five or less. However, there was evidence of some schools owning more than a sufficient amount with a total of 36 schools indicating that they owned 10 or more.

Sets of pads were also relatively low across the schools involved in the survey, with the average number of pads (sets) per school being 5 (5.07) and 22 schools not owning a single pair. Whilst a minority of schools (9) were able to offer over 10 sets of pads, the vast majority (70) owned less than 10 pairs. Responses in relation to gloves indicated a similar picture in that the average number of pairs owned by schools was 4.7 pairs and whilst some schools had the relative luxury of owning more than 10 pairs, 68 schools owned less than 10 and 24 schools did not own a single pair. Further to this, the average number of protective helmets owned by schools in the study was 4.3, with 60 owning less than 10 and 22 schools not owning a protective cricket helmet of any kind.

It did seem that many schools had the potential to use hardball cricket balls in some lessons or practices with an average of 20 per school, 19 schools owning more than 10. However, availability of leather cricket balls was similar to that of other hardball cricket equipment in that 60 schools owned less than 10 and 20 schools did not own a single one. In relative contrast, however, the availability of wind balls was higher with school on average owning 21 wind balls. Whilst 10 schools did not own any, 6 schools owned more than 10 suggesting that these might be the preferred use of lesson and extra-curricular delivery for many state schools.

Interview Responses

Whilst it was clear that the attitudes of most pupils to hardball cricket and the inability and/or unwillingness for many PE staff to deliver such lessons was significantly constraining the delivery of structured hardball cricket in PE, there was also clear evidence that a distinct lack of access to appropriate facilities hampered this even further. Even for those staff with a willingness and ability to introduce and develop more advanced techniques using the hardball, the appropriate facilities required (such as indoor nets) were either not always available or were not even present in the school at all:

The only way that I can try to teach certain shots to the year 8 and 9s like a hook or a drive is in the sports hall. I'll set up five or six stations in there with a feeder, batter, fielders and an observer and it works brilliantly. All stuff I did on the level one course I once did but once we lose the sports hall in May it all stops. Where else could we do it? It's the same if I wanted to then do a net session with wind balls or even the hardball in the sports hall.

(Will: Bargh High)

How can we possibly teach any hardball cricket? We lose the sports hall for exams twice a year, we've got no pull out nets and no artificial. We've got a bit of gear that we could use but when do we get chance? It's just all windball stuff really.

(Dave: Bridge High)

In addition to this, it was also clear that the amount of hardball cricket equipment available when or if PE staff attempted to deliver hardball lessons was extremely limited. The distinct lack of protective equipment, wooden bats and leather balls has already been highlighted but PE staff also provided some additional context in interviews as to why this was the case:

I must admit that the little bit of cricket equipment that we do have is embarrassingly old. I think the sets of pads that we have still have buckle fasteners at the back. When I get my budget every year though, I can buy two full bags of footballs for the price of a couple of pairs of cricket pads that will hardly get used.

(Steve: Hough Academy)

We haven't had the pads and stuff out for that long, I'm not sure what it looks like to be honest. I'm pretty sure that some of the cricket pads and bats in there are my old ones or ones that I've cadged from lads at the (cricket) club.

(Matt: Bright High)

Extra-curricular cricket – clubs and team practices

There was evidence to suggest that the more traditional lunch time cricket clubs and practices had become a thing of the past. As with the trends in much of the data, Year 7 boys were the more likely to offer a lunchtime cricket club although this only equated to a total 12 schools providing a lunchtime offer to Year 7 pupils. Perhaps not surprisingly given the trends associated with other data in the study, the offer of a lunchtime cricket club decreased for older year groups with just eleven schools offering clubs for Year 8 boys, nine schools providing a club to Year 9 pupils, and three schools providing a lunchtime cricket practice for Year 10 or 11 male pupils. In terms of numbers attending such sessions, however, only nine schools indicated that 10 or more pupils attended their Year 7 or Year 8 lunchtime cricket practices and that only three schools had more than 10 pupils attending at Year 10 or Year 11. Indeed from all schools involved in the survey data a total of just 152 Y7 boys attended a lunchtime cricket club/practice school, with this figure dropping to a total of 131, 97, 40 and 32 for years 8, 9, 10 and 11 respectively.

Much more positive, however, was the fact that many more schools offered after school cricket clubs and practices to pupils, and that in many cases attendance was relatively high. For male pupils in Year 7 and Year 8, over half of the schools in the study offered an after school, extra-curricular club, with 43 and 21 also offering these clubs at Year 9 and 10 respectively. Although it was still somewhat alarming that such a high proportion of schools offered no extra-curricular cricket provision at all (Year 7 - 30, Year 8 - 27, Year 9 - 36, Year 10 - 58), the numbers of pupils attending this extra-curricular provision was somewhat positive in that an overall total of 485 male pupils chose to attend a Y7 cricket practice, 545 attended in Y8, 413 in Y9 and 199 in Year 10. Although given the number of schools without an offer meant that the average number of pupils in the study attending extra-curricular clubs was relatively low (7.69 in Year 7, 6.8 in Year 8, 5.2 in Year 9 and 2.51 in Year 10), it was evident that several schools were enjoying a high level of participation in these clubs with 23 schools attracting more than 10 Year 7 boys, and 29 schools (Year 8) and 22 schools (Year 9) doing the same.

Interview Responses

Despite the relatively low levels of participation for pupils in extra-curricular clubs – especially at lunch time – there were some promising and positive examples of schools enjoying successes in this area. When pupils did arrive to participate in organised and regular hardball cricket practices, the staff spoke very positively about the levels of engagement and their own enjoyment of being involved:

We get a nice little number of lads, about 12 to 15, who want to be involved, especially towards winter. We can get the cricket nets out and we can have some proper batting sessions in there. We even split the hall so that we have a couple of nets for batting then others can practice fielding. Then we have a game of indoor, paired cricket to finish. I love those sessions after school.

(Liam: Ushington College)

Don't get me wrong, we have some great cricket practices here in winter and summer. You know, the ones that are really into it or come with their mates. It's a real mix of year groups and abilities but we can use the nets in winter and spring and they bring their gear with them so they genuinely get to practice and maybe even improve.

(Lewis: Fordham Academy)

There was even one example of a school where staff running an after school extra-curricular club felt that they had provided some pupils with an opportunity to try out something new.

We get a group of about 20 lads that come on a Friday lunchtime and I really enjoy it. Most of them are already playing and really fancy an opportunity to play some more cricket, but there are some that come that quite fancy trying something new.

(Jim: Durton Academy)

“some of the cricket pads and bats are my old ones”

However, when staff were probed further there was a clear sense that these clubs and practices were simply providing additional opportunities for pupils that already played the game to play even more. Unfortunately, there was little evidence that staff were providing a platform for pupils to extend and expand the skills and knowledge that they had picked up and developed in PE lessons. Instead, after school clubs and practices were typically made up of pupils from across several different year groups, who already played the game, would often bring their own equipment and were generally used to using the nets safely and effectively due to their previous experience at their respective cricket clubs.

They're great sessions but I'm not sure that we are introducing new kids to the game or providing much of an opportunity for those who don't play much cricket to get better. It's mainly just kids that already play who want to play a bit more. (Andy: Doveside College)

I'd love to say that when we highlight cricket sessions to lads in PE lessons that we get loads coming to get better. We do get a few, but it's mainly the lads that already love it and play outside of school. They are really nice sessions with great lads coming but it's just another net session for most of them rather than an opportunity to introduce new kids to the game. (Craig: Woodlane Academy)

We usually get 15-20 turn up and I'd say probably the majority are playing for a club outside of school with hardball. So it's a small number at the minute it's the lads that are already playing cricket and just love it. They just see extra-curricular as another opportunity to play more cricket. (Jamie: Inwood Academy)

"I am not sure that we are introducing new kids to the game"

"It's mainly the lads that already love it and play outside of school"



Inter-School Fixtures

Data relating to inter-school fixtures highlighted rather erratic trends in terms of number and type of fixture being played across schools and year groups. It is certainly worth highlighting at this stage that in hindsight there should have been a clearer definition of the term 'inter-school fixtures' used in the survey in that for the purposes of data collection this term was meant to refer specifically to inter-school hard ball cricket fixtures played on an artificial or grass wicket. It is this lack of clear definition that may have led to some of the anomalies emerging in relation to total number of 'inter-school fixtures' being played. In this regard, online survey responses indicated that seven schools had taken part in 30 or more 'inter-school cricket fixtures'. However, from contacting these schools for further clarification, it was evident that the term had been used to encompass all boys and girls fixtures and whilst the majority of these had been more traditional hard ball inter-school fixtures, others had included more structured, windball based fixtures taking place both indoors and outdoors. Notwithstanding this, it was evident that these seven schools were playing significantly more fixtures than most other schools and on closer inspection of the school data, four had comparatively low percentages of students eligible for free school meals (23.6%, 23.2%, 28% and 27.1%) and the remaining three were located in predominantly Asian communities with a high percentage of students from Pakistani and Indian heritage on roll.

As with the trends in other data sets, it was the Year 7 boys who were more likely to play hardball, inter-school fixtures with 43 schools able to offer at least one inter-school fixture at this year group at an average of 4 (4.12) fixtures per year. Perhaps not surprisingly this was similar for the Year 8 boys at 43 schools (average 4.04) – a figure that again dropped away for boys in Year 9 with 34 schools fulfilling at least one hardball cricket fixture (at an average of 3.6 Year 9 fixtures per school) and Year 10 with a total of 32 schools offering fixtures at an average of less than three fixtures per year (2.93). Indeed, across all 92 schools that completed the survey, there were just a total of 179 inter-school cricket fixtures involving Y7 boys, with 30% of these fixtures involving just five schools in the survey. Indeed, across all year groups for the schools offering any form of inter-school cricket fixture, there was a total of 672 fixtures played by boys across all five school year groups – a fixture that could feasibly be lower given the fact that schools involved in the study could have played against one another. As an extension to this, 425 of the inter-school fixtures recorded through the survey involved just five schools, with 30% of Y7 fixtures being attributed to these five schools in the survey and the same five schools making up 32% of all Y8 fixtures, 45% of all Y9 fixtures and 42% of all Y10 fixtures.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the number of fixtures arranged for year groups in schools did slowly decline with age, with a gradual decrease in schools not offering fixtures for a specific year group (Year 7 - 38 schools with no fixture; Year 8 - 39 schools with no fixture; Year 9 - 45 schools with no fixture – Year 10 - 47 schools with no fixture). Perhaps the most alarming figure overall was the fact that of the 92 schools that responded to the survey, 31 of those schools did not offer a single inter-school cricket fixture at any year group during the school year.

Interview Responses

From the interview responses there was evidence within some schools that fixtures were played regularly and the survey data in particular pointed to several schools who were playing a significant amount of inter-school fixtures right up to Year 10.

When we do get teams out, it's great and I really enjoy those summer evenings. We'll take three or four teams on a coach to the local school and we do hold our own most of the time. It's a mix of kids who play and who have never really played before and it's really nice to see them playing together and the other lads doing something that they wouldn't have normally done.

(Ryan: Gillthorpe Academy)

There were also responses that suggested that some PE staff had been able to utilise several pupils with ability and experience in the hardball game alongside other 'sporty' pupils who were willing or keen to play in order to play some sporadic hardball fixtures

In the last couple of years we were able to go play hardball against them (local school). That was a monumental thing for our school. We've never done that, but for the last two years we've been able to go play hardball cricket and that's something again, which is we're really proud of as a school in terms of doing that and giving that opportunity to the pupils.

(Jack: Ridgway Academy)

In one particular case, it was evident that a great deal of work had been done with a group of pupils in order to fulfil a hardball cricket fixture with a local school on a grass wicket and that this had led to a range of positive outcomes for both pupils and staff:

I once managed to get 12 year 9 lads who I'd worked really hard to play a game against a nearby school on their grass wicket. To be honest it was a really emotional night for us all. So much emotion came out of it. They won the match narrowly and you should have seen them running on the pitch. It was just like the Flintoff documentary. Like I'd never seen before. Not in a taunting way but just in general happiness way and I was like...wow!
(Will: Burgh Academy)

However, where schools were able to field teams at some, and sometimes even all, year groups, it was also evident once again that these were more often further opportunities for those pupils who were already playing cricket at local clubs to play more cricket. In some instances, PE staff did speak positively and favourably of pupils who had come along to play for school having had very little prior experience of hardball cricket:

Our teams that we do get out to play in the summer are almost always made up of the lads in each year group that already play. That probably accounts for two thirds of every side and then the rest are their mates who just don't want to miss about or are just great kids that will try anything sporty. They generally just field and have a go at bowling when we are on top. One lad joked he was gutted not to get man of the match last year and he'd not batted, bowled or taken a catch and only fielded the ball three times.
(Ryan: Gillthorpe High)

There was also additional mention of the benefits associated with running teams that were made up of pupils that played cricket regularly:

It (having pupils that already play) is a real bonus really as they generally bring their own bags and coffins to games. It means that we don't always have to provide the kit. They can also score and sort out the lads for us if we are umpiring.
(Matt: Bright High)

These lads generally have quite supportive parents too who already play the game. They'll come (parents) to games and even help us out with transport at some matches and I honestly could not do it without them. A couple of the dads umpire for us and one plays at our local club so that's a fantastic link when we need it.
(Karl: Tonbridge Academy)

Despite these relative success stories, however, finding other schools in the local area that were suitable opponents proved to be a real challenge to many of the schools that were willing and able to fulfil inter-school, hardball fixtures. One school indicated that the only real option available to them would be a lengthy trip to a local independent school to arrange and fulfil KS3 fixtures:

It's got to the point where I am thinking about contacting some local private schools for the year groups that we can get teams out for I think that we've got strong enough teams to give them a competitive game at Y7, 8 and 9. I mean each of our teams has 5 or six lads that play down at the club so I'm sure we'd be competitive. If we go there, I know we'll have set fixtures and might even play on a decent grass pitch.
(Matt: Bright High)

In most other cases, however, the majority of schools that could put up year group teams to play hardball fixtures had simply struggled to find schools with the local authority and/or surrounding area that would offer any form of hardball cricket fixtures at all:

The big problem for us is that even if we can get teams out - and we generally can at year 7 and 8 - there are no schools playing it near us.
(Karl: Tonbridge Academy)

I think a lot of the schools just wouldn't know how to play it (hardball cricket) but we often find that the staff will just say "oh, our kids aren't interested" when I think it's more an issue than that really.
(Liam: Ushington College)

Once we've battled to get teams out at KS3, the next challenge is to find teams at the right level to play against
(Rich: Cramlin Academy)

Overall, therefore, it was evident that being able to play meaningful, regular and appropriate hardball cricket fixtures on grass pitches was rare for the vast majority of schools in this study. Indeed, although several schools survey responses indicated that they were playing high levels of organised cricket fixtures each year, requests for further details and/or follow up interviews suggested that these were much more likely to be structured games of paired cricket, using limited equipment and a windball.

We play 'crash and bash' fixtures and they've been really successful. We play games on the 3G with a wind ball but wooden bats. It's 8 a side but a bowler can't bowl more than two overs. If we play a school nearby, we are finished and home by 5 o'clock. We can even play in the sports hall if it's raining. Some of the schools we play walk to us believe it or not.
(Will: Burgh Academy)

We do get a bit of interest in some year groups when we do paired cricket in PE so we play other schools at paired wind ball cricket. We have a PE and school sport group in the town so we have contacts through that. We've even had small tournaments here where we've had two games going at once on the 3G.
(Rich: Cramlin Academy)

In the majority of these cases, such fixtures were viewed favorably by PE staff as it appeared to address many of the problems previously highlighted whilst providing a genuine opportunity for many pupils without much cricket knowledge, confidence or experience to not only represent their school but apply some of the more basic skills that they might have been able to develop in PE:

The games that we do play are great to see. I'll be honest, the quality of shots and some of the bowling isn't the best but the boys that do come along and play love it. It's really just an extension of what they've done in PE most of the time and they obviously don't need to wear whites and all that stuff.
(Will: Burgh Academy)

This also benefitted the PE staff in that they did not feel that they needed to have a great deal of knowledge and experience in hardball cricket themselves:

The games and the lads just run themselves really. There's no need to lug the big bag of gear out, score properly or worry about the game being all over in five minutes or going on all night. Everyone knows the rules and we can get away with not having played much so the pressures off really compared to a big fixture.
(Jack: Ridgeway Academy)

That the amount of equipment and cricket-specific facilities required was also lessened which helped promote a more inclusive and relaxed playing environment for both pupils and staff:

We just play on our astro pitch. It's perfect really. Flat, dry and the wind ball bounce is fine. The lads don't need to worry about the hardball and we don't spend all day watching the weather forecast. Unless the weather is torrential we just carry on if another school has come to us.
(Jamie: Inwood Academy)

Two wooden bats and a windball and we're away. We've even had three other schools here playing on half the 3G each. We played 8 a side and everyone bowled an over. We started at half three, all played each other and had done by half five. We're doing it again this year.
(Tom: Woodchurch Academy)

And that the appeal of a clearer start and finish time was very appealing for staff with a range of demands on their time:

The best thing about the 8 v 8 games is that we know when it will finish. Everybody is involved too so you've not need to worry about that. It's usually the schools that we play who don't play proper cricket so we're all in the same boat too. Matches are pretty tight and we've done in just over an hour.
(Jim: Durton Academy)

However, even with all these benefits in relation to accessibility and time constraints there was still an overwhelming sense that after school sports clubs and cricket fixtures in particular were becoming more of a challenge for PE staff. This was mainly due to the fact that PE staff were increasingly constrained by a range of other responsibilities:

It's just that staff are pulled in so many directions and by the end of the year they are dead on their feet. We'll have athletics and other things going on too so playing cricket and getting home late is just not appealing so staff just don't want to do it.
(James: Barlow Academy)

Our staff are pulled all over the place. I think it's often the same in many schools where the PE staff become senior or pastoral leaders so they just can't really commit to anything after school, let alone fixtures that are going to last for three or four hours.
(Liam: Ushington College)

There was also evidence to suggest that PE departments and PE staff were much less likely to be supported by other staff in school as had traditionally been the case:

There used to be a time where we'd have a couple of general teachers running teams for us who were into cricket and liked the opportunity but everyone is just so busy now with planning, marking and observations that there's no way that they want to stay at school any longer than they have to.
(Jack: Ridgeway Academy)

By extension, there was also mention of the restrictive nature of transport where access to minibuses were a challenge and larger coaches were extremely costly.

Even if we could get teams out we don't have a minibus anymore so it would be a coach. They are £300 in the summer and that has to come out of our budget.
(Jamie: Inwood Academy)

Pupils Playing Cricket with Local Clubs

Although staff were asked to indicate the number of pupils that they believed played some form of cricket outside of school, it is important to acknowledge that these figures must be considered within this context. As with the picture across other questions it was evident that some schools could point to a proportion of their pupils being involved in the game of cricket outside of school. Indeed, a total of 1276 pupils across the 92 schools surveyed were thought to playing cricket for a club outside of school equating to an average of just over 15 pupils per school (15.7). Also, as with the data linked to other questions in the survey, there were many schools that could state a proportionately higher number of pupils playing cricket for clubs outside of school. 26 schools involved in the study had more than 20 boys playing cricket for clubs outside of school and several others had significantly high number of pupils playing for clubs outside of school including five with 40 or more pupils, three with 50 or more and four schools indicating that they had over 80 pupils playing cricket for local clubs. It is perhaps not surprising that these schools were also able to offer significantly more inter-school fixtures than most others in the survey. Indeed, if the data of just six schools is removed (436 players) the average numbers of pupils playing in each school drops to 13 and with a further four schools also taken out, the average number of pupils playing cricket for clubs outside of school drops to less than 10 (9.58).

Once again, however, and despite some of these encouraging numbers across some schools in particular, the survey data stated that 15% of the schools involved in the survey did not have a single pupil that they were aware of playing cricket for a club outside of school and 43% of schools that indicated that they did have pupils, the total equated to less than 10 pupils across the entire school and 66% of schools had less than 20 pupils playing cricket for clubs that they were aware of.



Interview Responses

There were some success stories in relation to schools that had been able to organise and fulfil, hardball cricket fixtures. As mentioned previously, these were often schools that had a proportion of students in each year group that were already playing cricket outside of school or that there was a staff link to the local club that proved to be advantageous in playing fixtures when needed:

The club is a big reason behind how and why we can play games to be honest. I'm the chairman so it's easy to get access to the ground for fixtures and we even sometimes walk down here after school for some paired cricket games with our extra-curricular club.
(Liam: Ushington College)

Our link to the club is massive. We are really fortunate for a whole host of reasons to be honest. I'm not saying that we are necessarily a massive success story but we couldn't do half the things that we do without the local club. To be fair the link has been there for as long as I can remember but it's a massive positive us and them a bit I suppose.
(Matt: Bright High)

The fact that there are a few lads in each year group that play down at the club and even some of their dads, means that if we are really struggling or we want to put on a proper fixture against a decent local school we can generally use there. Most of the dads are really supportive and if we ask the lads a bit before we can usually get the ground on a Monday night.
(Andy: Doveside College)

As an extension to this there were even some instances where PE staff spoke of coaches from the local cricket club coming into the schools to deliver sessions after school or to help out with fixtures:

We have had a couple of retired blokes from the local cricket club volunteer to come in and help when I first started working here. The kids used to love it. They'd come in and run sessions in the sports hall after school. For a couple of years, they even helped run teams with us and it was a massive help for some of the staff where cricket wasn't their thing'
(Craig: Woodlane Academy)

More broadly, several schools spoke of a wide ranging and longer term positive relationship with their local cricket club that appeared based on a genuine link and association between the school, the cricket club and even the local primary schools in the area:

Even though we don't play many hardball fixtures at all, it is clear that the cricket club is a real hub for cricket in the local area. We have used it ourselves at times for fixtures, development officers and SSCOs used to use it for wind ball T20 tournaments and I know that the primary tournaments are still held there.
(Dave Bridge High)

The PE staff in these schools with similar relationships also spoke of the positive impact that such a positive link with the local club had on increasing engagement and participation for pupils at the school – both actual and potential:

The lads that do play down at the club often drag the others down who are thinking about it but wouldn't go of their own accord. It's less than a mile from the school and most of the lads that play in the teams down there, including the adult teams actually went to this school.
(Matt: Bright High)

However, it is perhaps not surprising that such links were rare in most cases, and this was even the case when cricket clubs existed in very close proximity to the school:

To be honest we have two decent cricket clubs quite close to school. In fact most of our lads will walk past one of them on their way to school but they wouldn't really even acknowledge it is there. We don't have any contact with them at all really which is shame really when I think about it.
(Jack: Ridgeway Academy)

“our link to the local cricket club is massive”

“we wouldn't do half of the things that we do without the local club”



In some cases there were even responses that indicated that local clubs used the cricket facilities in the school itself without any real proactive attempt by either to forge any meaningful links:

Funnily enough, I know of at least two local clubs that use our sports hall and nets for their winter nets but we have no link at all with them. They might ask to put some posters up if they have a season where they are short of players but these two clubs are a couple of miles away and they don't have any link at all with us. In fact, our 4G is used non-stop in winter for football clubs and loads of our lads walk past these nets sessions and wouldn't even register that they are playing cricket in there.
(Jamie: Inwood Academy)

This appeared to be associated with the perceived lack of interest from the pupils or that fact that whilst cricket clubs were relatively close in distance from the school, the nature of the game and the perception of the school meant that local cricket clubs did not express any form of interest in working with the school as it was not in their interest.

Overall mate, it just comes down to the fact that the lads at this school are just not into cricket. The game is not even remotely on their radar. It's not a game that they play or see other people playing so other than the chance to whack a wind ball about in PE every now and again it's just not something the interests them or impacts on them in any way.
(Luke: Lonton Academy)

School and PE department links with County cricket clubs

Trips and Visits to county-based elite cricket fixtures

In relation to links with county cricket clubs there was even less evidence that these existed in any meaningful, consistent or effective way. During the interview stage of the study, it was positive to hear of one school that had benefited from a range of funding and support from their local county club and it was evident that the availability of facilities (moveable outdoor nets) and the access to community coaches had led to some increases in participation and engagement in this regard:

We are lucky that we are being used as a hub by (local county cricket club) so we've been able to access and use funding to get loads of equipment and some outdoor, moveable cricket nets. The kids love it in the summer and we can rent them out to clubs too. It's made a real difference to lessons and kids coming after school.

(James: Barlow Academy)

There was also evidence from another school that the visit of a cricket development officer linked to the local county club had led to a significant impact on both pupils and PE staff.

We had a lady from Lancashire come in for six weeks and she was amazing with the girls, boys and staff. Everybody loved her and we all picked up so much from the sessions that she did. We've got loads of lesson resources that we still use.

(Will: Burgh Academy)

However, it was evident from further responses from this staff member that this was never really followed through by the county cricket club and the links and increase in engagement and participation became lost over time:

As good as it was that she came in, we never really saw her again as she went to other schools and everything just fell flat again really. It was a real shame

(Will: Burgh Academy)

Almost all other participants could not highlight any real link to the local county cricket club in any capacity. Whilst some PE staff seemed to be aware that cricket development officers had been into local primary schools, this appeared not to be the case for them:

I know that some form of cricket development officer was doing the rounds in the local primary schools a couple of years ago. I think they were linked to Yorkshire CC. I put the feelers out about them coming in here but I never really heard anything back

(Liam: Ushington College)

Several other interviews responses did also appear to suggest that there might even be an apparent sense of bias towards certain areas of the county in this regard:

Nothing really, it doesn't help that we are in South Yorkshire and Yorkshire seem focused in West and North Yorkshire. Just some access to teaching resources would be a start.

(Dave: Bridge Academy)

Overall, however, the over-riding feeling from the majority of responses was the very real sense that there was no level of support in any capacity from the county clubs in order to support staff development, increase pupil interest, and develop curricular and extra-curricular participation in cricket:

When I came and wanted to start promoting and pushing the game in school, I contacted Durham CC but was told that schools cricket was not a funding priority at the time and that I should ring back at another time.

(Jim: Durton Academy)

I have contacted the county to see what they had by way of staff training or even lesson resources that I could use within the department, and it was like I was speaking another language.

(Chris: Moorham Academy)

Don't get me wrong, schools cricket is absolutely flourishing in areas of this county and we all know where and how. The county seems to take great credit for that too but that's the type of cricket that looks after itself. Families that play or are interested in the game, sending their kids to schools that play it, teach it and even coach is the easy stuff. Try getting some of our lads playing hardball cricket in whites, that's the challenge mate. They're no less talented sports wise, it's just that cricket and games like rugby union are just not on their radar.

(Karl: Tonbridge Academy)

Indeed, there was even a sense that access to free or discounted tickets would be a great opportunity to promote the game of cricket in schools where interest and access is limited. However, as with other responses associated with county cricket clubs, contact and support appears to have been limited:

I had a nice little group coming after school and at lunch time and we played a few matches against local schools too. I said to lads that I'd look to sort out a trip for a T20 game but the tickets and coach were just too much. I asked if they did anything free or cheap for schools but apparently not. What a way to finish the year that would have been eh!

(Will: Burgh High)

A few of the kids that play for school and come on a Thursday after school mentioned The Hundred. I looked at the fixtures and they were all in the school holidays. Sorry lads, sir is in Majorca!

(Rich: Cramlin Academy)

I mean look at the county four day game. They aren't exactly turning them away at the gates are they. Surely getting local school kids to some of these games would be a start wouldn't it? I'm not saying that they would sit and watch every ball but it would get them to a ground to see what it's all about. They'd spend some money in the ground and you never know some of them might come back

(Jack: Ridgeway Academy)

"I was told that schools cricket was not a funding priority"

"I contacted the county to see what they had by way of staff training. . .it was like I was speaking a different language"



Additional issues raised through interviews

In addition to the responses to the more focused and structured questions, there were several other issues that emerged from the interview stage of the project. Two of the more prominent issues that were highlighted by the vast majority of participants were the dominance of football in the lives of many pupils living in these working-class communities and the significant reliance on a key member of staff in most schools to promote and develop the game of cricket.

Dominance of Football

More broadly, interview responses consistently highlighted the fact that the game of football was a prominent feature of the lives of the majority of male pupils both within and outside of the school environment.

So many of our kids just wouldn't go to join a local (cricket) club because it's not on their radar. The lads who have the sporting potential to do it are just football, football, football (Dave: Bridge Academy)

The mentality is not great. They're not really geared up towards cricket. It's the dominance of football...they won't consider coming to cricket fixtures or practices because they have football training. They are just not interested in it (cricket) as they just want to play football all the time... it's just this community. They just want to play football all the time (Andy: Doveside College)

It's the dominating sport (football) across most pupils here anyway...the majority of the lads come to PE and they're like 'are we doing football today sir'. (Liam: Ushington College)

Football is almost their entire life for most of the lads at our school. It is literally all that they are bothered about. If we talk about cricket or when we start to deliver it on the curriculum it is almost as case of "cricket? What's that?" If these lads could play football every lesson then they would (Jack: Ridgeway Academy)

It (football) soaks up everything...it just takes over everything else. You look at your typical lad or bloke around here and it's literally their entire life isn't it. Lots of our lads play for local football clubs and my son is looking a joining one soon but they are like cults aren't they. The kids, the family and the players get totally wrapped up in it...and it just takes over everything. It's like, well, we've got a game training game, training game, training, game training... (Matt: Bright High)

Football is just all encompassing at a school like ours. When they say that they are into sport or good at sport they're not, it's just football. For many of our lads, there is literally nothing else that they are interested in. It used to be that you could get them playing basketball, rugby or badminton and they do play in PE but outside of that it's nothing. It's the same with cricket, it's just not something that any of them consider. (Jamie: Inwood Academy)

More specifically, it was not just the dominance of the game itself in the lives of these young working-class males, but also the fact that the game was so accessible to them. In this regard, several staff spoke about the number of pupils who were attached to local football clubs, many of whom were playing at a purely participatory level:

The power of the local junior football clubs is massive. In fact, three junior clubs use our pitches on a weekend. You get a situation now that even those that are not that good can find a football team to play for and it's all they want to do then and know about. (Dave: Bridge Academy)

In addition to this, there was also a sense that the game of football was becoming a year-round sport as was the appetite for the game from pupils and their families. This was an issue that was seemingly enhanced by the increasingly popularity of summer junior tournaments

They don't want to miss training so don't come to anything after school by way of sports clubs and they (football) play all year round now so you can't even change their focus after Easter. They're at tournaments all summer and it's like a World Cup to them and their parents. (Chris: Moorham Academy)

There was also a sense that local football teams may be reluctant to lose players to other clubs so kept the players involved through the spring and summer months in order to avoid this:

Gone are the days where the football season would end at Easter and we could turn the lads' attention to cricket and athletics. They just play (football) all year round now or train at least. (Jamie: Inwood Academy)

I am no longer surprised when our lot tell me that they are playing football. God only knows what playing football in July is doing to their bodies but it also means that they don't get that switch off and switch on from the game. (Jack: Ridgeway Academy)

When I went to school in the 90s lads would stop playing football and we'd be cricket mad from May. We'd run for school in the athletics matches and we'd even play a bit of tennis. There's quite rare now. The lads who see themselves as footballers will come and run for school because it's easy it requires little teaching but many of those don't even consider cricket at all, especially in a Euros or World Cup year. (Liam: Ushington College)

Reliance on cricket teachers to promote the game in school

Secondly, one additional over-arching and common theme was the sense that the game of cricket would struggle to continue without the input from the one member of staff currently promoting and attempting to develop the game within school. In this regard, it was evident that in the schools with any meaningful cricket offer – both in PE and after school – it was almost entirely the enthusiasm, experience and expertise of that member of staff promoting the game in the department and/or around school

If it wasn't for me then there wouldn't be any hardball cricket at school at all. I push the extra-curricular club at lunchtime and I get them coming so we can move towards using the nets and the hardball but without me that wouldn't happen. I think it's the same with the funding and the fixtures too, I am constantly pushing for all this and I'm not saying that other staff aren't bothered it's just that they are interested in other things. I do a lot of this for my club so I'm quite used to it. (Jim: Durton Academy)

I do a lot with them especially in terms of the nets, hardball cricket and net etiquette. I'm worried that will go when I go...that's dead! I don't think that even they realise (the school) are on a knife edge where it could go either one way or another at the minute. To be honest, I'm really struggling to justify continuing to teach cricket at all. I can't get games for those that want to play and I don't have the facilities to teach it properly at school. If we are not careful the game is going to completely die here. (Karl: Tonbridge Academy)

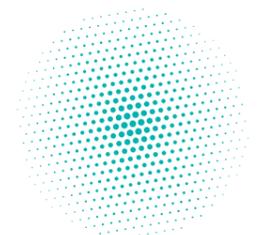
The loss of prominent staff who were able to, and enthusiastic about promoting the game of cricket was also an issue within the local authority where these staff had been responsible for arranging inter-school fixture and generally promoting the game across local schools:

It (cricket) would struggle I think (if I left). Bear in mind I also had about six years doing all the local school fixtures as well. I did everything. I set up all the fixtures, all the cup composition and the annual cricket meeting to arrange fixtures. Everything. And then once I kind of said I've done my time and offered it out, no one's ever picked up that mantle. So what we're doing now is it's just gone back to self-arranged fixtures and no meetings as far as I am aware. (Matt: Bright High)

Indeed there was even evidence of PE staff leaving a school that had led to the total demise of curricular and extra-curricular cricket at the school.

He drove the cricket at this school almost single-handedly for about fifteen to twenty years and that was when we had the best cricket provision in the local area. But he retired a couple of years ago and cricket here fell off a cliff in a dramatic way. There's no kind of way for it to go on. (Dave: Bridge High)

“If it wasn't for me this school wouldn't play any hardball cricket at all”



Summary



A – Access

More effective access to hardball cricket through PE, extra-curricular activity, increased equipment and facilities, terrestrial TV coverage and attendance at live cricket events.



B – Ball

A more structured and strategic attempt to aid the transition between the soft and hardball versions of the game.



C – Competence and confidence of staff

Targeted and specific support and training for current and trainee PE staff.



D – Dominance of football

Attempts to address the increasing dominance of football in the lives of many working-class males.



E – External links

Clear and effective links with local cricket clubs, county clubs and the ECB.

Issues by numbers

7.12 hours

The average number of hours allocated to cricket on the Y7 boys' PE curriculum.

3.8 hours

The average number of hours allocated to cricket on the Y9 boys' PE curriculum.

8 schools

The number of schools that did not offer any cricket lessons at all on their boys' PE curriculum.

6 schools

The numbers of schools with access to their own grass cricket pitch.

5.07 sets

The average sets of cricket pads owned by schools in the study.

22 schools

The number of schools that did not own a single pair of cricket pads.

24 schools

The number of schools that did not own a single pair of cricket gloves.

22 schools

The number of schools that did not own a single cricket helmet

20 schools

The number of schools that did not own a single leather cricket ball

452 pupils

The total number of pupils that attended a lunchtime cricket practice

30 schools

The number of schools that provided no extra-curricular cricket provision.

5.2 pupils

The average number of pupils attending a Y9 after-school cricket practice.

672 fixtures

Total number of inter-school cricket fixtures played across all 92 schools.

31 schools

The number of schools that did not offer a single cricket fixture at any year group.

1276 pupils

The total number of pupils actively playing with a local cricket club across all 92 schools.

15.7 pupils

The average number of pupils in each school playing for a local cricket club in each school.

6 schools

The number of schools that had arranged a cricket related trip/visit during the school year.

Report Recommendations

Bridging the Gap

From both survey and interview responses, it does seem evident that softball versions of the game of cricket are popular among young people who are currently playing the game in primary schools, secondary schools and cricket clubs. More specifically, inclusive, fast-paced and active versions of the game that use a softer ball are not only popular with those taking part, but appear to be effectively delivered by teaching staff due to the less complex skills, knowledge and equipment required. As a result, games associated with the Kwik Cricket and All Stars/Dynamos initiative that uses plastic bats and windballs and focus on drills and activities that introduce basic fielding, bowling and batting techniques to participants appear to be successfully fulfilling the remit of initially attracting children to the game and in most cases also keeping them engaged and involved during their primary school years. This positive outcome appears to be facilitated by the opportunity that such games provide to keep more participants active, engaged and included, the adaptability of the game to the space and facilities available, the lower range and level of skills required to take part effectively and perhaps most importantly, the safer and cheaper nature of the game due to the lower need for protective equipment. In addition, and in relation to social class background more specifically, there is also evidence in the study to suggest that the age at which these versions of the game are promoted and played (typically ages 6-11), the lack of technical knowledge and game experiences required by staff and coaches to deliver lessons/session, and the minimal amount of equipment required by schools, teachers and coaches means that the financial and cultural constraints that can negatively impact on engagement and participation in cricket in older age groups is significantly reduced. In short, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the version of the game of cricket typically delivered at this level and age group is flourishing.

As an extension to this, responses from secondary PE staff involved in this study also suggest that fast-paced, inclusive, windball versions of the game are not only popular among the majority of male pupils in KS3, but that curricular PE lessons that use a less traditional, soft-ball version of the game to teach and develop basic skills, technique and knowledge are being delivered consistently and effectively in most secondary school PE lessons by a range of staff across the department – especially to boys in these year groups. In addition, there was even some evidence to suggest that male pupils in Year 10 and 11 were often able to draw on this enjoyment of the game as well as some of the more basic skills and knowledge acquired in KS3 in order to play generally relaxed, recreational

versions of pairs cricket using minimal equipment and a softer ball using suitable outdoor equipment where appropriate such as artificial wickets or 3G pitches.

However, despite the apparent success of these forms of the game at both primary and early-secondary school ages, it is evident that any transition into the hardball version of the game is at best limited and at worst non-existent, particularly for those pupils that are solely dependent on their state, secondary school PE and extra-curricular offers to progress towards proficient play in more traditional, hardball versions of the game. A range of tangible and non-tangible constraining issues relating to equipment, facilities, attitudes and competencies are currently limiting the opportunity and likelihood of many pupils continuing their engagement, participation and progression in the game into hardball cricket. As a result, if we are to build on the positive levels of engagement and participation in the game of cricket between the ages of 6 and 11 and to provide realistic opportunity for more of these young people to progress into the hardball game, there is a very clear and significant need to bridge the gap between two versions of the game in secondary schools around the ages of 11-13 specifically.

We should be under no illusion that any such approach and initiative aimed at increasing the numbers of young working-class males actively engaged in a hardball version of the game will not be a significant undertaking in terms of funding, resources and staff training. In addition, there is also a need to acknowledge that this approach would require a concerted effort in order to amend and develop the cultural and social attitudinal changes to the game of cricket if we are to promote and develop the playing of hardball versions of the game for young people attending state, secondary schools and living in predominantly working-class communities. Finally, it is also important to acknowledge that any such approach or initiatives should not be an attempt to return to an anachronistic and somewhat idealised situation and/or version of the game where more 'traditional' hardball cricket in schools located in working-class communities was popular and much more common place. In this regard, it may well be that the game and the country more generally needs to accept that boys from state schools located in working-class areas may well never again realistically compete with boys from families higher up the social scale who are able to pay to enter the private education system – especially if they are solely relying on their PE and school sport experienced in order to enter and then progress and succeed in the game.

In order to move towards this process of 'bridging the gap' therefore, a much clearer and effective pathway from an initial introduction of the game at primary school age into the hardball version of the game around the age of 11 or 12 and the skills, tactics and nuances associated with it can be a realistic goal in providing this link into hardball cricket within the school environment. However, it is also important to acknowledge that this must involve a more strategic, collaborative and well-funded approach that involves state schools, PE staff, Chance to Shine, local clubs, county clubs and the ECB.

In relation to responses received during the course of this study, there is strong evidence to suggest that this should be done via the development and promotion of a transitional game to be played specifically with pupils aged 11-14 (Years 7-9) that utilises more technical aspects of the game, can be played on a range of facilities within the typical, state school environment, and involves a slightly harder version of the ball requiring the use of minimal and inexpensive protective equipment. Building on the success of tape ball cricket in many areas of the country and using light weight gloves and pads, this game could well create an opportunity for many young people to experience a more realistic version of the full hardball game that realistically builds upon the skills and knowledge accumulated in the primary and early secondary school exposure to the game. Whilst the aim would be for young people to become increasingly confident and competent playing a more technical and structured version of the game within their own school environment, the longer-term goal would be to promote greater opportunity for these young people from working-class communities to play such a game in increasingly competitive situations and even develop the type and level of skill and confidence to make attending a local cricket club or representative trials far less intimidating and more realistic.

In order to progress towards this longer-term goal of increasing working-class boys' participation and success in the hard ball version of the game, there would not only need to be an upskilling of many PE teaching staff (see below) but there would also need to be a concerted and consistent effort to deliver and promote this version of the game to pupils

in Years 9, 10 and 11 through structured, progressive and effective PE lessons. However, even if this is partly successful by way of providing a logical and transitional bridge from the cricket that they have played and experiences further down school, the opportunity to play this version of the game with confidence and competence once developed during school PE may well also lead to many adolescents proactively seeking out and attending extra-curricular clubs and school fixtures. In this regard, if suitably considered, promoted and funded, a transitional version of the game introduced and played in state schools has the very real potential to remove many of the barriers in relation to equipment, facilities and staff/pupil confidence and in doing so promote a greater opportunity for PE staff to arrange and fulfil fixtures with schools of a similar level and in closer proximity. These games could be played indoors, on 3G pitches or artificial wickets, would be more transparent in terms of structure and time frame, and may even involve multi-school tournaments at one school where time can be used more much efficiently and effectively to increase the number of fixtures between schools. Importantly, however, it would be important to also provide and promote a clear opportunity for these pupils to continue their progression in the game through this transitional version of the game and into a more recognised, hard ball version of cricket. In this regard, events, games and practices could be clearly and strategically linked to local cricket club representatives, cricket development staff and school cricket networks (see below) so that safe and effective opportunities can be provided for these pupils to take the further step into playing - and progressing to red ball cricket for either school, the local club or even the county player pathway system.

Staff Training, Support and Development.

In order to aid this transition between the two versions of the game and bridge the gap in participation between the differing age groups previously mentioned, it is evident that there is clear and pressing need to address the low levels of confidence and competence held by many secondary PE teachers to plan and deliver lesson that would promote the ability and confidence of pupils to play a more structured and recognisable version of the hardball game. In this regard, it is clear that a specific teaching award should be developed and delivered to PE teachers in order to upskill existing staff working in state, secondary schools and in doing so promote their familiarity with more complex techniques and skills through a range of drills, activities and pedagogical approaches specifically designed to aid pupil transition from windball cricket towards the hardball game. In doing so, consideration must be made regarding any financial commitment from schools and the realities and costs associated with taking staff off timetables in order to complete any training opportunity. Therefore, interview responses suggest that any such course should be cheap/free, potentially deliverable in a half day or after school to all staff within a department (e.g. four hours) and delivered as part of a multi-school cricket network where contacts can be made, support provided and fixtures arranged across several schools in close proximity to one another. Staff who spoke favourably of this approach in interviews were keen to stress that the content of any such course should avoid the need to focus on the basic pedagogies and approaches that PE staff employ on a daily basis (e.g. warm ups, communication) and focus more specifically instead on developing PE teachers ability and confidence to teach and support their KS3 pupils with more technical aspects of bowling, batting and game play. By extension, participants in this study also suggested that the course should involve an introduction to some of the more game-specific aspects of cricket such as scoring, umpiring and field placements and include access to a wide range of on-line teaching resources that can be used in lesson planning and delivery including instruction videos to be used as part of demonstrations with guidance on common errors to aid feedback to pupils. PE staff were also keen to emphasise the fact that these courses should not only acknowledge the realities of available space and facilities within a state school environment, but that the structure, content and aims of the course should be consciously and consistently

focused on the move towards the use of harder ball and some protective equipment as means of promoting the transition between the fun, inclusive wind ball lessons and the playing of more recognised versions of the hard ball game between schools.

From interview responses associated with the distinct lack of initial teacher training support for aspiring PE teachers as well as the erratic nature of school placements with regards to the opportunities to teach cricket, there is also strong evidence to suggest that a much more strategic and pre-emptive approach to developing PE teacher confidence and competence could be effective. Rather than addressing any gaps in PE staff knowledge and experience to teach more structured and technical skill in cricket retrospectively, it does certainly seem sensible to create and deliver such a course to all trainee PE teachers and higher education establishments across the country. Building on their knowledge and experience of taking part or being taught how to teach fun, fast-paced, inclusive games after the delivery of batting, bowling and fielding basics, the ECB-backed PE Teachers Training Award should aim to support future PE teachers with their subject knowledge and confidence in delivering more formal and technical aspects of the game with a harder ball and limited protective equipment.

Equipment, Facilities and Curriculum.

If the state secondary schools are to be in a position to provide an effective opportunity for pupils to progress towards a hardball version game – either in more effective PE lessons or via transitional new version of cricket - then access to appropriate and affordable equipment and facilities is required in the majority of secondary schools located in working-class areas. It has already been stated that introductory lessons and versions of the game are being successfully delivered and received for the most part at primary school and early key stage 3 level. However, there is a great deal of evidence in this study to suggest that if these pupils are to increase their confidence and competence to play with the harder ball then there must be greater opportunity in PE lessons - as well as extra circular clubs where appropriate - to benefit from more teaching opportunities and deliberate practice in suitable and effective teaching environments such as indoor and moveable nets as well as artificial cricket wickets that have previously been a common feature of most state, secondary schools sporting provision. That is to say, if we are to capitalise on the initial interest and enjoyment of the game, there must be a more concerted and externally funded effort by the ECB to provide greater and safer opportunities and experiences for more pupils to learn skills and develop confidence with the harder ball within their school environment. In the first instance, many more schools must have much greater access to some form of cricket net appropriate to the school as well as protective equipment where both bowling and batting can be practiced using the harder ball more consistently and effectively as part of PE lessons. Such a teaching environment provides much greater opportunity for pupils to become more comfortable with all forms of the protective equipment and to apply and develop bowling and batting skills in safe, appropriate yet much more realistic environments if they are to move towards playing the hard ball version of the game. Clearly the use of cricket nets is not a new approach to developing confidence and competence with the hard ball and introducing pupils to the hardball version of the game. However, as new build schools become increasingly common, fewer are being built with sports halls that contain pull out cricket nets which clearly impacts upon the ability of schools and PE teachers more specifically to be able to deliver the types of PE lessons and extra-curricular clubs that enable

these skills to be taught, applied and developed with the harder ball. Such teaching opportunities not only provide opportunity for PE staff to provide additional guidance and feedback to pupils as skills are developed and confidence improved, but technique, shot selection and decision making can be observed, discussed and improved as part of the pedagogical process and may even involve the pupils analysing their own performance as well as that of their peers.

Responses within this report also suggest that perhaps more frustratingly, many schools do indeed have indoors cricket nets but are unable to access these for much of the year due to their sports halls being taken over for exams. In the first instance, it seems that the funding of moveable outdoor nets as well as the equipment required to use them safely could negate many of the issues relating to accessibility to them. However, unless subsidised by an external organisation such as the ECB this is unlikely given the cost, the relative use in the school year and the very specific nature of the equipment when set in context with equipment used much more regularly by a higher proportion of the pupil population. One way to address this this could be for schools to deliver cricket within the Autumn, early Spring and even Winter months where access to nets in the sports hall is more realistic and accessible. Even without the access to nets within the sports hall, many schools could use the available indoor space to plan and deliver specific drills and activities in lessons that promote the introduction and development of shots and bowling techniques with a softer ball that can then be applied and utilised in games in the summer or via outdoor nets.

Completing the Over and Cricket Networks

In the first instance, it was evident that several state, secondary schools located in working-class areas were able to establish cricket teams across several year groups in order to fulfil hardball fixtures with other schools in the local area. In almost all of these cases, these year group teams were predominantly made up of players who currently played cricket for a club outside of school and often had done for a period before attending secondary school. However, it could be argued that these pupils are not – and should not – be the focus of any strategic and concerted effort towards promoting the hard ball game in state, secondary schools due to the fact that they are already actively engaged and participating in this version of the game. Instead, the findings in this study suggest that there is potential for a large proportion of pupils with limited current and prior experience of the game to become involved in the game of cricket in both the short and longer term. As an extension to a move towards more confident and competent teaching staff, improved facilities and equipment and the playing of a transitional version of the game, there could well emerge a generation of those proportion of players who are realistically looking for their next - and arguably final step – towards regular and committed participation in the competitive fixtures within the hardball game for both school and local clubs and it is these pupils that should be the main focus of any approach to increasing the number of state school pupils playing hardball cricket in order to ‘complete the over’. As mentioned previously, there is scope for a transitional version of the game to help promote this progression but responses from interviews in the study suggest that for this initiative and approach to be truly successful in the longer term this would need to take place within an established and clearly structured local cricket network that provides the appropriate opportunities and support to pupils, PE staff and schools to offer games and events that further aid the transition away from paired windball games and into more structured and traditional hardball versions of the game. Additional coaching opportunities, inter-school fixtures and even small events and tournaments would evidently be more successful if they involved schools in close proximity to one another and or of a similar level in terms of cricket confidence, experience and ability as a school. Co-ordinated by a key member of staff whose time is funded externally or a member of ECB staff, this local cricket network made up of several secondary schools in relatively close proximity could provide a very real opportunity for pupils with an initial interest and ability in the game to

make the transition into hardball cricket to be realised where family and parental support might not always be forthcoming or experience and confidence might be low. In this regard, one additional suggestion may be that a proportion of these games and tournaments are specifically focused on the involvement of state school cricket players who are *not* currently playing any form of external cricket to allow for less pressured and intimidating competitive fixtures as well as more a focus and strategic level of support and guidance in the games themselves as well as specific opportunities to become involved at local clubs.

With regards to the latter issue, it is evident that most schools who are able to generate and promote a successful and sustainable cricket environment in PE and school sport are likely to have positive relationships with their local club(s) and so this should be a key and long term focus of any state school cricket network. Although this clearly might not always be possible given transport costs and geographical proximity of cricket clubs in some areas, clearer links and relationships should be promoted with local clubs where ever possible so that realistic and appropriate opportunities can be provided for pupils wishing to make the transition in to the hardball version of the game. Ideally promoted by an ECB staff member and involving a proactive approach and attitude from the clubs themselves in many cases, this could involve the use of existing club cricket coaches to deliver sessions in schools, the use of club facilities for use with hardball cricket fixtures or extra-curricular activities or even the use of additional facilities such as clubhouse for events so that pupils without any direct involvement with their local cricket club can becoming more comfortable with spending time in that environment.

Recommendations



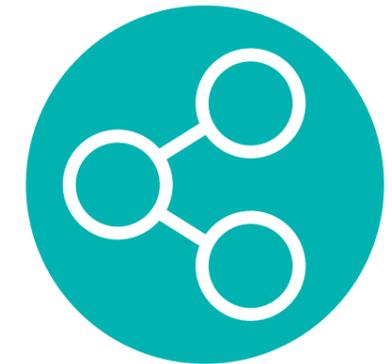
Creation, promotion and implementation of new ‘harder’ ball version of the game to help bridge the gap between soft and hardball cricket.



Accessible and affordable Teachers Cricket Course to promote confidence and competence to teach relevant technique.



Clear and supported transition into hardball game via appropriate inter-school fixtures and links with local clubs, county clubs and the ECB.



Increased access/funding to hardball equipment and facilities in state, secondary schools.

Case Study

One large, state secondary school that was keen to be involved in the study but was not eligible due to current FSM eligibility (19%) was Wood Grange Academy. From speaking with several PE staff there was evidence that the PE department's approach to curricular and extra-curricular cricket could be used as a realistic and effective case study for the introduction and development of cricket with young males from working-class families.

School Information WoodGrange Academy

Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) – 19%

Pupils of Roll: 1845

PE staff:

Paul (Head of Boys PE); Richard (Teach of PE and Head of Year 8), Alex (Head of PE) Steve (Teacher of PE)

Cricket Facilities:

Sports hall with pull out nets, two permanent artificial cricket wickets, 14 cricket bats, 12 pairs of gloves, 8 helmets, 30 leather cricket balls,

Fixtures Played:

Year 7 – 12, Year 8 – 13, Year 9 – 12, Year 10 – 8.

Number of pupils playing club cricket outside of school: total 48

Attendance at extra-curricular clubs:

Year 7 – 32, Year 8 – 28, Year 9 – 18, Year 10 – 14, Year 11 – 8, Year 12/Y13 – 14. Total - 114

It was evident that cricket was a prominent and important feature of the PE curriculum at Wood Grange and that the PE staff were keen to introduce as many pupils as possible to the game of cricket whilst also providing opportunities for further development wherever possible as they progressed through school.

As with several of the schools involved in the study, cricket was delivered to Year 7 boys over two, six-week terms after the Easter break with the scheme of work initially focused on an introduction to fielding, batting and bowling in the sports hall via the use of softballs and then progressing into skill application and game play outdoors using wooden bats and windballs.

They all come with a range of experience with sports like cricket and rugby union so it's generally about trying to get them to the same level. We have the sports hall for six weeks before we are kicked out for exams so we'll go in there with the Year 7 boys and work through bowling and batting with a bit of fielding. (Steve)

I think there is an expectation to do all the long barrier and catching stuff for a few weeks but my opinion is that those are generic skills really so we mainly focus more on bowling and some of the key shots in the sports hall for the first six weeks. If kids can't bowl the whole game falls apart when we try to play it so that's really big for us. (Alex)

Yes, using the sports hall with Year 7 pupils is essential for us. We've all done our cricket level one which was a great course to be fair and three of us have always played cricket on and off so that helps. But, there are loads of drills and games where we can teach hooks, defensive shots, drives and bowling that and can still be made fun but we need the sports hall for that. They can umpire and assess each others performance too based on worksheets and demonstrations so that is really helpful in turning them on to the game. (Richard)

More broadly, there was evidence from the PE Staff at Wood Grange that these sessions were not only used to introduce and develop the key skills required to play the formal game of cricket but that there was a clear attempt to change pupils' mindset on the game as well as make a conscious effort to progress on from the versions of the game that they might have played in primary school:

We get a lot of "I play football me sir" when they come up from primary school and we work hard to change that. It's the same with things like rugby and basketball. They'll say things like "I don't play rugby" and I say "well you do now". By working hard on cricket for the full twelve weeks they get into cricket and fairly good at it without even knowing it really. (Alex)

It comes a lot from us too really. It helps that we like our cricket, so we'll talk about games on TV in lessons and we'll join in at times. I think it's important that we are seen to really value the game because it helps them switch on to it. (Richard)

We don't really go in for the non-stop cricket and diamond cricket stuff much. I mean I might use those games if we've done fielding as it gives lots of opportunity for catching, fielding and throwing but we try to use the drills as the games so it's not just frantic slogging and running around. (Paul)

As an extension of this initial half term in the sports hall, the Year 7 pupils will then all go outside as part of mixed ability groups in order to play six a side, windball-based games where they can apply most of the skills that have been covered in the previous six weeks. Two PE teachers as well as at least one PE-specific LSA will umpire and facilitate games where pupils are also expected to help with umpiring, scoring and feedback to peers at given points in the lesson.

We get the groundsman to cut three rough wickets and mark out boundaries so that the three pitches almost interlock with each other. To be honest we can stand in the middle of what looks like a giant cricket Venn diagram and watch all three games really. The cut strip in the middle of each is not great as it's just normal grass, I mean we don't roll it or anything, but it works quite well and as the weeks go by, it ends up a decent surface if we keep playing on it and cutting it. (Paul)

This 12-week delivery of cricket in Year 7 clearly enabled all boys to become more exposed to the game of cricket generally, but more importantly enabled them to develop an ability to play a more formal version of the game without too much pressure or fear of using the hard ball. Feedback and guidance from staff appeared to enable them to progress quickly and perhaps most importantly it seems that the majority are very much 'turned on to cricket' by the end of the year.

The lads don't really realise it to be fair but we've pretty much got them onside (with cricket) by the end of Year 7. It is something that we work hard on as with a few other sports that they wouldn't normally play so it doesn't happen by magic. Don't get me wrong they don't all love it or even like it but at least cricket is on their radar and something that they can play. To be fair we do get some real success stories too though. (Alex)

Once these pupil return in year 8 the teaching groups become streamed based on ability for all PE activities which then has a bearing on their progress and opportunities in cricket. However, it is evident the PE staff are mindful of keeping all pupils on similar trajectory with slightly different lesson structures and expectations. In the first instance, all pupils will once again do a six-week half term on cricket although the lower groups will do this with windballs on the 3G pitch whilst the more able group will begin being introduced to the harder ball via the sports hall nets. In the first instance, this provides an opportunity for those boys already playing the hardball version of the game to continue to progress:

Some of the lads who already play the game for a local club love it when we get the nets out. The bring their own gear and leave it with us until PE and it's a real chance for them to show what they can do. (Alex)

We really do use the lads who can play to be honest and are also keen to keep pushing them. We have four nets and even with the top set lads there is a lot of difference in ability in cricket as you can imagine. We do split the nets though and work with them accordingly. In some lessons we get the better lads to run a net but we need to be careful to keep them playing and progressing too – not just doing our job for us! (Paul)

Perhaps the most important use of these net session, however, is the opportunity to improve the confidence, knowledge and ability of the 'generally sporty' lads in the top set who have very little previous experience of the hardball game:

It's quite funny really as some of these lads are great sportsmen but cricket is just so far outside of their comfort zone. We also get a few who act tough around school and there are clearly petrified of the hardball when it comes out. But we get them padded up, start with windballs in the first few weeks and then differentiate two of the nets so they can build their confidence. (Alex)

To be fair, we focus most of our attention on those lads in the first few weeks as they need the feedback and guidance really. We can just do throw downs or bowl steady at them whilst they get their confidence up and get in and give them some guidance on shots. They make pretty good progress generally in the end really. (Paul)

There is clear evidence that this works extremely well in introducing and developing skills with this cohort, especially for pupils that would not be exposed to the hard ball version of the game in any other circumstance. In the second term, both ability groups return to playing on the grass pitches via the use of wind balls and wooden bats due to availability of facilities and the need to involve both groups. Interestingly these lesson flit between ability-specific games and mixed ability with seemingly clear reasons for doing so:

Yeah, the final term in Year 8 is back to 6 a side games on the three pitches marked up on the bottom field. There's not much else we can do once we lose the sports hall but the ability-based games can get pretty full on and we insist on proper cricket shots. Some weeks we mix it up a bit and ask the more able lads to help the others where they can. (Alex)

Overall, there is strong evidence here of success with the PE department's strategic effort to introduce key cricket skills effectively in lessons, provide opportunities for these to be practiced and improved through skill-related activities and then applied in soft and hard ball game like situations during both Year 7 and 8. Just as importantly it does also seem that the awareness of the game of cricket is significantly improved for these male pupils as well as their confidence and experience in all aspects of the game leading to the game becoming a new and largely positive part of their sporting repertoires.

From speaking with the PE staff at Wood Grange it was apparent that the delivery of cricket in Year 9 did take on a very similar approach to that delivered in Year 8. Once again limited by the access to the sports hall and the numbers of pupils in each group (24-28) the staff are keen to provide appropriate access to the indoor nets in order to improve confidence with the hardball:

We have to be a little bit more inventive in Year 9. In the first term the top set with have the first three weeks in the sports hall and we'll just be batting and bowling in the nets with the gear on and cricket balls. We have to help a few but basically they are off and away and we still differentiate the nets for those that need help. The other set spend those weeks on the 3G re-capping bowling and some batting and playing games of paired cricket but then they come inside to use the nets. It's tough for some but we think it's important and they often surprise themselves. To be honest at Year 9 loads of them love putting the stuff on and they know they bowling's not going to be too quick. (Richard)

Following this approach in the first term the Year 9 pupils will go outside with the top set playing 8 a side matches between themselves on the two artificial wickets using pads and a harder ball in some cases, and the lower group will play the same game format but on the 3G pitch and with a windball:

Again, that seems to work quite well. There are instances where we will move kids between groups if they are happy to or even ask to, but the matches are decent by then and they are still playing at their level. It's good because they've just come out of the nets. (Paul)

The move into Key Stage 4 brings with it a different approach to the delivery of PE at Wood Grange with pupils able to select from a group of activities in the summer term. Limited by the fact that they only receive one core PE lesson and the fact that Year 11 or close to beginning their examinations, the approach to cricket in PE is much more relaxed, game focused, and very much facilitated by the pupils themselves:

This is where a lot of the hard work that we do with them lower down school pays off. Some of them do take a while to get back up to speed but by this age they are choosing what they want to do in PE. We are big believers in introducing them to activities in KS3 and then they can make their own mind up with what they like by Year 10. What generally happens (with the Year 10 pupils) is the top set from last year will chose cricket and go in the nets for a half term and then we play outside after Spring Bank. (Alex)

They pretty much run the sessions themselves by Year 10 really. We make four lads 'net captains' for the lesson and they are responsible for who bats and bowls as well as generally keeping an eye on things. It's great session, especially when you see the non-cricketers holding their own or even that some of them have become quite good. (Steve)

The PE staff are also fairly realistic and pragmatic regarding the selection of cricket from most of the other year group though and although there are some 'success stories' in terms of the lower set boys selecting cricket at key stage 3, the staff are aware that this is rarely the case:

The ones that chose cricket at Year 10 are usually the top set lads. I'm not sure if (the lower set pupils from KS3) they feel intimidated or just want to be with their mates but we don't get many that select cricket. That's fine and I think that there's still the fact that the game is technically hard and there are some decent cricketers here. But I think it's just their approach to PE more generally really. Why be in here with hardballs coming down at you when you can be outside playing softball with your mates (Richard)

Extra-curricular clubs and fixtures

In order to supplement the aims and outcomes of cricket lessons in PE it was evident that every effort was made to provide opportunity for pupils to further develop their skills and confidence in the hard ball version of the game with a view to playing competitively for school and even progressing towards sessions and games with a local club. In the first instance this was provided via the use of staff-supervised practices at lunch time:

We are quite lucky because we still have quite a decent lunch break so we get a decent turn out at lunch time practice. It's just something that we've always done really so the lads seem to buy into it. We don't expect them to get changed but they must change their shoes and take ties off if they want to play. Staff are a bit more relaxed as we generally have our lunch in there too but we do make the effort to help the lads out especially lower down school. (Richard)

For Year 7 male pupils, lunch time cricket club took place on Mondays for this year group only which allowed for a real level of differentiation again in terms of the range of ability and experience in the group:

We do have one net where we use the hardballs with Year 7 because we know of the lads that play and can do that. The rest are generally windball to allow the lads to just come and have a go and build on what they might have done in PE. Given the push we give to cricket we do get quite a few lads there. (Alex)

In terms of fixtures for the Year 7 pupils, the PE staff indicated that they do arrange fixtures for this year group but generally aim to take more of a squad in the hope that they might be able to play two games against another school as part of a relaxed environment where they appeared happy to adapt to what other schools might want or be able to offer:

Year 7 fixtures are all about getting as many of them involved as we can really so they get that experience. We know most of the schools and most can get teams out at this age so we often play it on a week by week basis and sort our lads and teams accordingly. Some schools will want a hardball game only, some want one hardball and one windball and some just want to play some paired cricket on their 3G. We're not too precious at that age really so it's a real mix for us and if it helps other schools out then even better. (Paul)

Lunchtime nets for other groups moved progressively towards more of a focus on the hardball game so that pupils could really focus on developing their skills and confidence with protective equipment on. There was still opportunity for windball focus nets on Tuesdays in Year 8 nets but this seemed to all but disappear by Year 9.

Again, we've done the same thing for years, Year 7 Monday, Year 8 Tuesday, 9 and 10 on Thursday and Y11 and sixth form on Friday which pretty much runs itself. Some Y8 want to just use the windball in their practice which is fine and it's a great opportunity again to build on what we do in PE but by Year 9 it's generally hardball only. We don't get many just coming to try it out by then so they are all fairly confident and know what they're doing (Alex)

In relation to fixtures, there was also evidence that games were generally played using the harder ball by Year 8 with the school able and willing in most cases to field two teams in key stage three where possible.

We are lucky really as we are a big school and we have quite few lads playing already but we can generally get two teams at Year 8 and 9 out if attendance at lunchtime club is strong. We've got two artificial wickets so we have to play on more than one night sometimes and take two teams to the other school. The head supports us with the cost of buses which is essential really but we get to play plenty of games. (Paul)

Perhaps more important than the number of pupils actively involved in inter-school cricket fixtures and even the outcomes of most of the games appeared to be the success stories of lads who would not normally be playing cricket without the structures in place for pupils at Wood Grange school:

Don't get me wrong, we want to win and we push to get out strongest teams out when we play in cup fixtures. But the best bit about it for me is when we get lads playing for school that I know would not be remotely interested if we hadn't have done it in PE. Some of them aren't always great and only a few go to take up the game outside of school but I just love it when they get a wicket or score a few runs for school, playing with their mates in the summer. (Steve)

By years 9 and 10 school teams were down to just one team but strong and were able to compete against many of the similar sized schools in the local area. As with many of the schools involved in the study more widely, it was evident that teams were made up of pupils that played cricket regularly for clubs outside of school alongside pupils that had grown in ability and confidence as a result of PE lessons, extra-curricular clubs and playing fixtures lower down school:

To be honest, by Year 9 and 10 getting teams out is a bit more of a challenge but we do manage it. There is less enthusiasm to play compared to Year 7 as most have found other things to do but we do end up with a good group. Like when I was at school really in that five or six carry the team and the rest field and bat down the order. They all seem ok with that really (Paul)

Yes it's just one team at Year 9 and 10. It's frustrating really because it's not like football and rugby where I take subs and make sure that they all play. I generally need 11 and if one cries off that often means his mate does too so it's a battle sometimes. But we generally seem to manage it though and we do quite well (Richard).

It did seem that the school were keen to play hardball, 11 a side fixtures though where possible and they also entered their teams into county cups. This meant that the games were quite time consuming and that they needed to their artificial wickets or try to access the local cricket club and in some cases this meant travelling a distance to fulfil fixtures:

Yes we are quite keen to play hardball games against other schools, especially by Year 8 where we can. It's a big commitment really but it's something that we are all used to from school ourselves and the expectation here. We have had students on placement though and they can't believe it. The lads seem ok with it too really as some of them play for clubs so they are used to it. We need to avoid their club nights when we play though as that can be tricky (Steve)

It does get harder as you get older, especially when you've got kids yourself. Fewer and fewer schools seem to be doing it now though and I can see why. I'm head of year 8 now too so it's tough committing the time. It's worth it though as the kids here are great but they can be long nights if we're away (Richard)

As part of an attempt to pull all the cricket engagement and participation together the PE staff were also keen to provide opportunity for pupils to attend cricket matches towards the end of the school year. This had been something that they had done for some time and although it was becoming increasingly difficult, it was something that they saw great value in:

Yes, we always run a trip to a T20 game before we break up. The kids love it and it's also a chance to thank some of the parents that have helped us out during the season as we pay for their ticket. We ran two coaches last year. (Steve)

It gets booked up really quickly and the kids love it. We used to get free tickets but not sure what happened there. But it's great for the kids to see cricket first hand. (Alex)

When I first started here we used to go to the test match for the day but it's just got so expensive now and so difficult to get tickets. It also got a bit lively towards the end of the day so we had to be careful. The T20 trip is great though and we even get some parents coming. It's a nice finish to the year. (Steve)

Link with local cricket club

One of the additional benefits to the cricket provision at Wood Grange was the relationship that they had with the local cricket ground. It was evident that the local club (situated less than a mile from the school) held a close geographical, sporting, social and historical link with the school that the school and the PE department more specifically were able to and keen to utilise and very much saw the advantage that this gave them over many other local schools.

We couldn't do half of the things that we do and have the type of cricket offer that we do with the cricket club. The link has just always been there and it's continued through to our time too. Me and Richard are local and played our cricket there as kids, my lads have just started Dynamos, and we'll go down on a weekend with the kids to meet friends and have a few beers. I suppose when I sit and think about it, it's such an advantage that I suppose is rare elsewhere. (Paul).

The cricket club is a massive help to us. There are loads of kids that arrive having played All Stars and Dynamos there which is a big help. It's not just the skills though it's the fact that they've been in and around a cricket club so the game is a bit more normal to them. Even if they don't keep playing here or up at school they will still be down with their parents on a weekend. It's like a school reunion at the club on a Saturday sometimes. (Richard)

The link is massive to us even though it's really an official or formal one as such. All our teams are made up of lads that play their cricket down here and some of them are playing four times a week. Me and Richard have even played some of the older lads in the seconds on a Saturday. We can also use the ground at times too when we are struggling if we need a grass wicket for a cup game. It's often just an older wicket that might have been used that weekend but where else would you get that (Paul)

In terms of the longer term goal of introducing young people to the game of cricket and then providing opportunities for them to improve and develop towards extra-curricular activity, school fixtures and even long term participation with a local club, it was evident that the work Wood Grange engage in cricket and the link that existed with the local club had led to several success stories in terms of pull through in each year group. PE staff really saw this a major positive outcome of the efforts that they had made to expose pupils to the game and support them in their ability to play the hardball version of the game:

The lads that come to practice and then play for school are a real positive for us if they have never played the game before but the biggest win is when they end up playing down at the club. Sometimes they will come and tell us and sometimes we just find out but to see them playing down there is what we do it for I suppose. (Alex)

Oh yes, it's great when they end up playing at the club. It's usually only a few in each year group but the ones that are football mad that end up playing cricket down at the club in the summer is massive. The generally get dragged along by some of the cricketing lads or the dads who help a bit with the teams but it's great when it happens. (Steve)

It's a bit like when some of them end up playing at the rugby club too. It's a real success I suppose. You don't want to take too much credit for it but when you taught them how to bowl and hold a bat in Year 7 and watched them put pads on for the first time, you can't help but feel a bit of pride when they end up joining the club and coming to really like the game. (Richard)

Overall, however, it was clear that these instances of non-cricketers picking up the game as direct result of their PE experiences were relatively rare and even more unlikely was the fact that these pupils played the game in the longer term. Whilst they did speak of successes in other sports and were pleased with the pupils who continued to participate in sport once leaving school. The number of pupils that went on to play cricket into adulthood having never played before secondary school has very rare:

Lads who go on to play? Very few when you think about it really. We have some ex-lads playing down at the club now but they've always played as did their dads and even their grandad's. The lads who went on to play as adults who weren't really cricketers? I can't think of any really. (Paul)

I can probably count them on one hand really and they don't often play at a decent level. We had a group a few years ago that really took to it and they are still playing at another club nearby but the standards not great. No, the ones that end up playing are generally the ones that have always played (Richard)

Case Study Summary

It is evident within this case study that the PE staff had benefitted from their own positive cricket experiences at school, a strong interest in the game perpetuated by friends and family and their own participation with local clubs in order to provide an effective cricket offer for their own pupils at Wood Grange. Initially it was clear that the staff had made a conscious and proactive effort to expand the sporting repertoires and interests of their pupils away from typical, class-related activities via structured, progressive and inclusive approaches to teaching activities such as cricket on their PE curriculum. In doing so, it was evident that they had built on the initial engagement and enjoyment of soft ball versions of the game as well as some skills and knowledge in order to build gradually yet effectively towards the clear end goal of getting as many pupils as possible playing the hardball version of the game. By extension, the PE staff at Wood Grange were also able to allow pupils the opportunity to progress towards extra-curricular involvement and inter-school fixtures via accessible lunchtime clubs that allow for knowledge and skills introduced in lessons to be applied and developed through guidance and support from staff and peers towards some form of participation in competitive, hardball cricket fixtures for some. Finally, whilst it was also clear that opportunities had been taken to further promote the game via school trips to cricket fixtures, it is the strong links with local cricket club that provided a close and consistent opportunity to make an initial and then longer-term transition towards participation in the hardball version of the game. Notwithstanding these positive approaches and outcomes, however, it is still worth highlighting that the majority of pupils at Wood Grange that seemingly went on to play hardball cricket after leaving school were the pupils that had arrived at secondary having already been introduced to the game via parents and family and the local club.

Concluding comments

The aim of this report has been to assess the current state and status of cricket in state schools by gaining a more in-depth view of the game in schools located in northern working-class communities. In doing so the intention throughout has been to acknowledge the range of social, cultural, and educational issues and influences that have impacted on the ways that cricket is delivered in schools (PE and extra-curricular) as well as how the game more generally is viewed by young working-class males. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that the availability of equipment and facilities, the attitude and abilities of staff to deliver appropriate skills and techniques, access to the game via local clubs and television coverage, and the changing nature of young people's leisure and sporting profiles have meant that cricket is no longer the prominent working-class sport that it once was. Whilst the softer ball, inclusive and fun versions of the game are clearly effective and successful in terms of promoting interest and participation within primary schools and local clubs, the hardball version of the game has become increasingly less likely to be played by young males attending state schools and living in working-class communities. For many, the success of alternative, softball versions of the game is purely success enough, and in this regard some may even suggest the actively promoting the hardball version of the game in many state secondary schools is both an unrealistic and ineffective use of resources and time. Indeed, even if the active promotion and development of the hardball game of cricket in state secondary schools remains a key focus, it seems important to acknowledge that it is highly unlikely that we will ever see a return to the golden age of cricket where the game was played regularly and successfully by pupils in state-funded secondary schools. If the aim of addressing the dominance of privately educated males in the elite version of the game and talent pathways is also the longer term aim there is also evidence to suggest that this balance is also unlikely to be fully redressed due to limited access to clubs and facilities in working-class communities, changing attitudes towards the game of cricket for many young males, the dominance of lifestyle activities on the game of football in particular and perhaps most importantly the privileged opportunities afforded to males that are fortunate enough to attend fee paying secondary schools.

However, it is the view of this report that when cricket is promoted and delivered effectively and progressively, an increased level of engagement and participation in the hardball version of the game can realistically emerge from the obvious positive impact that initiatives such as Kiwk Cricket, All Stars and Dynamos have had upon primary-aged pupils involvement in cricket. Clearly many state, secondary schools successfully achieve these positive outcomes despite the



challenges and constraints that they face, and it is important that we celebrate and learn from these examples where at all possible. However, in doing so, it does also seem important that we acknowledge the fact that many of the short and long term success stories in terms of cricket participation for those young males attending state secondary schools are often directly linked to positive family exposure to the game via parental participation and interest in cricket.

Despite these constraints and challenges, however, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that with a concerted, structured, and long-term effort to promote the hardball version of the game within state secondary schools there is scope for many young working-class males to progress towards talent pathways and achieve success in elite cricket through representation at club county and even international level especially where effective links exist between local schools, local clubs and the county and national structure overseen by the ECB. However, we would argue that promoting an interest, confidence and ability in all aspects of the hardball version of the game (including participation and spectating) should be the primary concern and aim of all state school PE department's cricket provision in order to ensure that the game remains a positive and realistic aspect of the lives of young working-class people who would never have previously played or watched the game that we all love.

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