

From Elitism to Equity?

Building Inclusive Community Cricket

Background

Research question: What institutional barriers and partnership opportunities do stakeholders identify in developing sustainable and inclusive community cricket?

The community cricket club is a newly established grassroots club seeking to increase access to cricket in Ithica and the study area. This project moves on from the question of increasing participation, investigating what conditions are needed for inclusive and sustainable community cricket to succeed. Drawing on literature, local demographic data and stakeholder interviews, the project explores three key themes:

- **Overcoming institutional barriers** through partnerships with schools, charities, Oxford colleges and community organisations.
- **Creating an inclusive culture** by reducing financial, cultural and gender-based barriers to participation.
- **Building long-term sustainability** through governance, safeguarding and community-led leadership.

The project aims to produce practical recommendations that can support the community cricket club as it develops into a lasting community organisation. Rather than evaluating existing participation, this project investigates the conditions needed for inclusive and sustainable community cricket provision to succeed

Methods

One unstructured background interview was conducted with the club founder and excluded from the analysed dataset. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with institutional and sporting stakeholders. The study captures stakeholder perspectives; residents, parents and prospective participants were not interviewed.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted online over three weeks in July-August 2026 and thematically coded by hand using a hybrid inductive-deductive approach. Coding was refined through peer verification into three core themes.

1. Participant sampling

5 stakeholders recruited via opportunity and snowball sampling

2. Semi-structured interviews

Online, around 30 minutes each, July-August 2026

3. Transcription

Audio recorded with consent, then hand transcribed

4. Thematic coding

Hybrid inductive-deductive approach, verified by peers

Key themes noted were:

1. Institutional barriers to partnership
2. Creating an inclusive culture from the outset
3. Building a sustainable future

Limitations

Due to time and ethics constraints, our interviews focused mainly on institutional figures, leaving out primary school leaders, parents, community group leaders, and children, so the study cannot confirm whether the proposed cricket activities are genuinely wanted, culturally appropriate, or sustainable. Future work should co-design with marginalised groups and prospective players and evaluate whether proposed interventions truly address the inequalities identified.

References

- Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (2023)
- Oxfordshire County Council (2020)
- Parent & Harvey (2009)
- Misener & Doherty (2012)
- Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2005)
- Sport England (2026)
- Vail (2007)

Results - Key Quotes

"So, candidly, I think that's probably one of the biggest barriers, the university-collegiate relationship on cricket and our ability to coordinate and take collective action."
- Oxford University academic

DISCUSSION:

- Whilst central institutional ambitions for community partnership exist, stakeholders suggested that the University of Oxford's ability to act can be hampered by the autonomy of its constituent colleges.
- Stakeholders emphasised the importance of identifying operational as well as strategic contacts within potential partner institutions

"We don't have 600 years of convoluted governance and history without it being complicated... you have to have succession planning."
- Oxford University professional

DISCUSSION:

- The University of Oxford has acquired a complex structure over its history
- Lessons can be learned from this structure, where power does not rest with a single individual
- Stakeholders emphasised distributed leadership, clear governance structures and succession planning to reduce dependence on individual founders.

"Getting people into a sport by having fun builds up the performance pathway."
- Former Olympian

DISCUSSION:

- Inclusivity by design and opportunity for elite progression are not necessarily conflicting principles
- Wider recruitment may create a larger and more diverse pool of talent with potential to both progress and give back to the community

"Mothers have always been the one that... don't have the time themselves."
- Female cricket captain

DISCUSSION:

- Whilst growth in female participation is strong in Oxfordshire, initiatives often focus on junior and young adult cricket
- Stakeholders identified working parents, particularly mothers, as a potentially overlooked group, with childcare and time constraints limiting opportunities to participate. Opportunities for inclusion include running parallel parent and junior cricket sessions, to alleviate the childcare need whilst parents themselves play

"You need to have individuals that ... represent the community, but are also a key part of the community, which enables those relationships to be more long-lasting."
- Cricket development stakeholder

DISCUSSION:

- Stakeholders warned that clubs may struggle when their relationship with the local community becomes fragmented
- Bottom-up initiatives allow direct integration and representation of local community members

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