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ECB and its delivery partners commit to multi-year investment to widen access and opportunity in the sport

The ECB and its official charity and delivery partners have today announced increased funding commitments which will take cricket to more people over the next three years, supporting the game's ambition to become the most inclusive team sport in England and Wales.

Between 2026 and 2028, over £15 million of ECB funding has been agreed across the charity and delivery partners – Chance to Shine, Lord's Taverners, the MCC Foundation, the African Caribbean Engagement Programme (ACE)

and the South Asian Cricket Academy (SACA) – to continue to offer free cricket in state schools and SEND settings, strengthen talent pathways for underrepresented groups, and support more Black and South Asian players to progress in the game.

In November, [the ECB's State of Equity in Cricket Report](#) provided a comprehensive update on the work happening across the sport to make it more accessible and inclusive. The collaboration between the ECB and its partners is an important strand in these efforts to take cricket to communities across England and Wales.

The direct impact of the funding commitments for each charity and delivery partner is outlined below.

Chance to Shine

In the last full school year (2024/25), Chance to Shine took cricket into 4,287 primary schools, representing a quarter of all state primary schools in England and Wales. Over 560,000 primary school children played through Chance to Shine sessions, of which over 90,000 were from schools where over 40% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals. Since its inception, Chance to Shine has now delivered cricket to over 7 million children.

Over the next three years, it is anticipated that a further 1.4 million primary school children will experience cricket through a Chance to Shine programme, with programmes which particularly target schools in under-served communities.

Lord's Taverners

Over 28,500 pupils in more than 950 SEND/ALN education settings received free cricket through Lord's Taverners programmes last year.

Alongside school delivery, Lord's Taverners Super 1s programme gave over 2,100 young people with a disability aged 8-25 the chance to play regular, competitive cricket over the last 12 months. Community cricket hubs provided by Super 1s, allow participants the chance to receive coaching, compete against their peers and enjoy the personal development benefits of playing sport.

Between 2026 and 2028, another 60,000 children will take part in Lord's Taverners' schools programmes, with the ambition that by 2028, all 1,500 of the SEND/ALN education settings identified in the State School Action Plan, will be offered the opportunity to play cricket.'

MCC Foundation

A stepped-up partnership with the MCC Foundation (MCCF) is enabling rapid growth of their Hub network, providing more opportunities for state school pupils and stronger alignment with county pathways. The Hub network will expand to 220 Hubs in 2026, offer 8,500 participant places (including 3,800 for girls), more match play and greater opportunities for talented state-educated players to reach their potential.

Following the ECB's initial investment, the number of MCCF Hubs has grown from 77 Hubs and 3,221 participants (2023) to 164 Hubs and 5,544 participants (end 2025), with more than 430 players progressing into County Age Group squads since 2024. The next phase aims to widen access further and smooth transitions into county environments, using success stories such as Romano Franco (Glamorgan) and Seren Smale (Lancashire and England) to inspire others to follow in their footsteps.

African Caribbean Engagement (ACE) Programme

This year, ECB funding will continue to underpin ACE's mission to reconnect Black communities with cricket and support talented Black players into county pathways and the professional game.

In 2026, ACE will aim to reach 14,000 young people, across hubs in Birmingham, North London, South London, Sheffield, Nottingham, Bristol and Manchester. Since its inception five years ago, ACE has reached over 42,500 participants, supported 150 players into county, pathway and district structures, helped three players secure professional contracts, and trained 30 qualified coaches.

South Asian Cricket Academy (SACA) – official delivery partner

To bolster opportunities for British South Asian players, the ECB has committed to invest in SACA through to 2028, supporting SACA's men's

programme and piloting a new women's programme to test what works in female talent acceleration.

Due to the large number of talented applicants, the new women's pilot will support 15 non-professionally contracted British South Asian women aged over 18 for the fully-funded high-performance elite programme. Selected players will benefit from dedicated coaching, residential training camps and fixtures against county teams, mirroring the men's programme.

SACA's model has already supported a cohort of graduates now active across the men's professional game, contributing to the increase in British South Asian representation in men's cricket - from 5.2% (2021) to 10.4% (2025). Of the 18 graduates, 12 of those are still playing which represents 30% of the 40 South Asian players currently playing in the men's professional game.

The next funding period aims to grow the pipeline further, deepen county links, and turn more academy experiences into sustained professional opportunities across men's and women's pathways.

These five delivery partners receive central ECB funding to assist in meeting the ECB's nationwide aims, at scale, in this strategic cycle. However, the ECB would also like to take this opportunity to recognise and thank the many local charities that work with individual counties and Recreational Cricket Boards to have profound impacts on people and communities across England and Wales.

Richard Gould, ECB Chief Executive Officer, said, *“Our charity and delivery partners are harnessing the power of cricket to change lives by providing more opportunities for children in schools, people living with disabilities, and those talented players looking to move through pathways towards the professional game.”*

“This investment is about scaling that brilliant work and accelerating our progress towards becoming the most inclusive team sport. Together with Chance to Shine, Lord's Taverners, the MCC Foundation, ACE and SACA, we want every child—whatever their background, school or postcode—to have the chance to fall in love with cricket and to go as far as their talent and ambition will take them.”

Kate Stephens, CEO of Chance to Shine said, *“Chance to Shine has been proud*

to work alongside the ECB since our foundation in 2005. Together, we have built a reputation for high impact, high quality programmes in primary schools that are data-led, deliver a tangible change, operate at scale and focus on some of the most deprived areas of the UK. This is made possible through our partnership with the Recreational Cricket Boards and the wider cricket community, whose local knowledge and delivery expertise brings the game to life for children across England and Wales. Above all, we believe that cricket is a wonderful vehicle to connect with children and deepen their approach to learning, and we cannot wait to inspire the next generation of young cricketers both on and off the pitch.”

Mark Curtin, CEO of Lord’s Taverners, said, *“This renewed commitment from the ECB is a powerful endorsement of the life-changing impact of disability cricket and the importance of ensuring every young person has the chance to play. Through our work in SEND and ALN settings, and Super 1s community hubs, we are breaking down barriers for young people living with a disability, creating inclusive environments where they can develop life-skills and confidence through the game. Together, we are building a future where every young person with a disability across England and Wales has the opportunity to experience the joy and belonging that cricket can bring.”*

Angus Berry, CEO of MCC Foundation said, *“We are deeply grateful to ECB for their continued support of our MCCF Hub Programme. This increased and sustained investment is a vital catalyst for growth. It allows us to reach more young people in state schools and under-represented communities across the country, expand high-quality provision, and make talent pathways more accessible. It is not just the financial support, but also the deep ties we have with ECB and its County network which is integral to the success of the programme, now and in the future.”*

Chevy Green, Director of Programmes, ACE said, *“We welcome the ECB’s support and share a clear ambition: to transform representation in cricket. This funding will strengthen our programmes designed to increase representation, accelerate opportunities, and nurture talent for Black communities and other underrepresented groups - who have historically faced barriers to participation and progression in cricket. Partnerships like this are vital to inspire a new generation of cricketers.”*

Tom Brown, Founder and MD of SACA said, *“Since SACA launched in 2022, the funding we have received from ECB has been instrumental in enabling us to deliver the SACA programme across the country and achieve the success we have*

seen.

"The ongoing financial support of the ECB into our programmes, which has now expanded to include a Women's Academy, will assist us greatly in our ambitions to build on our existing success in the Men's game and help us replicate that in the Women's game.

"Our thanks go to ECB for their ongoing support and commitment to all that SACA is looking to achieve for the game."



Contacts



Chris Tuttlebee

Press Contact

Corporate Communications Lead

chris.tuttlebee@ecb.co.uk

+44 (0)7824 551713



ECB Press Office

Press Contact

media@ecb.co.uk