

ATISN 27536 - WRU correspondence

1. Direct ministerial correspondence

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership
Welsh Government
5th Floor
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

Email to: Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership

28th August 2025

Dear Minister,

I am pleased to share an update on the wide-ranging consultation aimed at listening to the rugby community in Wales—our fans, our players, our clubs, and our partners. Our intention is to transform the professional game to ensure its sustainability, competitiveness, and alignment with our shared aspirations.

As you will have seen, we have published an in-depth, systemic overview of the challenges and opportunities facing rugby in Wales and worldwide. We've outlined a proposed optimal system that will allow us to transform our elite pathways for men and women and better support our National teams of all ages as well as our domestic professional teams.

Our objective is to develop a strategic framework that reflects the evolving landscape of professional sport, addresses financial and structural challenges, and enhances the development pathways for Welsh talent.

The work we have already undertaken has led our executive team to provide a proposed optimal system but we will be undertaking further detailed work as a result of the consultation process. We intend to provide stakeholders with a good understanding of the options available and enable those who participate in the consultation to highlight potential issues and propose amendments to be considered before any final decisions are made.

We know that there is a huge amount of commitment to the current structure of the professional game in Wales, but our performances on the pitch do not match our ambitions as a rugby nation. Now is the right time to thoroughly review our elite

pathways. We must also grapple with very challenging financial headwinds facing rugby here and around the world.

We would welcome the opportunity to work closely with the Welsh Government throughout this process. Your insights and support will be invaluable in helping us shape a future that benefits not only the sport but also the wider social and economic fabric of Wales.

I include the current consultation document here: (<https://ymlaencymru.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/190825-Updated-Confidential-Consultation-Pack3.pdf>). We will share further details of the consultation process in the coming weeks, and we would be delighted to arrange a briefing at your convenience.

We would also be happy to offer your officials a technical briefing to cover further detail in relation to the financial or structural elements outlined in the consultation, if that would be helpful

Yours sincerely,

Chair
Welsh Rugby Union

From: WRU

Sent: 24 October 2025 14:10

To: WG

Cc: WG

Subject: Fw: Decision on The Future of Elite Rugby in Wales

I hope all is well with you. Please see attached letter and below embargoed copy of the press release. If you need any more information then please give me a call – I am around over the weekend if that helps.

Best regards

WRU



EMBARGO: 3PM Today, 24th Oct
UNANIMOUS BOARD DECISION ON THE FUTURE OF ELITE RUGBY IN WALES

Decision to move to three men's professional clubs follows record-breaking consultation and engagement across Wales.

Caerdydd/Cardiff 24 October 2025.

The Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) today announced a landmark decision on the future of elite rugby in Wales, following one of the most extensive consultations ever undertaken in Welsh sport. The WRU Board unanimously agreed to implement a new whole-system approach to elite rugby, designed to deliver long-term success through rugby alignment across all levels of the game and financial sustainability.

The decision is the conclusion of an extensive consultation and engagement programme. There were more than 7,000 responses to the public engagement and over 31 face-to-face meetings took place throughout September with key stakeholders across the game.

Speaking at a press conference in Cardiff's Principality Stadium, Chair of the WRU Board, Richard Collier-Keywood, said; **"We have heard loud and clear from the consultation that people want a long-term fix and not a short-term patch. We have listened and we agree.**

"Our decision is that the future structure of elite men's rugby will be based on three professional men's clubs, replacing the current four-team model, alongside two women's elite teams."

The WRU confirmed that it proposes to grant three licences for men's clubs; one for the capital, one for West Wales and one for East Wales. There will be equal funding for the three team squads starting at £6.4M and rising to £7.8M per annum. This decision reflects the need to concentrate talent, improve competitiveness, and ensure financial sustainability.

Richard Collier-Keywood, continued, **“Any change is difficult, and we have current contractual obligations to the URC and our professional clubs that we will honour in the absence of new agreements. We want to involve the URC and the owners and managers of the current clubs in how we get to our chosen destination. This may take some time, but we will work hard to get this done as quickly as possible.**

“If, however, it ultimately proves impossible to reach a consensus on how this change will happen then the WRU will run a fair and transparent tendering process for the three licences. We have already guaranteed that all existing player contracts will be honoured.”

The WRU confirmed additional investment of £40 million across five years in Welsh rugby from the elite level to the pathways. £28 million of this will go into:

- Improved coaching and education
- Men’s national academy with two regional training centres
- 12 men’s Player Development Centres
- A women’s national academy
- Three women’s Player Development Centres with nine satellite locations
- Additional investment in Super Rygbi Cymru and Celtic Challenge teams
- A new Talent and Insight Management Department which will manage talent identification, recruitment, retention and development across both men's and women's rugby

Richard Collier-Keywood, added, **“Our intention is that we will work closely with the owners under a new licence agreement that will see them retaining overall control of the clubs and their commercial activity whilst the rugby operations and the funding for this will be the responsibility of the WRU. The details of this will be worked out with the clubs but our desire is to align to improve performance of both the national teams and the professional clubs.**

“We have carried out an analysis of population demographics, community club distribution, registered community player numbers and potential future rugby players, coaches, university and school locations and physical rugby infrastructure across Wales. The geographical distribution of licences for the three future clubs in this new model will need to take into account these factors. Our view is that this will lead to licences being issued with one in the capital, one in the West and one in the East.”

WRU director of rugby and elite performance, Dave Reddin, said: **“This new system has been built from the ground up to drive success with every part aligned and every decision designed to raise standards, restore the DNA of Welsh rugby and deliver the**

step forward in performance that everyone in Welsh rugby craves.

“As a result of the consultation, it has moved on for good reason from the original two-club model proposed. The consultation confirmed that change is needed, and this model focuses investment where it makes the biggest difference on the pitch. But we also heard the concerns of players and the deep passion for the heritage of our teams. On balance we feel that this three-team structure protects that for most while managing a necessary reduction in a fair and respectful way. This creates a sustainable, joined-up system.”

The WRU also announced significant investment in the women’s game, including two elite women’s teams, a Women’s National Academy, and a new domestic league.

Amanda Bennett, Independent Non-Executive Director and Chair of the Women’s Rugby Committee, said,

“This is a transformative moment for women’s rugby in Wales. The WRU’s commitment to funding and infrastructure will help us attract and retain top talent and build a competitive domestic structure. We all saw the amazing success of the Women’s World Cup tournament this year. This is an area for growth in the sport both globally and in Wales.”

Richard Collier-Keywood, concluded, **“Many of these investments will benefit players coming through over the next few years. We want Wales to be an attractive place for them to play and for fans to see attractive rugby. Please support our teams as we rebuild the system together. Thank you”**

ENDS

Photographic and video assets are available.

For media enquiries and interviews, please contact: WRU. Mobile number:

Notes to Editors

- The WRU Board members are Richard Collier-Keywood (chair), Jennifer Mathias, Andrew Williams, Alison Thorne, Amanda Bennett, Jamie Roberts, Abi Tierney, Colin Wilks, John Manders, Chris Jones, Malcolm Wall, Claire Donovan. Profiles on each Board member can be found on the [WRU website](#).
- A short explanatory paper, ‘The Way Forward – the Future of Elite Rugby in Wales’ can be downloaded now from the [WRU Consultation website](#)



**Welsh Rugby Union Group / Grwp Undeb
Rygbi Cymru**
Principality Stadium, Westgate Street, Cardiff.
Phone / Ffôn: | Mobile / Ffôn Symudol:
Email/ Ebost:

**Y Gweinidog Diwylliant, Sgiliau a Phartneriaeth Gymdeithasol Minister for Culture, Skills
and Social Partnership**

Ein cyf/Our ref JS/00647/25

Welsh Rugby Union

25 September 2025

Dear WRU,

Thank you for your letter and for providing the consultation document outlining the proposed approach to the transformation of professional rugby in Wales.

I would welcome the chance to discuss the consultation and your plans in greater detail. Please could you contact my office at your convenience to arrange a suitable date for a meeting, if possible in early/mid-October.

I look forward to engaging further on these important matters and working together to ensure a positive future for Welsh rugby.

Yours sincerely,

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership
Y Gweinidog Diwylliant, Sgiliau a Phartneriaeth Gymdeithasol

24th October 2025

Dear FM,

I am writing to share a pivotal announcement regarding the future of elite rugby in Wales, following the conclusion of an extensive and inclusive consultation process led by the Welsh Rugby Union.

Over recent months, the WRU has engaged deeply with stakeholders from across the breadth of Welsh rugby, including the four professional clubs, both our men's and women's players, coaches, supporters, community clubs, government officials and partners, to help shape a sustainable and ambitious path forward.

This collaborative effort has culminated in a landmark decision on the number of professional clubs and the strategic direction of our elite game.

We firmly believe this marks a defining moment in Welsh rugby history. We have a blueprint now in place to lay the foundation for long-term success, with investment and support designed to strengthen the entire ecosystem of Welsh rugby, from grassroots to international level. For full details of the decision and the WRU's vision for the future, I invite you to read the attached press release.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to Welsh rugby.

Yours sincerely,

Welsh Rugby Union

24th October 2025

Dear Minister JS,

I am writing to share a pivotal announcement regarding the future of elite rugby in Wales, following the conclusion of an extensive and inclusive consultation process led by the Welsh Rugby Union.

Over recent months, the WRU has engaged deeply with stakeholders from across the breadth of Welsh rugby, including the four professional clubs, both our men's and women's players, coaches, supporters, community clubs, government officials and partners, to help shape a sustainable and ambitious path forward.

This collaborative effort has culminated in a landmark decision on the number of professional clubs and the strategic direction of our elite game.

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For full details of the decision and the WRU's vision for the future, I invite you to read the attached press release.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to Welsh rugby.

Yours sincerely,

Welsh Rugby Union

The First Minister of Wales,
Welsh Government,
5th Floor,
Tŷ Hywel,
Cardiff Bay, CF99 1SN

24th August 2026

Dear First Minister,

We are writing jointly, as Vice Chair and Group Chief Executive of the Welsh Rugby Union, in response to a letter sent to you by Hayley Parsons and Jonathan Davies.

We want to set out clearly the facts of where our governance and decision-making stand, address directly the specific asks the letter makes of Welsh Government and explain the

impact the current climate that this concerted and unwarranted campaign is having on our people.

Considered decision-making

The process behind the men's professional game restructure has not been rushed, and it has not happened behind closed doors. There is widespread understanding that professional rugby in Wales was in need of fundamental change. Less than 18 months ago Cardiff Rugby went into administration and the WRU was required to rescue. This decision was litigated and the WRU had to defend it. The rescue of Cardiff Rugby demonstrated the significant reliance on benefactors and the WRU to support the professional game in Wales as the clubs are not currently able to sustain themselves commercially.

During the summer of 2025 we therefore engaged with the professional clubs and other stakeholders and last September undertook one of the largest consultation processes ever carried out in Welsh sport – hearing from professional and community clubs, players, fans and other stakeholders extensively, before reaching any conclusions.

The result of that extensive consultation supported the need for transformational change. We recognise that such change is difficult (particularly against the backdrop of the economic downturn for rugby globally) but the findings of the consultation were definitive and it is incumbent on the WRU to continue with its implementation if we are to address the sporting and economic realities facing the game.

Earlier this year we held an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), at which every one of our member clubs had the opportunity to question and challenge the decision that the Board had made on the restructure of the game in Wales. Since then, we have reconsidered a wide range of factors, including population and accessibility, infrastructure, financial sustainability, player pathways, sporting performance, fan support and heritage, before affirming the difficult decision to move to a three-club model. The geographical and demographic analysis underpinning the Board's decision on where to locate the three new licences beyond 2028 has not yet been published, but we intend to share it in the coming weeks, precisely because we welcome scrutiny and embrace transparency.

Improving governance

Over the past three years, the WRU has also undergone significant governance reform, changes voted through almost unanimously by our member clubs, specifically to increase diversity of thought and strengthen commercial, financial, business and professional rugby expertise on our Board. This is not a Board that entrenched itself against scrutiny, it is one that clubs themselves reshaped.

Since 2023, the WRU has been subject to sustained, wide-ranging independent scrutiny, not simply internal reform. This has included the Dame Anne Rafferty Oversight Group, reporting quarterly on our progress against the independent recommendations, a formal Section 23 partnership with the EHRC, now completed and signed off, with clear measurable improvement, an independent Women's Contract Process Review, and this year's independent Board Effectiveness Review by the Good Governance Institute, which concluded that substantial progress had been made and had been approached seriously rather than as a compliance exercise.

This is a direct answer to one of the central asks in the letter from Hayley Parsons and Jonathan Davies: independent, external scrutiny of our culture and governance is not something we need to establish, it already exists, is active, and has recently and directly assessed our progress as genuine.

We do not say this to suggest the work is complete, it is not, and we remain committed to it. But it means any further process should build on this existing independent architecture, not duplicate it.

Questionable claims

We do not recognise the commentary and figures quoted regarding clubs privately supporting the EGM earlier this year but too afraid to say so publicly. We would welcome the opportunity to understand the evidence behind this specific assertion, given the seriousness with which it is being presented. It's worth noting that the majority of the clubs that requisitioned the EGM later wrote to us and asked us to cancel the EGM and withdraw the motions. The WRU declined to do so and went ahead with the meeting demonstrating good governance and enabling the entire membership to have the opportunity to hear from the WRU as we transparently set out our plan for the restructure of the game. Please note our Annual General Meeting will take place in just a few months, in mid-November.

On the new Chair recruitment process, our direct experience is different to that which is set out in the letter from Hayley Parsons and Jonathan Davies, and in one respect suggests a much more worrying concern. We have had direct feedback from candidates that have withdrawn from the recruitment process specifically because of the current climate, explaining they are unwilling to put themselves or their families through the external toxicity currently surrounding the game.

WRU Constitution

We recognise that Hayley Parsons, Jonathan Davies and others are entitled to their views, however, it's essential to recognise that the WRU is an independent, member-owned union, accountable to its member clubs through established constitutional processes, not to informal coalitions outside that structure, however well-intentioned or well-connected. We would be very concerned by any suggestion, implicit or otherwise, that a group without electoral or constitutional standing within Welsh rugby should be able to override decisions properly and lawfully taken by our members and the Board.

External oversight

We take governance, transparency and disclosure culture seriously, as demonstrated above, and welcome legitimate, evidence-based scrutiny through the appropriate existing bodies, the EHRC and the Oversight Group in particular.

We would be concerned by any process that duplicates work already independently assessed, or that risks setting a precedent for direct government involvement in the governance of an autonomous, member-owned sporting body based on unverified claims.

Employee impact

What concerns us most, and what we do not believe has featured sufficiently in the public debate, is the impact this sustained campaign is having on WRU employees. Our people, at every level of this organisation, are dealing with a level of personal attack, intimidation and, in some cases, targeted abuse that goes far beyond legitimate scrutiny of our decisions. This includes attacks that have become personal, gendered and, at times, potentially unlawful in nature. We have a duty of care to our people, and we take that duty extremely seriously.

Next steps

We very recently had a positive meeting with the Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport and discussed all the above, and other matters, in detail.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you directly if you would find it helpful, to share our perspective directly, and to discuss how Welsh Government can support a stable, evidence-led resolution, rather than one shaped by unverified claims.

We would also welcome an indication of whether Welsh Government would be willing to make a public statement acknowledging the extent of independent scrutiny already in place, through the Oversight Group, the EHRC, Sport Wales and other bodies, so the public has an accurate picture of the assurance already provided.

We would be very happy to meet at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

WRU

From: Ashok Ahir
Sent: 05 August 2026 10:34
To: Sport Division
Cc: Exec Assistant, (LCC - Sports Division)
Subject: Re: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Bore da Lewis

From a WRU perspective we would want to be able to cover some or all of the following:

- Reorganisation of men's professional rugby
- Development of the women's game
- Community Investment Model

If you can please let me know any specific areas that you want to cover - so that we can prepare for those as well.

Cofion

Ashok



Ashok Ahir | Director of Corporate Affairs
Welsh Rugby Union Group / Grwp Undeb
Rygbi Cymru
Welsh Rugby Union Group, Principality Stadium,
Westgate Street
Phone / Ffôn: | Mobile / Ffôn Symudol:
Email/ Epost:

Values: Excellence | Integrity | Success | Courage | Family | Humour
Gwerthoedd: Rhagoriaeth | Cywirdeb | Llwyddiant | Dewrder | Teulu | Hiwmor

From:
on behalf of Sport Division
Sent: Wednesday, August 05, 2026 10:25
To: Ashok Ahir
Cc: Exec Assistant; Sport Division
Subject: FW: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Hi Ashok

Sorry to chase, but do you have any agenda items for the meeting? I need to prepare a briefing for the Minister.

Regards

Y Gangen Polisi Chwaraeon/Sport Policy Branch
Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government

E-Bost/Email

From: Exec Assistant
Sent: 30 July 2026 16:00
To: LCC - Sports Division; Ashok Ahir
Cc: Sport Division
Subject: RE: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Hi
Thank you for getting in touch.
Ashok will come back to you about this.
Best wishes,



Executive Assistant to CEO
Welsh Rugby Union Group / Grwp Undeb
Rygbi Cymru
Welsh Rugby Union Group, Principality Stadium,
Westgate Street
Email/ Ebst:

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From: Sport Policy Branch
Sent: 30 July 2026 10:27
To: Exec Assistant; Ashok Ahir
Cc: Sport Division
Subject: FW: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Hi both
I'm preparing a briefing for the Minister's meeting on 12 August. Could you please provide any agenda items you wish to discuss?
I would be grateful if you could send these to me by Monday 3 August.
Regards

Y Gangen Polisi Chwaraeon/Sport Policy Branch
Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government
Ffon/ Phone:03000257347
E-Bost/Email

From: Exec Assistant
Sent: 21 July 2026 13:36
To: DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport/YD Trefnydd, Prif Gwip a Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport
Cc: Ashok Ahir
Subject: RE: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Hi Aled

It was nice to speak just now and just to confirm that we have landed on August 12th 16.00-16.30 for Heledd, Abi and Ashok to speak and have agreed it will be a virtual meet in this instance so we don't hold the process up with geographical challenges!

Abi

Ashok

We look forward to receiving the calendar invite from you with dial in details.

Best wishes,



Executive Assistant to CEO
Welsh Rugby Union Group / Grwp
Undeb Rygbi Cymru
Welsh Rugby Union Group, Principality
Stadium, Westgate Street
Email/ Ebost:

Values: Excellence | Integrity | Success | Courage | Family | Humour

Gwerthoedd: Rhagoriaeth | Cywirdeb | Llwyddiant | Dewrder | Teulu | Hiwmor

From: DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Sent: 14 July 2026 10:05

To: Exec Assistant; DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Subject: ATB/RE: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Hi Saghi,

Thank you for your email, I was on leave yesterday however I'm back in work for the rest of the week. I'm available for most of today so I'm happy for you to give me a call whenever you're available.

Diolch,

Ysgrifennydd Dyddiadur i Heledd Fychan | Diary Secretary to Heledd Fychan
Trefnydd, Prif Chwip a Gweinidog Cabinet dros Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Trefnydd,
Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Ty Hywel, Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN | Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN

Ebost | Email:

Gwefan | Website: www.llyw.cymru | www.gov.wales

Oddi wrth: Exec Assistant

Anfonwyd: Dydd Llun, 13 Gorffennaf 2026 11:24

At: DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport/YD

Trefnydd, Prif Gwip a Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Pwnc: RE: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Diolch Aled

I hope you had a nice weekend.

I have been asked to contact you to arrange the meeting between Heledd, Abi and Ashok as requested below.

I did just try to call you but it went to voicemail. Are you free tomorrow for a phone call? I'm pretty available all day so just let me know what suits you. Or Thursday. I'm not here on Weds.

Thanks, Saghi



Executive Assistant to CEO
Welsh Rugby Union Group / Grwp
Undeb Rygbi Cymru
Welsh Rugby Union Group, Principality
Stadium, Westgate Street
Email/ Ebost:

Values: Excellence | Integrity | Success | Courage | Family | Humour

Gwerthoedd: Rhagoriaeth | Cywirdeb | Llwyddiant | Dewrder | Teulu | Hiwmor

From: DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Sent: 03 July 2026 17:14

To: Ashleigh Collier

Cc: DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport; Exec Assistant; Ashok Ahir; Abi Tierney

Subject: ATB/RE: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

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Diolch Abi!

Ashleigh – Can you let us know when works best for the CEO and Director? While we're unlikely to be able to offer a slot next Wednesday anymore due to Ministerial business, but we can consider w/c 13 July instead. Would a meeting at 10:00 – 10:45 on Wednesday 15 July be suitable?

If the above slot is not suitable, could we please have a call to compare diaries and discuss options? My number is 03000 255 148.

Diolch,

Aled McKenzie

Aled McKenzie

Ysgrifennydd Dyddiadur i Heledd Fychan | Diary Secretary to Heledd Fychan

Trefnydd, Prif Chwip a Gweinidog Cabinet dros Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Trefnydd,
Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Ty Hywel, Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN | Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN

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Hapus i gyfathrebu'n Saesneg neu yn y Gymraeg / Happy to communicate in English or Welsh

Oddi wrth: Abi Tierney

Anfonwyd: Dydd Iau, 2 Gorffennaf 2026 15:19

At: DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport/YD

Trefnydd, Prif Gwip a Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Copi/Cc: DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport/YD

Trefnydd, Prif Gwip a Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport; Exec Assistant; Ashok Ahir; Ashleigh Collier

Pwnc: Re: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Dear Aled,

Thank you for your email and suggestion of introductory meeting.

I am cc. Saghi, who has taken over from Victoria Hughes (I would be grateful if you could update your address list?). Saghi will be able to work with you to find a good time and location. I am also cc. Ashok, who is our Director of Corporate Affairs, and I work like to join me for the meeting.

Please can I just flag that I am away a lot in July and August with both WRU commitments and holiday. I would value your patience as we look for a time.

Yours,

Abi

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)



Abi Tierney | WRU Group Chief
Executive Officer

Welsh Rugby Union Group / Grwp
Undeb Rygbi Cymru
Welsh Rugby Union Group, Principality
Stadium, Westgate Street

Email/ Epost:

Values: **Excellence** | **Integrity** | **Success** | **Courage** | **Family** | **Humour**

Gwerthoedd: **Rhagoriaeth** | **Cywirdeb** | **Llwyddiant** | **Dewrder** | **Teulu** | **Hiwmor**

Ysgrifennwch ataf yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg // Please write to me in Welsh or English

From: DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Sent: Thursday, July 2, 2026 1:08 pm

To: Abi Tierney; Victoria Hughes

Cc: DS Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Subject: Introductory meeting with Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

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Prynhawn da,

The Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport would like to arrange an introductory meeting with the WRU, we would be happy to host you in person at either the Welsh Government office in Cathays Park or in Ty Hywel. The Minister has availability on Wednesday 8 July at 10:30 – 11:15, please can you let us know if this is suitable for you? We can also consider additional times or a virtual meeting if more convenient.

Diolch,

Aled McKenzie

Ysgrifennydd Dyddiadur i Heledd Fychan | Diary Secretary to Heledd Fychan

Trefnydd, Prif Chwip a Gweinidog Cabinet dros Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Trefnydd, Chief Whip and Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport

Ty Hywel, Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN | Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN

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2. Ministerial Briefing Papers

DIARY CASE BRIEFING

Meeting date/time	Wednesday 8 October 2026, 9.30am
Who is the Minister meeting?	WRU
Who requested the meeting?	Minister
Primary purpose	Update on the WRU consultation on the future of the professional game in Wales
Is there an agreed agenda?	No
Which officials are supporting the Minister?	DD Arts & Sport Head of Sport
Where is the meeting?	Teams
Other practical considerations	NA

Purpose

The purpose of the meeting is to seek an update from the WRU regarding their recent consultation on the future of regional rugby in Wales.

Current position and issues to note

Regional Restructuring

The WRU announced, in August, that it was going to undertake a consultation to review the structure of the professional game in Wales, as they stated that the status quo isn't viable.

They presented 4 options in their consultation pack, from remaining at 4 regions through to reducing down to just 2 and set out how this would impact performance pathways for age groups in Wales and also how it will support the Women's game in Wales.

That consultation closed last week and over 7000 responses were received (according to WRU and press reports) from its major stakeholders (the Regions and their fan organisations) as well as the public.

According to the WRU website, their next steps are that the executive team are currently analysing all of the information they have collected throughout consultation, and this will form the basis for a recommendation which will be submitted for review and consideration at its Board meetings throughout the month of October. They have made a commitment to all involved to determine a definitive plan about the way ahead for Welsh rugby before the month is out. That process starts at their first meeting on Wednesday (8th October).

[REDACTED]

School Hub Officers

With regard to hub officers, following a review, undertaken in conjunction with World Rugby, they decided to discontinue their funding for hub officers in schools. They have been funding 90 officers, of which 78 were located in secondary schools with the rest embedded in the regional clubs. The review showed that there was insufficient coverage across the whole of Wales and even where officers were split across multiple schools, they had a maximum of 47% coverage of schools in Wales. Also, this was costing just shy of £1m and they had little influence over the activity of the hub officers as they were not employed by the WRU but the school and they felt the outputs were not reflective of the need for improved coverage of rugby provision across all schools and community rugby clubs across the whole of Wales.

They are implementing a new programme of c.28/30 Rugby Engagement Officers across Wales who will be allocated geographical areas with the main function of supporting every school and community rugby club within their area as well as also providing support to referees. They are currently recruiting to these positions. They have also entered into an SLA with The Urdd to bridge some potential gaps in North Wales and have undertaken to continually reviewing these new arrangements to ensure they get their intended coverage across all schools and rugby clubs.

International fixtures in North Wales

During the 2024 U20 Six Nations the WRU announced it was moving a fixture from Parc Eirias, Colwyn Bay to Cardiff to attract more attention and greater crowds to the U20 fixtures. This led to representations from the stadium operator and the local authority to the WRU to reintroduce high profile fixtures to the region. Meetings have taken place with the WRU but to date there have been no agreement for any fixtures to move back to the stadium.

Points to make

- According to your update last week, there were over 7000 responses to the consultation, have you had much chance to review them and assess the general mood/tone of the response?
- You are going to Board throughout the month to come up with a definitive plan for regional rugby, is there a sense of where you will land and how are you going to sell major change to the nation?
- Throughout the consultation you mentioned how this would enhance the women's game in Wales, can you outline how that will look under the new structure you set out for the regional game in Wales?
- Also, a few items have come up in the Senedd recently so can you update me on;
 - the current position with the Rugby Engagement Officers, that are replacing the school hub officers, and;
 - whether there any current plans to introduce international fixtures back to North Wales?

DIARY CASE BRIEFING

Meeting date/time	Wednesday 12 August 2026 16:00-16:30
Who is the Minister meeting?	Abi Tierney – CEO of WRU Ashok Ahir - Director of Corporate Affairs of WRU
Who requested the meeting?	WRU
Primary purpose	An introductory meeting with senior leadership of WRU
Is there an agreed agenda?	• Reorganisation of men's professional rugby • Development of the women's game • Community Investment Model

Which officials are supporting the Minister?	Neil Welch, Head of Sport Policy
Where is the meeting?	Virtual
Other practical considerations	N/A

Purpose

An introductory meeting with the senior leadership of WRU.

Current position and issues to note

Reorganisation of men's professional rugby

The WRU has indicated its intention to move to a three-team men's professional rugby model from the 2028-29 season. The proposed structure would comprise one professional team based in the capital, one in east Wales and one in west Wales.

Cardiff Rugby and Dragons RFC are expected to be considered for the capital and east Wales licences respectively, subject to the final licensing criteria. The position in west Wales remains sensitive, with Ospreys and Scarlets both affected by the proposed model. The WRU expects to begin the formal decision-making process in December 2026, with a final position before the end of the 2026-27 season.

Points to make

- Given the significance of these proposals, I would encourage you to continue engaging openly with clubs, players, supporters and local communities as the formal decision-making process progresses.
- Can you outline how you are engaging with affected clubs, supporters and communities during the licensing process, and what factors will ultimately determine the final configuration of the professional game in Wales?

Summary of written questions and responses on the future of Welsh rugby

Three Written Questions have recently been submitted to Welsh Ministers regarding the future structure of Welsh rugby and the position of the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU).

WQ98634 – Gwyn Williams. Asked whether the Welsh Government has any plans to intervene to guarantee the future of the Ospreys rugby club. The Minister's response was that the WRU is an independent organisation and decisions on the

future of the sport are its responsibility. While Welsh Ministers have no powers to intervene, they have emphasised the need for transparency, accountability and consideration of the impact of decisions on affected communities.

WQ99361 – Jayne Bryant. Asked what discussions the Welsh Government has had with the WRU about the future structure of Welsh rugby. The Minister confirmed an initial discussion had taken place with WRU representatives, with a formal meeting being arranged. The Minister also stressed the importance of meaningful engagement with all parties and consideration of the long-term impact of decisions on the whole game.

WQ99414 – Liŷr Powell. Asked what meetings the Welsh Government has held with the WRU regarding the structure of regional rugby and the Government's position on maintaining four professional regions. The Minister provided a similar response, confirming initial discussions with the WRU, the arrangement of a formal meeting, and reiterating the need for engagement and consideration of impacts. The response also stated that decisions on the future of the game in Wales are ultimately matters for the WRU.

Summary of diary advice on Welsh rugby restructuring

A diary case was received from an independent group represented by Professor Dylan Jones-Evans OBE, requesting a meeting with the Cabinet Minister for Culture and Sport to discuss the proposed restructuring of professional rugby in Wales. The group expressed concerns about the potential reduction from four professional teams to three and wished to discuss the wider implications of the proposals.

Officials advised that it would be reasonable to decline the request, as discussions on the future structure of professional rugby should primarily take place through established governance arrangements.

Development of the women's game

Women's professional player Contracts

Wales Women now has 37 players on full-time professional contracts, reflecting the rapid progress made since the introduction of professionalism in 2022 and marking a significant milestone in the development of the women's game in Wales.

The Women's team are due to play 2 home fixtures in the WXV in the autumn;

Wales v South Africa, Cardiff Arms Park
Friday 18 September, KO: 7:15pm

Wales v USA, Cardiff Arms Park
Saturday 26 September, KO: 3:00pm

The match against the USA will be especially significant as it will be the first time Wales have ever faced the USA on home turf in Cardiff.

Research into concussion in female rugby players

As reported last week (26 July) [Concussion in rugby: Ex-players back first female-centred study - BBC Sport](#) Cardiff University's medical engineering team is now aiming to create the first head impact assessment protocol designed specifically for female athletes.

The study followed 30 players from the university's women's rugby team, using specialised mouthguards, cognitive tests and MRI imaging. Several former Welsh players have come out in support of the study.

Rafferty Review

The independent review into the WRU was published in November 2023 and made 36 recommendations, focused on improving governance, organisational culture, inclusivity, representation, and raising the profile of the women's and girls' game in Wales. The WRU accepted all recommendations, with an oversight group chaired by Dame Anne Rafferty established to monitor progress.

- I would welcome an update on the progress of the Rafferty Review, particularly any early themes, challenges, or anticipated next steps.

Community Investment Model

The WRU's new club investment model is intended to support community clubs below the Community Premiership by linking funding more closely to the aims of the One Wales strategy. Public WRU material says the model is designed to help create safer, more welcoming and inclusive club environments, support more sustainable community hubs, and strengthen club development both on and off the field.

- How is the new Community Investment Model helping clubs become more sustainable, inclusive and resilient, and how will the WRU measure its impact across grassroots rugby in Wales?

Background information

WRU Chair

Richard Collier-Keywood stood down as Independent Chair of the WRU July 2026. The WRU are currently in an open and comprehensive recruitment process.

WRU's five-year strategy (2024–2029)

Ymlaen Cymru (One Wales) is the WRU's five-year strategy (2024–2029), setting out a unified plan to reform and strengthen rugby across Wales. It aims to address long-standing challenges around financial sustainability, performance and fragmentation within the game, while creating a more coherent system spanning grassroots,

community and elite levels. The strategy's vision is to "unite people and inspire passion in Welsh rugby", supported by a mission to deliver high-quality opportunities and experiences for all participants. Its core goals include achieving top five world rankings for both men's and women's national teams, improving the competitiveness of professional clubs, growing participation, and strengthening the financial health of the sport. Central to this are four pillars: improving elite performance, supporting a thriving community game, accelerating the development of women's and girls' rugby, and expanding audience engagement. More information can be found via - <https://ymlaencymru.com/>

Summary of Government Business and Responses on the Future of Welsh Rugby

WQ98634 – Gwyn Williams asked whether the Welsh Government has any plans to intervene to guarantee the future of the Ospreys rugby club. The Minister's response was that the WRU is an independent organisation and decisions on the future of the sport are its responsibility. While Welsh Ministers have no powers to intervene, they have emphasised the need for transparency, accountability and consideration of the impact of decisions on affected communities.

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HF/05488/26 – Joint Letter from Cefin Campbell AS, Nerys Evans AS, Adam Price AS and Ann Davies AS

Four elected representatives for Carmarthenshire wrote to express serious concerns about the WRU's review of professional rugby and the potential reduction of regions from four to three, which they argue could threaten the future of the Scarlets.

The letter highlights the Scarlets' importance as a key part of west Wales' sporting identity, its role in developing international players, and its contribution to Welsh rugby. It also emphasises the potential economic and community impact of any changes, noting that Parc y Scarlets supports more than 400 jobs and contributes an estimated £17 million annually to the local and regional economy. Have not responded as came in on 11 August 2026.

TO/HF/05480/26 - Concern Regarding Transparency and the Future of Welsh Rugby

General Public, a Welsh rugby supporter and independent rugby commentator, wrote to the First Minister seeking clarification on the Welsh Government's role in ensuring transparency, accountability and public scrutiny as the WRU considers significant changes to the structure of professional rugby in Wales.

The correspondence raises concerns about the level of transparency surrounding the WRU's review process, noting that supporters and stakeholders are still awaiting further information on the rationale behind the proposed changes, despite public commitments that more detail would be provided. The letter also questions whether the process being followed reflects the approach originally outlined to supporters.

The writer highlights the wider cultural, community and economic importance of rugby in Wales and stresses the need for the interests of all parts of Wales, including North and Mid Wales, to be considered in future decisions. The letter concludes by asking what discussions the Welsh Government has had with the WRU, whether it considers the current level of transparency sufficient, and what role Government should play in ensuring accountability for decisions affecting the future of Welsh rugby.

Meeting Request

Founder of The Ideas Community, has written to the Cabinet Minister for Culture & Sport on behalf of an independent group originally convened by former Principality Building Society COO Rob Regan, requesting a meeting to discuss the proposed restructuring of professional rugby in Wales. The group has expressed concerns regarding the potential reduction of the professional rugby structure from four teams to three and seeks an opportunity to discuss the evidence, alternatives and wider implications of the proposed changes.

3. Formal Meeting Records

Meeting Note – 8 October 2025

Welsh Government and Welsh Rugby Union

Present

Jack Sargeant, Minister for Culture, Skills & Social Partnership

Richard Collier-Keywood, Chair WRU

Steffan Roberts, DD Arts & Sport

Neil Welch, Head of Sport, WG

The Minister commenced the meeting by enquiring about Abi Tierney and asking RCK to pass on his regards and for her swift recovery.

RCK then outlined some of the main headlines from the consultation exercise; there had been over 23,000 hits on the consultation webpage resulting in 7200 formal responses to its proposals. There were also comments surrounding options not contained within them as well, for example establishing an Anglo-Welsh league and dropping out of the URC, and how the regional debt has been managed since Covid.

They managed a large part of these via weekly updates and in one presented an overview of their year end position to enable stakeholders to have a financial overview of the progress WRU are making on that front.

They will be evaluating these responses over the next month and reporting to Board as they progress their decision making. As part of their considerations, they are looking at refinancing

their debt with new partners and will look at the potential of repaying the Welsh Government loan.

In going through the process of setting out options for the consultation on the future of the structure of rugby, it was obvious to the WRU that 4 equally funded clubs were not viable, especially when compared to Ireland and Scotland as comparative nations.

RCK committed to ensuring the Minister is made aware of the final decision prior to it being made public.

The Minister asked about whether the future for women's rugby was part of the consultation.

RCK stated that there would be 2 professional teams established in Wales and they are considering a 'modest' domestic league to provide wider opportunities for women and girls to play rugby and support future pathways for young girls.

The Minister also stated that officials would write to get updates on the school hub officers and fixtures returning to North Wales following questions being raised in the Senedd.

Meeting with Cabinet Minister Culture & Sport and WRU

12 August 2026

Present

Cabinet Minister for Culture & Sport (CM)

Abi Tierney, CEO WRU (AT)

Ashok Ahir, Director of Corporate Affairs WRU (AA)

Neil Welch, Head of Sport WG (NW)

Agenda

1. Regional Rugby
2. Community Investment
3. Women and Girls' rugby

Note of meeting

Regional Rugby

1. The Cabinet Minister started the meeting by outlining that she had received correspondence from fellow MSs regarding the situation, as reported, within the WRU and Regional Rugby.
2. CM stressed that any decisions on the future of professional rugby must be informed by meaningful engagement and a clear understanding of their impact on clubs, communities and supporters.
3. AT reaffirmed the current position was that as outlined in November (2025) by the Board of the WRU and hadn't changed. The option of sticking with 4 regional teams was not sustainable, financially or performance wise, and there would be a real risk that one would go bankrupt and disappear. This was evident of the recent bankruptcy of Cardiff Blues and other examples in the PRL in England. Therefore,

the decision to have 1 team in the East, 1 in the Capital and 1 in the west was the proposed model going forward.

4. AT outlined that the process going forward would be that the WRU were due to commence a roadshow in September around all the districts setting out their rationale for the decision they'd settled on and give all clubs the opportunities to question them on their process. Town Halls would also be arranged with other stakeholders, and all parties would be encouraged to work with WRU to co-create the future of Welsh rugby and address the challenges to grow participation.
5. This would be followed by an award process for the regions in the west to bid.
6. CM reiterated that WRU needed to bring people along on the journey or risk losing them to rugby, especially from a supporter perspective and that requested they consider the economic impact on the region that potentially loses out.
7. As part of this process the WRU were hoping that the 2 private enterprises would sit down together and work together to develop a solution for the whole region.

Community Investment

8. AT advised CM that all 272 clubs across Wales had completed assessments to determine the level of investment they could receive for the development of their club.

Women and Girl's Rugby

9. CM was informed that all new contracts had been finalised with the Women's National squad and that they now included a maternity provision for the players.
10. The growth of girls' rugby was encouraging and due to enhanced provision and better programming there was a 90% retention of 14-16 year-old girls in rugby.
11. CM requested to attend a future training session. ***(TBC whether it was a women's session or a general session the CM was to attend?)***

Other issues

12. AT informed the Minister that the WRU were due to attend Culture, Communications, Cymraeg and Sport Committee in October.
13. CM urged the WRU to engage in the consultation on the Culture Strategy.
14. It was suggested that officials should meet on a quarterly basis to maintain good communications between WRU and WG.