

THIS IS OUR GAME. **THIS IS WELSH RUGBY.**
DYMA'N GÊM NI. **DYMA RYGBI CYMREIG.**

Delyth Jewell MS, Chair
Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations
Committee

10 February 2023

Dear Delyth,

Thank you again for the opportunity to present to the Senedd Committee recently. Whilst this period has been extremely challenging for us, I hope you can appreciate that our intention is to accept and learn from the challenges we face, and to change the way that we work day to day, as well as renewing our governance, community and operational structures.

The Chair and I have been humbled by what we have heard, and the task we know we have ahead. In tackling some of the issues raised, we have received a great deal of challenge and advice from the Welsh Government and Sport Wales and you will know that progress has been made in appointing an independent Chair and outlining the terms of references of the external Taskforce.

We hope that further information can be published shortly and will keep the Committee up to date with details. We have also committed, of course, to return to the Committee to provide an update on progress in the interim and to provide specific information with regard to women's rugby and employment matters, which we include below.

I look forward to having more time to outline steps we have taken to invest in and develop rugby for women and girls across Wales over the last few years, and the progress made within the organisation to build a more inclusive and supportive staff environment.

Women's Rugby

We made commitments to openness and transparency at the Committee, and I include as an attachment the recommendations made by the Women's Performance Mid-Term Review.

Women's Performance Mid-Term Review

In 2021 we commissioned an independent review to consider what action was required to improve the provision for elite female players and address problems that had arisen within our international structures.

The review made very challenging reading for us as the WRU and described a committed squad of high-performance athletes frustrated by the support they were receiving, with failures in strategic and operational management, and not enough care, resource and encouragement for our international players to perform at their best.

The review report also made clear that we as a union had not ensured that our female players felt fully welcomed, valued and an equal part of our game.

The recognition of these serious failures as an organisation led to rapid changes, and of the 40 recommendations that were made as part of the review, most have been implemented in full, with further action required in other areas.

We have been heartened by the immediate positive outcomes, with the team achieving third place in the 2022 6 Nations tournament, but there is more to be done to build a professional, well-supported high-performance environment.

Whilst changes to management, investment in resources and new professional contracts have led to positive change, we recognise that considerably more needs to be done to ensure that women players at all levels receive the support they need to flourish and that we need to continue to change the way our organisation works day to day to be more inclusive.

I can only apologise again for the challenging environment and the personal impact it has had on the women involved.

You may also know that we have recently implemented changes in the community game following a review across all levels of the women's game and a widespread consultation process involving more than 1700 players, coaches, parents, stakeholders and collaborated with experts in varying fields including medical, physiological sport development, and other sectors.

The review looked at a range of areas to further support the growth of the female game in Wales and ensure that there is equitable and sustainable rugby provision for women and girls.

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The review covered broad aspects of the game, including season and competition structure, formats of the game and measures that could be put in place to help Welsh rugby structures to adapt to improve the female player pathway and support player development. It also covered issues such as training schedules, facilities and changing rooms, representation, attitudes and support from within the wider rugby community.

Key recommendations of the review were that the playing pathways girls and women were adapted and progressed, with changes to competition structures and further development of the community-based Female Hubs and further changes to the senior domestic competition.

We are delighted that the women's game in Wales has recently grown significantly, with an increase of more than 50% in regular female players since community rugby restarted in 2020. There are now 37 Female Hubs all over Wales, with 5000 women and girls registered, and with teams from under 7s to under 18s and senior women.

We have invested in the women and girls' game at all levels and have reviewed our playing opportunities and competitive pathways to adapt to the needs of our young people as we develop, grow, and protect the game in Wales. We have grown the number of Female Hubs, reviewed the playing framework for girls and our Hub Officers provided a diverse range of competitions, events and festivals for girls across Wales.

Our objective is to engage 10,000 women and girls in regular rugby activities by 2026, while enhancing the opportunities for girls within the pathway across all ages. I look forward to outlining in more detail our plans for growing the number of women and girls across rugby and building a union that we can all be proud of.

Employment and Staff Welfare

You also asked us to specifically respond with regard to employment settlements and grievances in relation to the allegations of poor behaviours described in the recent programme. The Committee are right to highlight that we should not wait until the Taskforce completes its work before we make changes, specifically to ensure that our staff feel safe, supported and valued, and that we tackle incidents and behaviours in a robust and consistent matter.

I have previously written to you to outline how we have invested in new procedures and enhanced and restructured our human resources team, with a particular focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The HR Team has sought external expertise to provide advice and support in reviewing all of our people policies in 2022, which includes our EDI, whistleblowing and grievance policies, to ensure these are as robust as possible. This period of challenge has made us doubly committed to develop an every day working culture that is professional, inclusive and welcoming.

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The WRU employs some 224 staff directly, whilst there are 430 in the wider WRU Group, which includes Principality Stadium staff.

Whilst the Committee asked us about non-disclosure agreements specifically, we will often use these as part of commercial agreements. Settlement or compromise agreements are used from time to time when ending employment for a variety of reasons. In providing the relevant information and as requested by the Committee we have considered settlement agreements in relation to allegations of sexism, racism and homophobia.

The WRU Group has entered into a settlement agreement on four occasions in the last five years in relation to a grievance that had been raised in relation to these issues. Two or three of the four settlement agreements relate to the issues that might come under the remit of the Taskforce review. I am sure you will understand that for a number of reasons, I cannot provide any further detail of the specific cases but we would of course be happy for those who have entered into settlement agreements to participate in the Taskforce review if they so wished.

The WRU Group has been in receipt of six grievances in the last five years that relate to either sexist, racist or homophobic behaviour. With regard to procedures that have been concluded, three members of staff have been subject to disciplinary action following allegations of sexist, racist or homophobic behaviour.

Changing culture takes time, but we are determined to do it, and in addition to the work of the Taskforce, we are looking again at immediate things that we can do and have done to support our staff.

Please do let me know if you require any further information. I can confirm that we have no amendments to make with regard to the published transcript of the Committee proceedings.

I will copy this letter to the Deputy Minister for her information, and I look forward to continuing our dialogue.

Yours sincerely,



Nigel Walker
Interim Chief Executive Officer