



PRIVATE

By email only

Mr Llew Williams
Clerk - Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International
Relations Committee
Welsh Parliament

25 January 2024

Dear Mr Williams,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 19th December 2023 and invitation to discuss broadcast coverage of the Men's and Women's Six Nations Championships in the UK, and specifically in Wales.

Firstly, we feel it is important to provide some background and context about Six Nations Rugby Limited's ("**SNRL**") role and responsibilities operating on behalf of and in partnership with each of its six member unions, including the WRU.

In 2020, the six unions agreed for all of their home international rugby media rights to be consolidated in order for SNRL to represent them on a centralised basis. These rights now include the men's Autumn International fixtures (currently the "Autumn Nations Series") and certain other international rugby matches as well as the annual Six Nations Championships (itself encompassing the men's, women's and age-group tournaments).

The rationale behind this is to provide a streamlined calendar and more exciting competition formats for rugby and sports fans of all ages. Within this media strategy, striking the right balance between reach and revenue generation (essential for our unions to reinvest across all areas of the game in their respective countries) is our core principle.

When considering audience reach today, it is important to consider the enormous changes in how fans now consume and enjoy rugby. This now spans live, highlights, clips, docuseries, surround programming, archive, podcasts and other audio to name a few, much of which is available free to view/access across various platforms including

social media. In 2023, social media video views of Six Nations content globally neared 800 million.

A Deloitte report in 2023¹ points to the changing consumption habits of younger sports fans, where 90% of Gen Z fans use social media to consume sports content. In Wales alone, total social media use relating to the Six Nations Championships in 2023 increased 17 percentage points year-on-year², driven by short-form content across various digital and social platforms - half of fans engaged in second screen behaviour whilst watching a Six Nations match.

We are increasingly working with our unions to reach new audiences by meeting them where they choose to consume content. For example, we have recently launched a behind-the-scenes Netflix series ("Six Nations: Full Contact"), revamped our fantasy gaming proposition and increased media exposure activity (i.e. digital creators, influencers and enhanced press access).

Broadcast rights represent the largest share of WRU income.

Based on WRU's 2022 financial statements, 67% of annual turnover was reinvested in the game. This funding fuels the investment in the development and grassroots areas and therefore rugby's long-term sustainability.

Broadcast rights for national team matches typically contribute the largest singular revenue line item in the accounts, averaging 26% of annual revenue over the last 5 years. Any change to that will impact directly on the health of Welsh rugby.

SNRL intends to issue a broadcast invitation to tender ("**ITT**") in the UK in the next 15 months for our competitions from the 2026 season onwards. It will ensure, as with previous Six Nations Rugby tender processes, that all principal broadcasters (Free-To-Air ("FTA") and Pay) will have the opportunity to respond.

SNRL has a duty to the WRU and each of its unions to ensure the optimal balance of promoting the game to a broader audience, driving audience reach and unlocking the revenue generation opportunities that become achievable by way of creating competitive tension for these broadcast rights.

For the benefit of doubt, there is no scenario whereby UK FTA broadcasters will not have the opportunity through the process to acquire all or some of the Six Nations Rugby Championships (men's and women's).

¹ <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/media-and-entertainment/immersive-sports-fandom.html>

² Nielsen consumer research report, Six Nations 2023

An open and competitive process is critical to driving fair market value, which in turn enables SNRL to make a balanced decision and deliver the best combination of audience reach to grow the sport, high quality coverage to engage rugby fans and fair financial return to reinvest into the game.

The decision that follows the ITT process will involve rigorous and transparent consultation with each of our unions as custodians for the sport in their countries and independent SNRL Board members, conscious of the relevance of any decision that is made on the sporting community as a whole.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Harrison', written over a thin horizontal line.

Tom Harrison
CEO, Six Nations Rugby Limited