

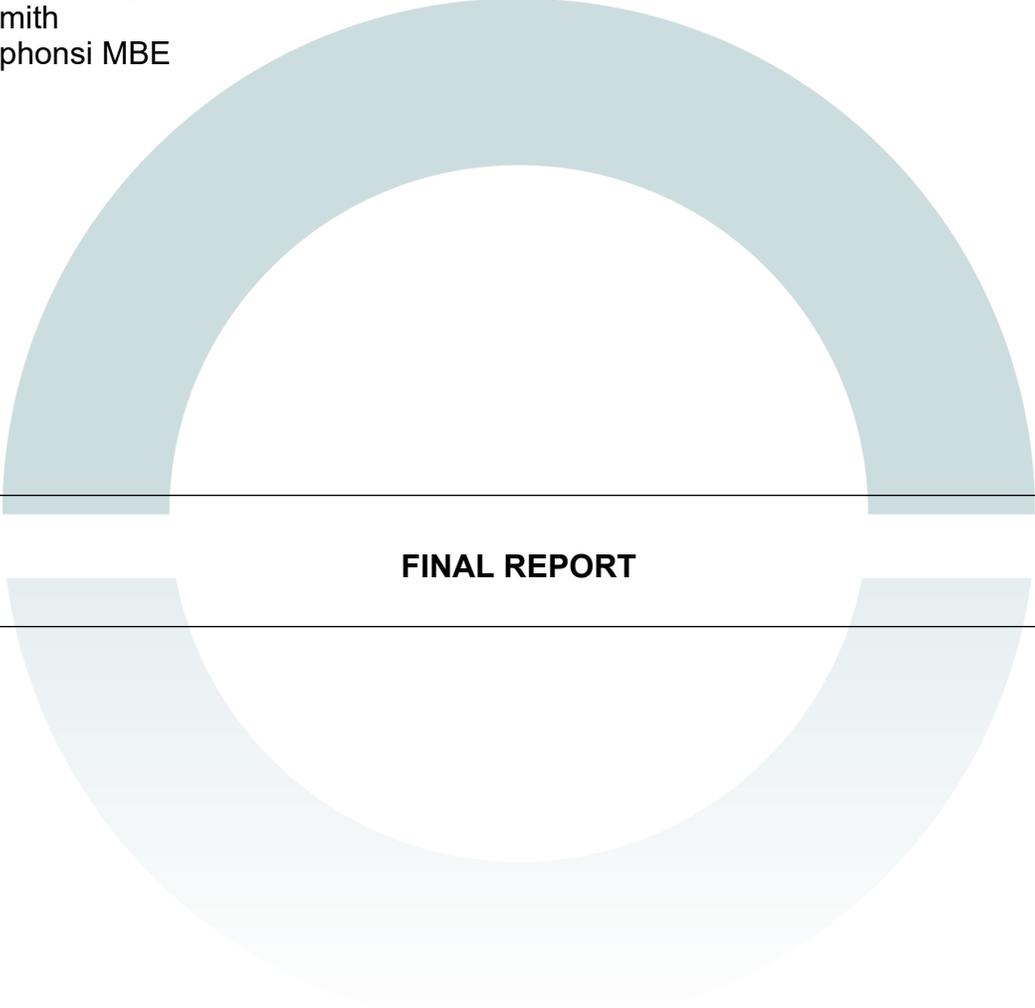
INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE WELSH RUGBY UNION

Review Panel:

Dame Anne Rafferty (Chair)

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FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. On 23 January 2023 BBC Wales Investigates reported “*allegations of bullying, sexism and sexual harassment that strike at the heart of Welsh Rugby*”. This included a failure to support rugby for women and girls, bullying and use of sexist, racist and homophobic language. The allegations sparked an outcry and over the following days the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) announced a review by a panel of three people according to published terms of reference.
2. The panel has heard from people in writing and in dozens of meetings, including current and former staff, players and directors. A clear pattern emerged to the evidence; we set that out below along with our recommendations, which the new leadership at the WRU should implement at pace.
3. Following this summary, the report sets out background, before reporting on four areas: (1) governance; (2) management of rugby for women and girls; (3) equality, diversity and inclusion; and (4) the WRU’s relationship with external stakeholders.
4. We make 36 recommendations, driven by the following principles. Governance should be efficient and inclusive. Representative and managerial roles should be separated so that the Board focusses on management and a reformed Council represents Welsh rugby (with a membership constituted on a wider basis than at present). Rugby for women and girls should have a higher level of investment according to clear strategies accepted across the organisation. The workplace culture should be professional, cohesive, kind and inclusive. The WRU needs to align itself more clearly in the public mind with its stated values.

Governance

The WRU Board was both frightened of what they had to do and unaware of what they had to do: If I ask the right question, I don’t know what to do with the answer. So, it’s much better not to ask the question.

5. This is how a former director of the WRU summed up the governance culture at the WRU for the period covered by this review. The Board was dysfunctional, ill-equipped and unable to address the serious institutional and cultural problems it faced.
6. The governance of the WRU long failed to put in place secure systems managed by those with appropriate skills to run a £100 million business. The WRU's governance undermined its efforts to fulfil and balance the roles and responsibilities of both a national sporting body and a large business. The Board has included significant numbers of Council members elected by club rugby but not representing or reflecting wider Welsh society. The Council has suffered the same flaw: representing the specific pool from which those elected were drawn. Further, the system of election meant few Board members were appointed for their skills following an open, competitive process. The outcome for the WRU fell short of good practice for selecting directors of a large and complex body. The system was neither broadly representative nor delivering efficient management.
7. Everyone we met told us the WRU's governance arrangements were not fit for purpose prior to the reforms voted through at the Extraordinary General Meeting ("EGM") on 26 March 2023. We were told that, at times, the executive ignored or side-lined the Board, the elected members felt cut off, there were references to a "board within a board", and the advice from the highly experienced non-executive directors was not heeded.
8. The March EGM reforms promise to improve governance. They might well not have been passed without the BBC Wales Investigates programme (as similar reforms failed in October 2022). In that way the BBC programme has already played a significant role in bringing about change. We propose further changes to governance arrangements.
9. We open this report with governance because failings of governance were a significant cause of the poor culture we found. With better governance, problems would have been identified earlier, resolved more quickly and effectively, and reduced overall.
10. The governance culture has been criticised as too political and it was perceived as such. This was inevitable when key positions on the Board are elected on personal platforms representing one group of stakeholders (i.e. community rugby). Ending the system of an

elected chair and reducing the number of elected directors should reduce the problem. Some told us strong characters had built up positions in the staff structure to levels they would not have secured in open appointment procedures. We heard suggestions of unexpected outcomes to several recruitment processes following internal lobbying. These concerns would be allayed by a move to a less political system where election played little role in governance or management.

11. We make recommendations for the reform of the Board and Council.

Culture

I don't know who to trust. I feel like I'm not being a 100% true to myself because there's things that I'd want to call out, address or bring up but I feel vulnerable because I don't trust people.

12. These are the words of one manager describing the stress of facing cultural issues they wanted to challenge but could not.
13. We were surprised at the number who had experienced great stress through working at the WRU. That might be expected for those directly involved in performance sport, but the experience was shared by many in management and administrative positions. It should be borne in mind that we were talking to people in 2023, a very difficult year for all staff. Nonetheless, we could not accept that the degree of stress was inevitable, let alone justifiable or productive. The broad nature and intensity of this experience and the accounts we have heard reveal an environment with elements of bullying and discrimination. We understand why people sometimes found this toxic, perhaps an overused term but apt here.
14. Board members told an external consultant in 2022, before the BBC programme, of their concerns about allegations of sexism and misogyny and of problems in the women's elite programme. The Board knew of stuttering progress towards inclusion within the WRU. The response to those problems prior to the broadcast was inadequate.

15. We set out in this report examples of discriminatory and exclusionary language reported to us, including sexist, racist and homophobic language experienced by some employees.
16. Too often the focus was on attempts to manage problems rather than resolve them. There was a lack of transparency, non-disclosure agreements (“NDAs”) were overused, and reports commissioned by the WRU went unpublished. Challenges were dealt with piecemeal. This organisational culture led to problems festering and the WRU not providing adequate or appropriate support to staff who needed it. Aspects of the culture were sexist, misogynistic, racist and homophobic and these were not properly challenged. This culture is one part of the treatment of women’s rugby.
17. For these reasons we recommend steps to make the workplace culture more inclusive and considerate.

Women’s and girls’ rugby

There was this tension of us being brought in because female fans were growing, there were more females wanting to play and I think the organisation had to tick a box in terms of we're committing to this and there are individuals internally that are super supportive, but this other side that weren't so supportive and didn't really understand why we were doing it.

18. Staff were employed to develop women’s and girls’ rugby but found hesitant support and significantly different attitudes dependent upon which manager was at the helm, forcing people to navigate unnecessary challenges and creating room for factions to develop. The team faced regular changes and a lack of support and communication. The WRU was told of these problems (for example in an open letter and in a report) but could not hear what was said.
19. The WRU tried to develop women’s and girls’ rugby, but the effort was unfocussed and inconsistent. Staff were appointed to roles developing rugby but the lack of an accepted strategic plan or co-ordinated support from managers left them unable to overcome the challenges. Some difficulties stemmed from a lack of acceptance of women’s rugby by

some senior managers. This caused stress for people trying to carry out their roles, and high staff turnover.

Breadth of the issues

It was really important that I actually made that point, that the men in the organisation that I work with, sexism is definitely not the way I would have ever described anything that I'd experienced. In fact quite the opposite, they were very supportive and treated me equally.

20. Many staff felt the BBC programme did not describe the organisation they worked for, that discriminatory behaviour was not widespread or that they had neither witnessed nor heard of it. We heard this from a number of employees, like the woman quoted above, who wanted to explain her experience of working positively with others at the WRU. We attach a letter from a director at Cardiff Rugby¹ which was very critical of the WRU's governance and culture but also read "*The WRU's dedicated and hardworking staff, most of whom are a credit to the game and work tirelessly to champion it ...*".
21. Some also pointed out how far society has come in recognising unacceptable behaviour and that like every other organisation the WRU reflects those changes. Some staff told us things were better now than years ago and many of the people involved had moved on.
22. This leads to some important points about what our conclusions do not mean. They do not mean that all – or even most – people have experienced bullying or discriminatory behaviour. Neither do they mean everyone, or even most people, behaved poorly. One employee told us how hard the days after the BBC broadcast were, as a male rugby playing WRU employee. The staff survey we conducted reflects their surprise at what was said about the WRU.
23. We recognise that complexity, but it is not the complete picture for three reasons. First, not everyone has to experience a problem for it to exist. A significant number did experience a toxic environment of the type we have described. Second, discussion with

¹ Letter Hayley Parsons OBE to WRU, appended below

staff who did not report problems often led them to identify some issues requiring cultural change, more often bullying and a failure to act on it but sometimes discrimination. Third, this evidence does not affect our conclusions about the governance culture which has resulted in the organisation too often falling into destructive approaches or failing to deal with poor behaviour.

The future

24. We have tried to look to the future. We have not shone a spotlight on individuals and, as we explain below, our Terms of Reference do not ask us to make findings of fact about individual allegations, those in the BBC programme or any others. This is not a report about individual misconduct or failings and, were it so perceived, the wider problems would be missed. It is a report about the governance, management and culture at the WRU.
25. Change is needed and action must be at pace. Another contributor stated: "*We're [now] in a better place but unless things rapidly or urgently change then people will be done with it*". The WRU is an iconic institution in Wales and has the strength to survive the current crisis and, over time, learn and prosper from it. Our proposals to change the culture and governance of the WRU are meant to support future success, for all the teams.
26. We asked the WRU if our recommendations are deliverable in practice (subject to votes from member clubs) and the WRU confirms that they are. Similarly, we asked them to confirm that the factual content of the report is accurate, and they did.

DIRECT ANSWERS TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The culture within the WRU

27. There were serious failings of governance and transparency throughout the period covered by this review. The result was an organisation unsure on its feet, allowing problems to develop and with a tendency to manage the problem rather than the underlying issue. Having allowed problems to develop the WRU could either neglect them or be too robust in dealing with them.

28. The governance system compromised the WRU in seeing cultural issues in its organisational structure or more broadly. The Board and executive had very limited diversity. The Board was given warnings but did not hear them or did not take effective action in response.
29. Throughout this period key appointments to the Board were by election on the basis of personal platforms. That is not a skills based system and creates a political context to governance.
30. Relations between staff were too political and the organisation too compartmentalised. There were no clear lines of accountability or supervision against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Consequently, staff were vulnerable to people who used force of personality to persevere with their own agenda or 'empire build'.
31. The work environment had elements of bullying and discrimination and was experienced as toxic by some employees. They found working at the WRU stressful, with a sense of powerlessness and even fear. A small number of people was widely perceived as challenging, which tipped into bullying in some departments at some times.
32. There were instances of discriminatory and exclusionary language. They often went unchallenged. We were told the more an employee was in an office-based role the less likely they were to hear such language.
33. External contributors told us they were not surprised at the content of the BBC Wales programme.
34. The women's game was not properly supported and developed. Significant change started with the November 2021 agreement to put in place contracts for some female players. Change then gained traction. We heard people referred to as a 'strong supporter of women's rugby' making clear that others were not. The context for these problems is a wider cultural attitude towards women's contact sport. Other unions have experienced problems in bringing about cultural change.

35. Finally, the WRU failed to express clear values or create an inclusive environment.

The actions and behaviour of leadership at all levels within the WRU

36. This requires a narrative answer which is below. In summary, the governance and management systems allowed the failings set out above to develop and then failed to remedy them, even when identified. The WRU did not set or demonstrate standards. It has not kept pace with its employees or its purpose. This can be seen at two levels: the unaddressed discriminatory language or bullying experienced by some staff and the friction between executives and the Board.

The extent to which employees feel able to voice concerns or to challenge inappropriate and discriminatory language and behaviour.

37. Most employees answering our survey were clear that they could bring grievances although some said the process was hard or they feared the consequences.

38. Conversely in written reports and in interviews we heard that complaining was difficult, particularly in relation to the conduct of some in senior positions and the uncertainty of how the grievance would be handled. Staff would say to each other that complaints would be bought off then silenced with an NDA. Guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission² (EHRC) endorses the view that NDAs can negatively affect the culture of the organisation using them. Beyond that, even where systems are in place, an inevitable consequence of the toxic culture is an inherent reluctance to raise issues.

39. Opportunities for feedback from members of the women's national team were too limited. There was turmoil in their support arrangements during the period of this review with too little, and frequently changing, support from the WRU. Coaches and managers came and went in quick succession. Some individuals rose to the challenge, and helped to keep the

² <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/guidance-confidentiality-agreements-in-discrimination-cases.pdf>

team together, but there should have been an organised process for listening to players and acting on issues. We recommend creation of such a process now.

The effectiveness of the WRU's whistleblowing policy and procedures.

40. The whistleblowing policy was too basic. It was unclear what would happen were a report made, other than the WRU considering it. However, in relation to the issues for this review the formal and informal lines of communication with managers and use of the grievance policy are more salient.

The WRU's actions in response to individual complaints set out in the BBC Wales programme of 23 January 2023.

41. As the problems initially emerged the WRU had taken steps at a superficial level appropriate. It arranged mediation, it held meetings to talk issues through, commissioned an external review of particular grievances and set up a review of women's rugby. Those actions did not lead to solutions to the immediate problems. They were never going to, given the extent of the underlying problem and the resources applied. Following the review of women's rugby some progress was made on the long-term problems, albeit without the wider engagement which would have driven cultural change.

OPENING

42. Rugby is Wales's national sport. The Welsh team has been a leading force amongst the Home Nations and in the wider world for well over a century. The WRU was a founder union of what is now World Rugby. The sport is closely tied into the sense of Welsh identity and Welsh society.

A. The crisis

43. For some years governance of the WRU has been at best suboptimal and at times dysfunctional and unable to address the serious institutional and cultural problems it faced. The structures gave a preponderant – almost absolute – control to the community

game, expressed through elected representatives. Attempts to modernise were controversial, partial and piecemeal.

44. Members of the Board did not accept each other's skills or the legitimacy of each other's position. At times it seems the executive did not operate to allow effective direction by the Board. Most Board members accept that a "them and us" atmosphere arose. This was demonstrated when a member of the Board asked Amanda Blanc, a fellow Board member and one of the UK's most senior female corporate executives³: "*What do you know about governance*"⁴.
45. The failure of the motion proposed at the October 2018 AGM to move from an elected to an independent and appointed Chair and the subsequent departure of the Chair and Chief Executive meant the WRU entered Covid in a difficult position⁵. The pandemic was hard on all team sports and participation has not returned to where it was in most nations including Wales.
46. The Board had failed to identify and implement an overall strategy. In particular, it fell behind other leading nations in the development of women's rugby at the national level. For example, professional contracts started to be offered in the 2010s, at first for 7s teams or for particular tournaments or on a part-time basis. Writing in 2018 The Guardian explained the history and gave its view that:
- It will not all be about cash – it will also be about will. Countries like Ireland, Australia and Wales have yet to show significant willing when it comes to matching their potential with the funding that would help to realise it.*⁶
47. Results deteriorated and there was a high turnover of key staff with coaches or managers leaving in 2016, 2017, 2020 and 2021, sometimes following a period of

³ Ms Blanc was an appointed non-executive director of the WRU and served from 1 January 2020 to 18 February 2022. She is currently chief executive of Aviva, a FTSE 100 company.

⁴ [BBC 12 March 2023](#)

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/65040223>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2018/sep/18/england-pro-contracts-change-womens-rugby-union-for-ever>

difficult relationships. The WRU in 2019 and from the start of 2021 was also managing grievances and involved in Employment Tribunal claims from staff alleging sex discrimination.

48. The WRU in response commissioned three reviews, covering the women's performance programme, equality, diversity and inclusion, and governance. Reports were received in July 2021, February 2022 and June 2022 respectively. All were highly critical. The subsequent attempts at change were uncertain, unclear, and faltering.
49. Many we spoke to experienced very high levels of stress and described significant parts of the working environment as "toxic", in the sense we have given above or in the sense of dysfunctional and causing unnecessary harm without apparent purpose or benefit, as well as discriminatory. Failures included governance, a lack of transparency and a desire to control. Unsurprisingly, and predictably, the crisis was in the women's national programme. The attitude to the women's game is plain from, for example, the limited access for women to the National Centre for Excellence until 2022, from limited engagement at Board level with the report into the women's game and from the question to Ms Blanc. There are other examples below.
50. During this period Amanda Blanc resigned as Chair of the Professional Game Board and from the WRU Board. She explained her resignation to the Board⁷, setting out her concerns about culture and governance. The women's performance review "verges on the insulting towards women" and had been redirected away from cultural issues, not published and little discussed. Only 3 of 8 members of the executive had even contributed to the review and "one can only imagine how this would be perceived nationally". Discussion of the proper disciplinary response to a Council member who made derogatory comments about women involved extensive expressions of concern that it was unfair to deprive him of too many complimentary game tickets. As well as those cultural issues she explained serious flaws in governance: lack of a skills matrix for the Board or of the skills needed on a properly appointed board, stalled progress

⁷ Ms Blanc's resignation letter and speech to the Board are appended

towards an independent Chair, absence of discussion of strategy, poor recruitment processes and filling senior roles by reshuffling staff rather than external recruitment.

51. This must have been painful to hear. It was delivered by someone with detailed knowledge of the subject, vast experience, and entirely committed to the success of the WRU.
52. Members of the executive team were also given a warning about the women's performance review by a non-executive director who explained "this sort of stuff is career limiting if you don't get ahead of it ... if you don't manage the agenda, it will manage you". When told the executive team was working on the recommendations, she asked what it was doing about managing the culture and preparing the wider community for how the issue would be perceived.
53. In the following year, 2022, there were external reports to the Board on equality, diversity and inclusion and on governance. In this way, action was taken in response to the concerns above but lacked urgency. By this point the difficulties in the women's national squads had already reached, and then passed, breaking point.
54. In this context of crisis the BBC TV programme was broadcast.

B. Forewarnings

55. The WRU had numerous warnings of the crisis which engulfed it. By mid-2022 it should have seen the serious problem it had not controlled or mitigated. It included both particular issues in women's rugby and general issues in the WRU. The warnings included:
 - The high rate of attrition from support, management and training staff on the women's programme, including loss of coaches or managers of the women's squad in 2016, 2017, 2020 and 2021. Employment Tribunal claims were brought by several women in 2021.
 - A letter in April 2021 from 121 people who had represented Wales, led by Tonia Antoniazzi MP raising concerns about its custodianship of the women's game.

- The report on women’s rugby in July 2021 which set out numerous failures to support the women’s game and made 40 recommendations.
- Amanda Blanc’s resignation in November 2021, particularly referring to the report into women’s rugby and the lack of skills on the Board to manage the issues.
- Further reports on inclusion (February 2022) and governance (July 2022). The headline of the governance report was that the Board was not fit for purpose. The detail raised issues about diversity on the Board, the lack of a value narrative and concerns from stakeholders about equality, diversity and inclusion. Individual directors reported to Value Alpha Limited ⁸ that they were aware of allegations of a culture of sexism and misogyny.
- The lack of progress on change. An example is the delay introducing women’s contracts.
- Articles in the press reporting alleged discrimination. A Daily Mail article in March 2022 reported that Wales rugby was ‘rocked’ by allegations which included a report from a senior female employee that ‘a colleague openly joked about wanting to rape her’ and ‘a culture of misogyny’. The report was amplified by The Telegraph in August 2022 under the headline “WRU faces claims of casual sexism and racism” referring to differential treatment of the men’s and women’s national teams.

C. The BBC Wales Investigates programme

56. On 23 January 2023 Wyre Davies reported “*allegations of bullying, sexism and sexual harassment that strike at the heart of Welsh Rugby*”. He explained that there was a review “*into the women’s game which the WRU kept under wraps*” and that “*there were warnings about how some women were treated*”. The allegations included “*how some inside the WRU had treated women*”. The programme featured Charlotte Wathan who was hired in 2018 “*to help transform the women’s game in Wales*” but “*quit after 4 years*” because of how she was treated. By early Spring 2021 she felt her mental health deteriorating and told the WRU she felt broken by her working experience and treatment. She considered

⁸ The external consultancy which conducted the governance report in July 2022.

the culture “*toxic*”. In April 2021 she brought a formal grievance followed by Employment Tribunal proceedings.

57. During her time at the WRU she considered there was “*an attitude that it was ok to make derogatory comments ... to make sexist/ sexual comments around women or about women*” explained away as banter. She said there were concerns that the women’s game was not taken seriously.
58. Ms Wathan was reported as finding worrying attitudes at the National Centre of Excellence, giving the example of someone referring to a drill as a “c*** drill”.
59. The BBC interviewed Marc Roberts. He said he had warned about what he had seen and heard in the organisation and that there was a lack of support for women. He had heard colleagues joking that someone could have experienced sexual abuse because he went to a private school. The most senior manager present later repeated the phrase.
60. In an online meeting in 2020 Ms Wathan reported that she heard a “senior manager” refer to a “P***”. Marc Roberts also heard this and explained that nothing was said in response. He objected and said it was unacceptable. The term was used again. Ms Wathan reported that the year before someone said they wanted to rape her. She said this was witnessed by a senior manager but there were no repercussions. Tonia Antoniazzi MP, herself a former player who took part in the review of the women’s game, said proper practice would have been for the conversation to be shut down immediately. The manager had said he recalled someone saying he wanted to visit Ms Wathan in her hotel room.
61. Ms Wathan explained she did not report the comments contemporaneously. She said she did not believe she would be listened to, or the comments dealt with. She also feared repercussion. Wyre Davies said the WRU called Ms Wathan’s allegations “*unsubstantiated following a thorough independent legal investigation*”.
62. A third employee spoke anonymously. It had been her dream to work for the WRU but she left in 2018 after 6 years also describing life inside the WRU as toxic. On the pitch

women were not equals and attitudes included the women's game being one for lesbians. She described constant undermining of her by a manager. She even considered suicide. HR advised her to make a grievance against the manager, but she left. She tried to bring Employment Tribunal proceedings but was threatened with an application for legal costs on the basis her claim was out of time and without basis.

63. Ms Antoniazzi said three people came to her with their individual perspectives and concerns about governance and how women were being treated. She positioned the problems at a level similar to the abuse allegations recently reported in gymnastics and to racial abuse in cricket. An external review into women's rugby had been set up but not published. Ms Antoniazzi was concerned at the lack of transparency. The BBC reported that just three of eight executives took part in the external review of women's rugby.
64. Finally, Wyre Davies reported on Ms Blanc's resignation speech. She had been asked if she had enough business experience for her role. She was "beyond disappointed" with the review of the women's game which bordered on the insulting. The Board had discussed an allegation of bullying of a female member of staff but spent most of the time on how to defend the man concerned. The WRU was "sitting on a ticking time bomb" in terms of diversity and inclusion.
65. The programme ended with Ms Wathan saying she hoped she had brought about transformational change.

D. Events after the BBC programme

66. The allegations in the programme were startling and the WRU found itself at the centre of a media storm. For too many the storm fell into the category of shocking but not surprising.
67. The day after broadcast, Steve Phillips, the WRU CEO, apologised for past failings:
"My reflections on the last 24 hours, probably just like everybody else in Wales, just a sense of being appalled with the contents of the programme and the allegations made. I have a general sense of being very sorry for how those individuals that worked for the WRU felt and a genuine sense of sorrow that we managed to seem to create a culture

between 2017 and 2019 where employees were not in a position or comfortable enough to approach the WRU and raise their concerns with us.

Could we have done things better? Probably and I think we can always be better but I think, I can't turn back the clock, but I would like to look forward and say we will take on board everything that's been said externally⁹."

68. That reflects a consistent theme in the response of WRU: admit serious failings.
69. The initial response was that that WRU would solve the problem itself. However, it was not remotely possible for that line to be maintained. Members of the Senedd – including the First Minister - expressed serious concerns¹⁰ and the Principality Building Society, a key sponsor, called for “*immediate and decisive*” action¹¹. Admiral, another sponsor, said its own culture was important to it and that “*naturally the cultures of the partners we work with are also important*”¹².
70. The reports in the BBC programme had a much wider resonance, as shown by the contribution of Rhian Bowen Davies, the Welsh Government’s first national adviser for violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence:
- “This is another example where misogyny and sexism is systemic and is a culture that tries to quieten individuals who suffer any kind of violence or violence at home.*
- We need to take definite steps to change this kind of culture. This culture exists in systems where men have ruled for decades¹³”*
71. *Welsh Women’s Aid issued a statement on the Welsh Rugby Union¹⁴:*

⁹ [Steve Phillips: Welsh Rugby Union boss says sorry but wants to stay at helm - BBC Sport](#)

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Rugby_Union

¹¹ [WRU boss Steve Phillips must go, says sexual violence adviser - BBC News](#)

¹² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-64377064>

¹³ [WRU boss Steve Phillips must go, says sexual violence adviser - BBC News](#)

¹⁴ [Statement on the Welsh Rugby Union : Welsh Women's Aid \(welshwomensaid.org.uk\)](#)

“While we note the Welsh Rugby Unions condemnation of the harassment that has come to light, it is swift reflection and dedicated reform that is needed. This must go beyond statements and gestures to robust and transparent actions that will tackle the systemic causes of this problem.”

72. We heard from some that the WRU’s intended response oscillated between a very assertive approach to the programme and the allegations in it (for example criticising the BBC or the people in the programme) or saying nothing. There were two criticisms of this. One, it reflected a record of over-assertive and controlling responses. The other was the uncertainty of how to respond. One sponsor felt that it had done more planning on how to respond to a crisis at the WRU than had the WRU itself. Tellingly, it had offered to help the WRU, using its work, but the WRU did not take it up. The BBC programme was broadcast almost 9 months after the Daily Mail article, so these allegations were not a surprise.

73. On 25th January the WRU announced an external task force¹⁵. It said rugby and the WRU needed to be as welcoming and inclusive as they could be.

74. On Thursday 26th January the BBC reported that Hayley Parsons¹⁶, a non-executive director at Cardiff Rugby and founder of the website GoCompare, had contacted Mr Evans and called for the chief executive and the Board to resign. Ms Parson’s correspondence was based on her own experience and made wider points, beyond the immediate reports in the BBC programme, calling on the WRU to:

“Take immediate and decisive action to address the issues raised in the programme, but also against a backdrop of a long-standing and deep-rooted culture of toxicity and bullying within the WRU.

¹⁵ [Welsh Rugby Union: Chair Ieuan Evans launches external taskforce review with Steve Phillips to stay - BBC Sport](#)

¹⁶ [Welsh Rugby Union responds after Cardiff director Hayley Parsons calls for board and chief executive to leave - BBC Sport](#)

In my role at Cardiff Rugby, I constantly witness and have to deal with the fallout of incompetence at the Welsh Rugby Union.”

I believe the board, in its current state, does not possess the expertise and experience to run the WRU, which is essentially a £100m company.

As a group of individuals, they are not fit for purpose, and the future of Welsh rugby requires people with the capability and experience to turn this urgent and dire situation around.

Many people have told me first-hand about the culture of bullying and manipulation within the WRU.¹⁷

75. By the end of the weekend - Sunday 29th January 2023 – the chief executive had resigned. Nigel Walker, who had been Performance Director, in charge of the elite squads, took over as Interim CEO, a position he still holds although a new CEO has been appointed and announced. The WRU awaits her release by her employer so she can take up the post (when Mr Walker will become Executive Director of Rugby).
76. It was soon clear people saw governance of the WRU as key in structuring outcomes. For example, on 30th January 2023 Huw Jones, former Sport Wales CEO, was reported as saying:
- “Most sporting governing bodies in Wales have evolved, they are more balanced, have outside expertise and are much more professional.*
- The WRU has not changed. The board is still dominated by elected district representatives from the clubs who will always have the ascendancy in voting and that's why nothing has changed¹⁸”*

¹⁷ [Welsh Rugby Union responds after Cardiff director Hayley Parsons calls for board and chief executive to leave - BBC Sport](#)

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-64454205>

77. A few days later Ieuan Evans and Nigel Walker appeared before a committee of the Senedd and continued the approach of accepting and apologising. Mr Evans said:
- “As a relatively new chair—a matter of weeks—I've been humbled and harrowed by what I've heard, particularly the impact on our female staff and players. I think we all know that we should do more, we need to do more to make the game and our organisation more inclusive, but I was shocked by the personal stories highlighted by our former staff in the programme, and I can only apologise once more to them, and not only them but people elsewhere affected by the allegations in that programme as well, and to say that I will work night and day to ensure that all of our staff feel safe and valued.”*
78. Mr Walker said:
- “To be candid, I think, as an organisation, we have been in denial as to the extent of the problem. So, there have been cases in the past that have been dealt with—in theory, dealt with, and people have moved on. I think each individual case is an indication that there has been a wider problem, but people have not joined the dots. When you see it presented over a 30-minute programme in the way that it was, unless you're going to bury your head in the sand for another six months or 12 months, you have to take action, and that's the position we're in. None of us are proud of the position we're in.”*
79. More specifically he explained that the WRU had commissioned a review into its management of the women's game (prior to his involvement) and his view on reading it was:
- “There are 40 recommendations in the review, and it was obvious that the Welsh Rugby Union had failed women's rugby.”*
80. The events on which we are reporting have affected past and present staff of the WRU, all aspects of rugby in Wales and the social and cultural position of the WRU as well as having commercial implications. Those who consider an open and inclusive culture optional should reflect on two incidents. Shortly after the BBC programme a senior member of WRU staff met a major sponsor. He delivered a full apology without

equivocation, recognising the damage to the sponsor whose reply was “This conversation can continue”. In other words, absent a satisfactory response from the WRU, the relationship would have ended. A senior manager at another corporate supporter had colleagues from a head office outside the UK demanding to know why they were involved with the WRU.

81. The WRU is right to see this as an existential crisis.

E. This Review

82. The review panel is made up of Dame Anne Rafferty, a former Court of Appeal judge, Quentin Smith a former Chair of Sale Sharks, former independent Chair of Premiership Rugby and Board member for the 2015 World Cup, also a solicitor and mediator, and Maggie Alphonsi MBE a former international rugby player, Board member of Saracens RFC and RFU Council member now a presenter and corporate adviser. Counsel to the panel is David Lawson, a barrister experienced in enquiries. The review is supported by Sport Resolutions, a well-known sports dispute resolution organisation and was assisted by two members of the Sport Resolutions panel with experience taking evidence, Mike Nally and Steve Pearce. The final member of the panel was appointed on 13 March 2023.

(i) The Terms of Reference

83. The terms of reference are to consider:

- The culture within the WRU
- The actions and behaviour of leadership at all levels within the WRU
- The extent to which employees feel able to voice concerns or to challenge inappropriate and discriminatory language and behaviour
- The effectiveness of the WRU’s Whistleblowing Policy and Procedures

- The WRU's actions in response to individual complaints set out in the BBC Wales Investigates programme of 23 January 2023.

84. These terms are focussed on the WRU as an organisation and as an employer. We are not asked to consider Welsh rugby or Welsh rugby clubs. Four of the five bullet points are expressly about the WRU and the fifth impliedly so (because it touches on WRU employees).

85. Neither are we asked to adjudicate on the incidents reported in the BBC programme or allocate blame. That would require a different report, focussing on the actions of individuals and would involve, for example, defining allegations and formal disclosure of documents. It would take a long time when there is clearly an appetite for change and an intention to undertake it.

(ii) Steps taken

86. At the outset, we noted that some of our work had been addressed in the three reports to which we have referred: Women's Performance Rugby Review (July 2021), Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report (February 2022) and Governance Report (July 2022). They were written by specialist external companies after consultation, document analysis and interviewing. The WRU had accepted their conclusions.

87. The reports identified many of the problems which were to overwhelm the WRU shortly after they were delivered. Actions were taken in response, albeit insufficient and lacking urgency. It was not likely the considerable issues revealed by the reports would or could be resolved within 18 months and they were not.

88. We saw no need to re-prove or materially revise the reports' conclusions. We have quoted from them at length because their conclusions have been accepted by the WRU's Board and we have recommended greater transparency.

89. We conducted our review in just over 7 months, carrying out the following steps:

- Interviewing well over 50 witnesses or groups of witnesses, generally for over an hour, some considerably longer, some twice. Interviewees included past and present players (amateur and professional), senior and junior staff and directors as well as people at professional and amateur clubs. We also received written contributions.
- We met a range of external stakeholders including sponsors and public bodies and people involved in representative politics.
- We opened the door to everyone involved in all aspects of the BBC programme, although not everyone walked through it.
- Obtaining documents from the WRU, including interviews it had conducted. These came in blocks on different dates and not in sequence or chronological order, which required us to revisit topics and to build up a picture of events incrementally. This added to the time it took to complete the review.
- Obtaining written contributions via an open email address, including anonymous contributions. (Overall, we received over 5,000 pages of documentary evidence plus numerous reports).
- Carrying out two surveys, one of staff and one about the experiences of female players.

90. We have not spoken to everyone involved in all the events and some people we asked to contribute did not. Some people who had worked at the WRU were too vulnerable to engage with us or simply did not want anything further to do with the WRU.

91. Three times we published notices of how to contribute. We contacted some people directly and others indirectly. We contacted people known to us, people named in documents and people suggested to us. We set up a way to receive anonymous submissions and continued the review for 7 months. The Terms of Reference are focussed on the WRU as an employer and all current staff were directly reminded through the questionnaire of their chance to help shape the future of Welsh rugby by contributing to the review.

F. Concerns from contributors

92. There were two striking and unusual aspects to this review.
93. The first was how many people had experienced great stress from their connection with the WRU. It is natural in any investigation to hear from people with concerns. However, we were surprised both by the number experiencing stress but also by the intensity and duration of their experience. It is reflected in Ms Parsons' letter, quoted above, and was central to the presentation in the BBC Wales programme. People told us of being burnt out, having anxiety, suffering mental health issues and seeing worse behaviour at the WRU than they had experienced elsewhere.
94. Second, an unusual number worried about the consequences were their identity revealed. Some were players concerned about team selection but the concern from the majority was that the WRU can be unforgiving, even vindictive. A number reported comments during disputes such as: "you'll never work in rugby again" – particularly challenging bearing in mind the importance of the WRU in Welsh society and economy and the commitment of staff to the WRU.
95. We used a variety of methods to help people make contributions, including anonymously, in writing and by using interviewers trained in taking sensitive evidence. We have set out conclusions in ways least likely to identify people. This is a report about governance, culture and systems at the WRU.

G. Bringing about change

96. Rugby has respected and celebrated values. It speaks for itself through those involved and its various organisations. The WRU embodies the spirit and values of rugby, as much a custodian as a governing body. It is expected to lead and to be an exemplar. This Review began because mistakes had been made and problems had occurred. Their origin and causes had to be established by us so that resolutions and remedies are supported by recommendations for conduct and management.

97. The WRU is at the top of the rugby pyramid in Wales, with responsibility for the community game and for all the national, representative squads. It has been, and still is, “the place to work” for many who want to contribute to the success of rugby and support its role in society. As the governing body, it oversees the community structure, member clubs, national teams, leagues and competitions.
98. The WRU must commit to changes, improvements and, like the sport itself, meet challenges with honesty and determination at all levels. There must also be changes bottom to top, grassroots to the Board and Council. Principally, that means change from those who control and deliver rugby in Wales - the WRU’s member clubs. The dedication and commitment is truly impressive and is provided, almost exclusively, on a volunteer basis by players and club administrators/officers. Those elected to positions often attend scores of meetings every year and might find it hard to hear the need for further change, but improving the governance of rugby, with experienced and skilled managers, is essential throughout the pyramid to develop, enhance and promote its status and importance at all levels of Welsh society. As a national sporting body, the WRU is required to take into account the interests of a wider group of stakeholders. The WRU is not just a large rugby club.
99. The Review heard evidence of ills similar to those within the WRU in clubs and committees – including poor management, committees lacking diversity and inclusivity, inadequate accountability, no or inadequate succession planning – which inhibited progress. The Terms of Reference preclude further comment.

H. The international situation

100. Other Rugby Unions have faced suggestions of failing to include women and girls in the sport, of other discrimination and of out-of-date governance structures. Other Rugby Unions have published reports on how to advance women’s rugby. We briefly note a few to put the issues at WRU in context.

(i) New Zealand

101. In April 2022 New Zealand rugby¹⁹ published “*Black Ferns cultural & environmental review*”. The report identifies negative experiences including:

- Culturally insensitive comments
- Poor communication and inconsistent feedback
- Allegations of favouritism and ghosting
- Body shaming issues for some players
- Lack of good recruitment, induction and ongoing support for both management and players.

102. The review sets out underlying problems with management structures, poor recruitment, training and welfare and lack of effective access to complaints processes. It recommended that key performance indicators should include well-being and culture as well as on field success and that “a speak up culture” needed to be created “where specific and timely feedback is valued...”. There had to be “sufficient mental health support available” and safe spaces for difficult conversations.

103. The review also noted that the team was female and culturally diverse, but management did not reflect the ethnic or gender background of the team. Many coaches and managers were appointed by a “tap on the shoulder” and did not have up-to-date job descriptions or regular performance reviews.

104. This has now been followed up by a report on governance in the New Zealand Rugby Union²⁰. This concludes that the governance of the New Zealand Rugby Union is not fit for purpose.

(ii) Ireland

105. In December 2022 the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) reported on how to support women in rugby and “make Irish Rugby a welcoming and inclusive environment for

¹⁹ The black ferns have won five of the seven rugby World Cup’s since women’s rugby was officially recognised by the New Zealand rugby football union in 1991.

²⁰ [NZRGovernance-Review-31-August-2023_web.pdf \(nzrugby.co.nz\)](#)

women, whether as players, coaches, referees, or volunteers”. The report was into how to develop women’s rugby, rather than in response to particular allegations.

106. The report explained the IRFU’s objective of a minimum 20% female delegates on the IRFU committee and the 40% target from Sport Ireland. The IRFU was already spending €5.5m on women’s rugby and would need to increase this by €2.4m to meet the goals in the report.

107. The report recommended a zero tolerance of discrimination and work to help clubs involve women and girls. Over half of survey respondents felt female players did not have adequate access to coaches.

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GOVERNANCE

109. A good system of governance allows people running an organisation to make changes but requires them to follow procedures and to consult key stakeholders. We heard of challenges to governance in the WRU. Its structure is laid out in the Articles of Association of the company and many changes require a 75% majority at a shareholders’ meeting to amend the Articles. The shareholders are the individual clubs. We describe below how this slowed changes that the majority involved in management and governance of the WRU thought essential - most notably, appointment of a skills-based Board. Further, the system of governance – based on election by individual clubs - makes it harder to engage a wider group and to expand representation. Whilst experience is valuable, long-term tenure of key positions often compromises, even stifles, essential change. A former Board member told us of a visit to a club where the two people running it were proud of their combined total of in excess of 50 years in charge. Another perception repeated to us was that those on club and WRU committees valued highly the prestige and privileges attached.

110. The distinction between shareholders and stakeholders is well-known in governance. Shareholders of a national sporting body such as the WRU need to recognise the wider social obligations for that body to consult and involve stakeholders generally. We recommend a reformed role and constitution of the Council to encourage this.

A. The context for governance

111. The Welsh Rugby Union is organised as a company. It runs a large business with hundreds of employees and significant real estate assets. It is also a national sporting body. For these reasons we set out some principles drawn from codes on corporate good governance as well as governance in sport.

112. The UK Corporate Governance Code was published in July 2018 by the Financial Reporting Council²¹. It applies to companies listed on the London stock exchange. Although it does not apply to the WRU, it is useful as a foundation of good practice for governance in large organisations. Its introduction explains that integrity, openness and diversity are required, and companies must build and maintain successful relationships with a wide range of stakeholders based on respect, trust and mutual benefit.

113. This starts with Board leadership:

A. A successful company is led by an effective and entrepreneurial board, whose role is to promote the long-term sustainable success of the company, generating value for shareholders and contributing to wider society.

B. The board should establish the company's purpose, values and strategy, and satisfy itself that these and its culture are aligned. All directors must act with integrity, lead by example and promote the desired culture.

...

E. The board should ensure that workforce policies and practices are consistent with the company's values and support its long-term sustainable success. The workforce should be able to raise any matters of concern.

²¹ https://media.frc.org.uk/documents/UK_Corporate_Governance_Code_2018.pdf

J. Appointments to the board should be subject to a formal, rigorous and transparent procedure, and an effective succession plan should be maintained for board and senior management. Both appointments and succession plans should be based on merit and objective criteria and, within this context, should promote diversity of gender, social and ethnic backgrounds, cognitive and personal strengths.

114. Specific guidance on governance in sport has been available to the WRU from Sport Wales; its “*Governance and Leadership Framework for Wales: Building on the Success*”²² is designed for all organisations in the sports sector in Wales, including national governing bodies as well as small social businesses. It quotes other national sporting bodies throughout. It recommends:

- *For diversity and inclusion*
 - *Actively promote and monitor equality and diversity, championing activities which are accessible and available to all;*
 - *Establish and share strong values in the organisation which include inclusivity and diversity;*
 - *Champion diversity on the board for portfolio responsibility, proactively advocating the importance of diversity and equality and mentoring programmes;*
 - *Evidence progress against equality and safeguarding standards.*
- *In the list of many personal behaviours are:*
 - *Demonstrate the organisation’s values in what you say and how you act;*
 - *Don’t spend too much time on detail;*
 - *Don’t be defensive to people who disagree with you;*
 - *Show interest in the background and skills of colleagues on the board.*
- *For board membership*
 - *The Board should represent the community it serves;*
 - *Have clear role descriptions and divisions of responsibility for key positions;*
 - *Have a standardised induction process signed by each board member on completion;*

²² <https://www.sport.wales/files/0a26509a4b1cbd61460824c823653507.pdf>

- *Provide all board members with ongoing training and development;*
 - *Have formal annual reviews of all board members;*
 - *Complete a skills matrix for the board;*
 - *Establish a clear strategy which places the participant at its heart and is clearly defined, understood and resourced.*
- *Undertake an annual organisational review as part of continuous improvement and delivery;*
 - *Have appropriate open and transparent recruitment practices for new board members;*
 - *Undertake proactive succession planning;*
 - *Have an appropriately sized board with external knowledge and experience. This is usually 8–12 people with at least 25% non-executive directors²³.*

115. The WRU system does not reflect this guidance. Clearly it has not had a skills-based Board appointed by a transparent process. A key route to the Board has been election, to some extent on personal platforms and after campaigning. The Board has also not offered diversity and generally comprised older, white-British men. At one time there were three women on the Board (Liza Burgess, Catherine Read and Amanda Blanc). The number fell back to one, Catherine Read. This does not represent the Welsh community demographically. Further, the Board's composition has not, hitherto, offered diversity of experience or outlook.

116. The recruitment, induction process, training and ongoing development have been underdeveloped as have reviews of performance, appraisals and skills analysis. The Board has not been effective in establishing a strategy, superintending its progress and providing leadership to the executive. It has not communicated values or actively promoted or monitored equality and diversity and it was unable to show evidence of progress against equality and safeguarding standards.

²³ We also noted the guidance from Sport England "A Code for Sports Governance" which sets out the importance of governance, diversity and "engaging effectively with stakeholders and nurturing internal democracy"

117. Our conclusions are uncompromisingly echoed in the Value Alpha Limited's report on governance.

B. Modernisation 2012 – 2018

118. The WRU has been working to modernise its governance for many years. In 2012 a governance review was chaired by Sir Robert Owen, a High Court Judge. In October 2014 the AGM voted for a series of changes to governance which included a term limit on the Board of 12 years. The Board then had 18 members, 17 elected (14 from the nine districts and 3 national representatives) and the CEO. It was decided to add two non-executive directors. It became a 20-person Board with only 2 members chosen for professional skills, rather than their ability to represent Welsh rugby and in particular the community game.

119. Gareth Davies was elected Chair in 2014 with a modernising agenda to make the Board more efficient and more diverse.

120. The first non-executive directors, Aileen Richards and Tim Griffin, were brought onto the Board. Ms Richards was the first woman to join. She had a 30-year career with Mars, one of the largest privately owned businesses in the world, ending as executive vice president. Mr Griffin was the Chief Executive of Dell UK. Gareth Davies was quoted as saying:

“The appointment of Aileen as the first woman to sit on the board of the WRU demonstrates that we are determined to modernise and become representative of our supporters in our corporate governance²⁴”

121. A few years later (in 2019) Liza Burgess, an ex-national captain, joined the Board as the first elected woman.

122. At the AGM in October 2018 the WRU members voted (by a little over 80% of the vote) to reduce the Board from 20 to 12. It then comprised:

²⁴ <https://www.wru.wales/2015/04/two-global-executives-join-wru-board/>

- The Group CEO. This person was appointed after a competitive recruitment process
- Three appointed independent directors, including the chair of the Professional Game Board, appointed after a competitive recruitment process
- The chair of the Community Game Board
- Seven Council members, 5 district council and 2 national council members, all elected.

123. Mr Davies was explicit that this was part of his modernising agenda²⁵:

“The governance changes will improve the WRU and provide a governance structure that is modern and fit for purpose.

These changes will also enable us to better improve diversity within our governance, better representing the interests of everyone involved in our game.”

124. This was an improvement on a 20-person Board which was most likely to have been more of a consultative than a management body. Even this, relatively uncontroversial, change took 18 months to get through and involved road shows round Wales but still only received just 5% over the 75% vote required i.e. there was notable opposition.

125. However, even at this point two-thirds of the positions on the Board were still held by people elected and therefore appointed without assessment of their skills²⁶. Before and after these changes the system for choosing the Board was by election rather than by appointing people for their skills. The necessary result of appointments without regard to skills was a Board variously described as:

“Incompetent and I mean that in the polite version, they did not have the competencies usually to be on the Board and the system would not allow change...”

“people of integrity who didn’t always know what good looked like”

“There was a lack of diversity of thought as well, and no diversity of skill sets, causing ... a real concern around an appreciation of good governance and experience of what good governance should look like.”

²⁵ [Welsh Rugby Union: Rob Butcher to step down as chair and leave board - BBC Sport](#)

²⁶ [Welsh Rugby Union plans to reduce board directors approved - BBC Sport](#)

126. We were told the causes of the lack of understanding were cultural and structural. The WRU was told of the dangers it was facing and a more diverse leadership group would have recognised and heeded those warnings.
127. We have listened carefully to the points in response. We were told the executive did not facilitate oversight by the Board, so members were hindered in offering the advice and support that they could. Many elected Board members felt their perspective was not recognised as valid and, on occasion, they felt 'pushed around'. All directors were committed to rugby, and to the WRU. The WRU is owned by the clubs. People on club and WRU committees have put in years of hard work to maintain community rugby.
128. From now on the role of all Board members must be accepted. We recommend additional training and support and greater clarity about the role of the Board and of the Council. This should make interaction easier. Additionally, an open and inclusive environment should be of universal benefit, including to directors who felt excluded.
129. In future, wider recruitment, appropriate training and support for all directors, and a reformed Council can provide the available and necessary skills for the WRU to operate all aspects of its business.

C. Governance Report, July 2022

130. In March 2022 the WRU commissioned Value Alpha to report on the Board's effectiveness. The report was commissioned under the leadership of an elected chair (Rob Butcher) and shows an awareness from the Board, including elected members, that the system was not working.
131. Value Alpha concluded in stark terms:
"The Board was failing. Board composition was weak, behaviours inside the boardroom were not strong, and key areas of governance process scored poorly. The Board was found to be not fit for purpose."

132. Criticisms included:

- The Board had too little diversity and did not reflect Welsh society.
- The route to membership of the Board was a block on strengthening Board composition.
- The skillset of the Board was inadequate for running the organisation.
- The Board and executive did not communicate between meetings and there was an imbalance in where influence lay.
- The Board did not lead strategy and there was no roadmap or holistic view of stakeholders.
- There was no good system to measure progress and no performance dashboard.
- There was no strategy and value narrative.
- Culture was poor in the sense of a lack of accountability and no consideration of consequences.
- Some Board members felt the executive did not give them the information they needed.
- There were only 4 scheduled board meetings per year, and this resulted in ad hoc meetings with little structure or strategy.

133. We have set these out as bullet points, but they merit careful digestion. Members of the Board did not set strategy or measure performance. They lacked the information they needed, lacked direction and did not meet often enough to be effective. The structure hindered progress.

134. Value Alpha made a startling comment on concerns from some stakeholders:

“There was a general level of concern around issues such as EDI, the women’s game, girls’ rugby, match-day experience, an employment tribunal, evening Six Nations fixtures, ticket prices, culture, diverse memberships; there was a need to see progress, and the pace had been too slow; they expected the WRU to be more proactive in the media...”

135. Again, we see the WRU had clear warnings of the problems it was to face in January 2023. Value Alpha sent a self-evaluation questionnaire to Board members and key stakeholders. Answers were on a scale of 1 to 7, seven the highest score. For twelve areas in relation to ‘focussing on critical issues’ the score was a 2 and in five other areas a 3. Questions included protecting the organisation’s reputation. For ten areas on working as a team, three of the scores were a 2 and the other seven a 3. A critical perceived failing of the Board was its relationship with the executive. Another was communicating a narrative to stakeholders and setting strategy. The Board was advised of a history of inaction (giving the example of the response to the women’s performance review) and of secrecy (giving the example of keeping the Professional Rugby Board at arm’s length).
136. Value Alpha identified significant overrepresentation of club and community game interests and no formal representation of the professional game. There was a dearth of representation from women, people from diverse communities, people with disabilities, and younger people.
137. Board practice was substandard. There was too much reliance on non-executive directors and in some areas a lack of respect for club members. Board meetings were rushed and inconsequential. There was no strategy for engagement, attendance or participation and no holistic view of stakeholders, players, spectators or diversity.
138. On any basis this is excoriating. Unsurprisingly problems of this depth had not been solved by the time our review started. We still heard of concerns about emphasis on some Board members over others, late circulation of papers and ‘a board within a board’. We heard the same concerns about skill sets, inaction and lack of strategy.
139. It is relevant that stakeholders considered the WRU a strategic asset to Welsh society and that it “*does amazing things in the community*” and “*doesn’t sing loudly enough about the good stuff they do*”. However, they also reported too slow a pace of change and that the WRU “*has put us in a difficult situation ... we stand for fairness and equality in society – does the WRU?*”.

140. What we have set out clearly shows the WRU having notice of the problems which were to throw it into crisis. One sentence in the report to the Board was “*Transparency is both inevitable and unavoidable – if the governance doesn’t deliver accountability, it will become a tsunami*”.
141. The Value Alpha report led to a Governance Review Board paper in September 2022 which noted “*these reviews were endorsed unanimously by the Board on 20 June 2022 and the recommendations ... subsequently fully endorsed...*”.
142. That Board paper proposed an EGM in early 2023 – a plan based on the view expressed as “*the Board was not fit for purpose and needs to modernise quickly*”. The paper suggested a greater role for professional aspects of the game, ending dual roles within the governance structure and moving to one-club-one-vote in all decision-making processes.

D. Attempts at reform after Value Alpha

143. In October 2022, at the AGM, an attempt at further governance reforms was only partially successful²⁷. It was agreed that future voting would be on the basis of one member/club one vote, that any member of the Council would be eligible to be chair of the Community Game Board and would be a director. However, the AGM did not adopt proposals to allow an additional director to be appointed (and then to become Chair, rather than an elected Chair). The resolution received a majority of the votes (66%) but not the 75% special majority required for changes to the Articles of Association.
144. The WRU pushed ahead with further attempts at reform, a decision made prior to the BBC Wales programme. On 1st January 2023 Ieuan Evans was quoted by the BBC: “[Rob Butcher tried] *to bring new skill sets onto the WRU board, while maintaining links to the community game and allowing the board the option to appoint a chair ... I intend*

²⁷ <https://www.wru.wales/2022/10/wru-agm-voting-results/>

to pick up exactly where Rob left off in these ambitions ... we will also encourage our members to take further steps towards improving diversity throughout our governance structure.²⁸ ”

145. There was an EGM on 26th March 2023. By this point the WRU was at the centre of national media interest. The BBC covered not just the EGM but the build-up, in a story titled “*Battle for Welsh rugby’s heart and soul*”:

“Rugby is a different animal to when the WRU was founded by 11 clubs 142 years ago. There is a clear divide between the professional game and the community game, though one simply cannot exist without the other.

However, the debate is now over who runs – or should run – the game in Wales.

...

Nigel Walker and chair Ieuan Evans have spent the last month travelling across Wales to explain their proposals to clubs in a bid to drum up support.

However, we have been here before and predecessors in their positions have quit after failing.²⁹ ”

146. The BBC cited the ousting of Gareth Davies and Martyn Phillips, then Chair and CEO respectively, following the 2018 reforms set out above and the resignation of Rob Butcher following the October 2022 vote.

E. The March 2023 Reforms

147. At the March 2023 EGM the further reforms were passed overwhelmingly, with 97.2% of those voting in favour. Clubs were asked to focus on a single special resolution amending the Articles of Association so that a 12-person Board would comprise:

- An independent Chair and appointed Chief Executive, both by competitive process.

²⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/64082094#:~:text=%22I%20have%20huge%20respect%20for,left%20off%20in%20these%20ambitions.>

²⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/65040223#:~:text=Walker%20and%20chair%20Ieuan%20Evans,bid%20to%20drum%20up%20support>

- Four members elected by the WRU Council (to which members are elected by the nine districts or nationally). In other words, four elected members rather than the previous eight.
- Four appointed independent non-executive directors, an increase from three.
- The Chair of the Professional Rugby Board.
- A person to advance the women's game.

148. The candidate brief for independent non-executive director issued in March 2023 following the EGM, reads:

... that the skillset of Board Directors should be made more diverse through increasing the proportion of Independents. The WRU Board will still comprise 12 individuals, but the new structure is designed to ensure a greater diversity of business skills, mindset, gender and cultural representation, and all other protected characteristics – ensuring it is truly representative of all of Welsh rugby. The stated ambition of the existing Board is that the new Board should include at least five women.

149. An important amendment to the Articles of Association should inform future appointments. Article 46 now reads:

In making appointments and elections to the Board, the Board will take into consideration the interests of under-represented groups and the value of diversity at Board level, in particular taking appropriate action to promote any aspirational diversity targets adopted by the Board of Directors from time to time.

F. Next steps

150. We asked to attend a Board meeting and were invited to the first part of that on 21 June 2023. The executive staff was present but are not members of the Board and said little other than when asked for information or clarification. We were told Board papers were not sent out long enough before the meeting to leave sufficient time for preparatory reading which resulted in complaints, questions and allegations of a “board within a board”. The Board was not invited to go through the CEO's report methodically. There

were verbal reports from two independent non-executive directors and a financial paper was presented by one of them rather than by a professional finance member of staff. Even taking into account the likely unease created by having observers, little amounted to a structured discussion by a Board to progress its business on a collaborative basis with collective responsibility (although a director did call attention to some key risks and sought to advise and guide). We have taken this into account in recommending reforms to the administration of the Board (some might have been made by now).

151. The system left control of the organisation exclusively with the community game i.e. those in leadership roles at clubs with votes. The Council had too much power in how the WRU was run. The reforms which made it through the 26 March 2023 EGM should lead to a more skills-based Board. Had that not happened it would be our first and loudest recommendation.
152. We were struck by how difficult it could be, for the interested reader, to understand the effect of how the WRU's governance and committees are arranged. The degree of overlap or duplication is puzzling, for example the Council and the Community Game Board are largely the same body, meeting to carry out similar functions, at least as far as community rugby is concerned. We underline later in this report the essential nature of transparency, and one interpretation of that word is the importance of clarity. If the reader cannot easily follow what is in place and why, that suggests a deficiency.
153. We realise that much change is in the air and much is yet to come, but we also realise that some changes are more potent if allowed to bed down. Thus, we simply highlight that an eye might profitably be turned to simplifying the structure, for example to the number of committees in place or the role of the President. Sometimes structures are left in place and amended when reforms are made rather than a new system being put in place. The result can be over-engineered.
154. The Board needs to move to the highest standards of corporate governance. This is a key reason for having an independent Chair with a business or administrative

background. The Value Alpha report points the way. We emphasise the need to improve communication between departments and between the Board and the executive, to have a written strategy for the business, separately from sporting strategies, and to have KPIs for the executive and regular reviews for all Board members (adjusted for their role).

155. The Council should be developed to bring in a wider range of experience for those involved in Welsh rugby. There should be representatives for rugby for people with disabilities, school rugby, college and university rugby, community players and women's and girls' rugby.

MANAGEMENT OF WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RUGBY

156. There are two issues: the particular problems which led to the BBC programme and a longer-term problem about the WRU's commitment to supporting women's rugby.

A. Challenging context

157. Women's rugby has been through a period of rapid transition. We still heard about the effects of men's rugby turning professional, which was almost 30 years ago. The change to regional teams was still a live issue for many and that was 20 years ago. Women's rugby had particular challenges, all the harder for the WRU given its difficulties with governance over the same period. The underlying challenges in developing women's rugby include:

- A cultural attitude that contact sports in general and rugby in particular were "men's sports".
- The failure to recognise the growth of women's and girls' rugby and invest in it early. Other nations thus moved ahead.
- The resultant lack of a team structure in Wales. Women qualifying for Wales tend to play in England, making training, support and communication between the team more difficult.

- A national body which neglected women's and girls' rugby might have appeared yet more neglectful because of flawed governance, lack of strategy and poor accountability and reporting lines.

158. That context provided fertile ground for problems to take root, making jobs to develop women's and girls' rugby more challenging. Some felt there was an absence of real belief in the programme, combined with a lack of experience and expertise and that aspects of what was done were 'tick boxes' or set up to fail. People naturally felt stress as they struggled to show those attitudes were wrong.

B. The problems experienced in women's national rugby

159. The crisis broke out in the women's performance programme. The BBC Wales Investigates programme opened on the experiences of a manager of women's rugby. Many of the reports referred to a toxic and abusive environment but they also related to the organisation of the women's game by the WRU.

160. Problems could be seen in three ways: grievances, the high turnover of support staff and results. The pandemic added to this mix by radically reducing people's contact with each other when good communication was essential were the WRU to meet the challenges facing women's rugby. It added intense financial pressures to issues for the WRU (through a very significant, additional, debt to fund activities whilst its income fell away).

161. There has been a high attrition rate in management and coaching staff at the WRU. We draw the following from publicly available sources³⁰. In September 2014 Caroline Spanton was appointed national manager of Welsh women's rugby. In 2016 Rowland Phillips joined as coach for the Wales women's team. Ms Spanton left in 2017 and Ms Wathan joined in 2018. In early 2019 Geraint John who had been Head of Performance Rugby became Community Director swapping roles with Ryan Jones. Women's rugby

³⁰ Mainly the WRU and BBC websites

sat in the community sector so responsibility for it changed at that point. In March 2020 Rowland Phillips left. In November 2020 Warren Abrahams was appointed head coach. In July 2021 he left. In October 2021 Ioan Cunningham was appointed coach for the Wales women's team.

162. Recruitment and exits take considerable time and effort. Departures may come over time or be sudden, often reflecting underlying tensions. The changes represented many months of instability across just 10 years. The BBC programme recorded that Ms Wathan had brought a grievance by April 2021. She left the WRU as general manager of women's rugby in February 2022. By April 2022 the BBC website had reported "*accusations of sexism and misogyny have emerged from a former WRU employee...*". In December 2022 the BBC reported that Ms Wathan and the WRU had reached an "*amicable resolution*"³¹.
163. Certainly, results suggested all was not well. Wales were 6th in the Six Nations (i.e. bottom of the table) on three occasions between 2018 and 2021, which led to online abuse, with an impact on health and well-being. That was just after a period in which the men's team had several championship-winning seasons.
164. Matters came to a head in 2021 when Wales had a very difficult Six Nations. WalesOnline explained:
- "Wales were amateur and many balanced rugby alongside full-time jobs, their coaching staff came and went through what seemed like a revolving door, and the gap between them and the likes of England and France was just growing and growing. That tournament saw Wales lose 53-0 to France, unsurprising given Les Bleuses were semi-professional at the time, but then Wales lost 45-0 at home to fellow amateurs Ireland, a side they really should have been competing against"*³²

³¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/63958545>

³² <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/sport/rugby/rugby-news/details-wrus-sealed-review-welsh-27134829>

165. A public letter was sent to the WRU on 14 April 2021 by 121 leading figures in women's rugby, led by Tonia Antoniazzi MP. It read:

“As former Welsh women's players we are writing to you, the WRU and executive, as the custodians of our national sport ...

The inaction of the WRU in providing a performance pathway for women and girls continues to negatively affect the national team's performance ... You have failed to provide a route for our female players through any elite level, our top players are encouraged to play outside of Wales, and our only women's team on an international stage is not winning The WRU has yet to publish a strategy for long-term development of female rugby players or defined pathways for the game.”

C. Responses from the WRU

166. The WRU took steps in response which included meetings with the CEO, a two-day workshop with senior staff, a mediation between some key people and commissioning a report on women's rugby. When people brought grievances the WRU asked for outside reports on them. Good ideas but there was no overall strategy for dealing with the various issues which were connected, not straightforward to resolve and seemed intractable. These were serious risks that needed assessment and co-ordinated action.

167. We also heard that over some time boundaries were broken, proper recruitment processes for staff not always followed and factions developed.

168. More specifically, the difficulties with the WRU's responses to the problems were:

1. Some aspects of the response were incomplete. Managers and human resources staff should have investigated more thoroughly concerns known to be serious. There should have been a proper analysis of the fractured working relationships between staff, with people doubting and challenging their colleagues and being doubted and challenged in return. It was not always clear who was handling these difficult issues. The final problem emerged very quickly and was not referred to more senior managers fast enough.

2. The overall approach was piecemeal, but these problems were embedded and needed steady and consistent action. A combination of poor governance, poor organisational culture and the history of faltering and uneven support for women's rugby meant the situation was not amenable to simple solutions.
3. Some of these responses were more about improving things for the future than saving the current situation. For example, the women's performance review and external investigations of grievances were not attempts to solve the crisis.

169. The WRU has been quoted as saying that grievances referred to in newspaper articles were "not upheld". This is a partial but not conclusive answer to the complaints:

1. The WRU's view of the grievances was affected by points which made the headlines. Those involved in the justice system will recognise that particular, keenly contested, allegations can become the focus between the parties, obscuring underlying issues. Some headline events were rejected in the WRU's investigations. However, one part of the overarching complaint was surely a failure to support women's rugby, something the WRU's report on the women's game had accepted.
2. The investigations also accepted some instances of dismissive and difficult behaviour and a lack of clarity over who was responsible for managing the concerns expressed about that.
3. Other complaints were rejected but in ways which acknowledged difficulties (even if not considered discriminatory). For example, one grievance said another employee had resigned for similar reasons. That was rejected, but it is accepted that this person found the working environment difficult.
4. In several cases it was considered there was a lack of evidence, precluding firm conclusions.

5. Some findings were tortuous, for example the double negative in “*I could not find this was without sound reason*”. This was taken to mean that there was a sound reason but that is not what it says.

6. Several staff left at the same time because of the working environment.

170. The problems could no longer be contained and addressed with usual and familiar approaches because of (i) the scale of the challenges facing Welsh women’s rugby, which includes negative attitudes towards women’s rugby and the failure to invest early, set out above; (ii) the lack of an accepted strategy for how to tackle those problems, which arose because of weak and contradictory management; and (iii) the absence of a collegiate management group which put sufficient value on co-operation, collective responsibility and shared problem solving. In other words, the culture and governance of the WRU were unable to deal with the challenges.

171. An important example was the delay in introducing women’s professional contracts which led members of the women’s national squad, and support staff, to lose faith in the organisation. Simply, they were promised things which never happened. One of the delays was caused by disagreements over how many contracts to issue and for which players, arising either from confusion or politics (and an absence of transparency) between senior managers. Poor management of the situation with conflicting messages was a contributor to the problems.

D. Women’s Performance Rugby Review, July 2021

172. From about 2018 the Board and senior executives knew there was a problem in the women’s national squad. At least one Board member had players and support staff asking directly for advice. Another was involved in trying to support mediation. Senior executives attended meetings with the support team to try to resolve the problems but without authoritative positions on the issues.

173. There was disagreement about the origin of the Women's performance review. Some felt it should focus on "rugby matters", others that it had been intended to deal with structure and culture. It was suggested that there were attempts to limit the review so as to 'manage the problem'.
174. The opening of the Report was clear and critical:
"The headline finding from the review is that investment, support and development of the WRU women's performance game is sorely lacking and is a strategic, operational, financial, commercial, political, social and reputational risk to the WRU. Change is needed, investment is needed, patience is needed, and results will eventually come but only if the WRU acts now to take advantage of this excellent opportunity to build long-term success."
175. The 74-page report gave red, amber, green (RAG) ratings in twenty areas and found red ("Need help") in fifteen and amber ("Working on it") in five. Notably, leadership, strategic plan and management structure were all red. The report stated *"there is little evidence ... that the WRU is fully committed to the women's game"*.
176. Descriptions of the culture from people who spoke to that review included *"damaged, unprofessional and toxic"*. The report recorded *"several individuals refer to their own or others mental health and well-being being adversely affected by the current situation"*. This is echoed in our surprise at the number who experienced great stress through their relationship with the WRU.
177. The authors commented that the response rate *"may well be an indicative factor"* in terms of the WRU's approach to women's rugby. Only 45% of Board members, 27% of Council members and 38% of executive staff responded to the questionnaires circulated.
178. Professional contracts had not been brought in despite being promised for at least four years.

179. There was no evidence of challenge from the Board to potential conflict between the general community strategy and the women's strategy and no focus on finding commercial partners for the women's national team.
180. There was no progress on implementing key parts of the strategy. There were "*inordinately high levels of staff turnover*" in the women's programme, visible to the public, to investors and to partners, and a reluctance to change had prevented implementation of the plan. The Board had "*in recent years ... failed in its responsibility*" for the women's performance strategy. This had not been identified to, or by, the Board as a risk.
181. Medical support (such as physiotherapy) was "*adequate*" but less than expected at national level. Access to psychology support was essential. Specialist skills training was required (in scrums, throwing and kicking) along with greater access to strength and conditioning training.
182. Of great concern was the lack of access to facilities. Squad members reported not being allowed to use the men's gym or waiting until the men finished training. An example of the attitude to the women's team being reinforced lies in a member of the men's performance staff describing the women's team as "*a sore on the arse*" without challenge from a senior executive. In fact, the review gave examples of the same attitudes at Board level. For example, a presentation about preparation for the men's World Cup had no equivalent for the women's World Cup. A former senior executive referred to the women's game as an "*adaptation*" of rugby.
183. There were some positives. One was that recent appointments to the Board suggested "*that scrutiny will be more thorough than previously*". The report referred to a perception of a power struggle within the executive and a "*breakdown of relations between coaching, sport science and management staff*". This raised further questions about personnel management.

E. Response to the Women's Performance Review

184. The WRU states 38 of the 40 recommendations of the Women's Performance Review have been completed or are in course. The WRU's defence to the accusation of failing women's rugby would be the partial one that the low point was the Six Nations competition in 2021 and that the Women's performance review in summer 2021 started a process of change, with the executive appointing a range of support staff and gradually turning around the atmosphere.

185. Our discussions show substantial progress in 2022 and 2023 but also that there is further to go:

- Professional contracts

In November 2021 the WRU finally decided to offer professional contracts to the women's team. From January 2022 there were professional contracts for 24 female players, 12 full time and 12 part time. From June 2023 there were 22 players on full-time contracts, 2 development contracts and two dual contracts with Great Britain 7s. This has now reached 31 full-time contracts. Under 20 and under 18 teams have been established.

- Environment

The WRU says the women's national squad now has full access, with the men's squad, to the National Centre of Excellence and decision-making about its use.

Player development centres are being established in east, west and north Wales to provide coaching, physiotherapy and strength and conditioning training for players aged 17 to 24.

- Commercial

Vodafone was established as the first sponsor of the women's game in Wales. There was additional support from Macron for kit provision and a commercial partnership with

WUKA (a manufacturer of period proof underwear).

- Staffing

WRU says a full coaching and support staff has been recruited and is available daily to the senior women's squad. The leadership and support team has grown to include a head coach, a team manager, two skills coaches, two strength and conditioning coaches, two physiotherapists, two analysts, a nutritionist, a team doctor and a psychologist.

- Competition

The Celtic Challenge has been created for teams from Wales, Scotland and Ireland and started with one team each in the 2022/2023 season and will be increased to two teams per country in the 2023/2024 season.

- Cohesion

A senior playing group was established with regular meetings with the coaching team. The performance director regularly attends training and matches.

186. Change is now at pace. One criticism in the governance report was that the Women's Performance Review had not been acted on which indicated a failure to listen and respond to criticism. The WRU is now hearing the concerns of the women's team and staff.

F. Investment

187. This has been transformed. Women's and girls' rugby was previously under the community department of the WRU and the expenditure on women's rugby came from the ring-fenced community budget. It was very limited and not particularly directed at the national team or creating a player development pathway. We heard that within the last 10 years clubs would have budgets of just a few hundred pounds a year to run a

women's team. Very little WRU funding came to community clubs for having a women's team.

188. The WRU says expenditure on the women's senior team in the financial year 2024 is budgeted at £2.8m with an additional pathway spend of £659,000.

189. The growth in expenditure should be a basis for significant improvements in support for female players. However, other unions are making significant investments, so competitors are also moving forward. The Scottish Rugby Union announced 28 professional contracts in December 2022³³ and the Irish Rugby Football Union is already spending €5.5m (about £4.7m) and has committed an additional €1 million³⁴.

190. We have recommended that the WRU benchmark its expenditure against other unions and ensures salaries on contracts are a reasonable alternative to other employment.

G. Where to play

191. The WRU has gone to considerable lengths to ensure male players qualified for the Wales team play in Wales. This includes funding for the regions to allow them to contract players eligible to play for Wales and a limit on selection for the national team for players who play outside Wales until they have 25 caps. There is no similar system for the Wales women's team. Consequently, many play in clubs in England, such as Exeter, Saracens, Bristol and Gloucester Harbury.

192. Advantages to playing in a home country include easy access to training sessions, playing more regularly with teammates and support services (e.g. physiotherapy). However, there is no equivalent to the United Rugby Championship in which women could play now. We heard suggestions for how to improve this situation, for example monthly games in Wales, whilst players remained otherwise attached to club or country

³³ <https://scottishrugby.org/scottish-rugby-announces-28-professional-womens-contracts/>

³⁴ <https://www.irishrugby.ie/2022/12/08/independent-review-sets-a-positive-pathway-for-womens-rugby-in-ireland/>

or having a team from Wales in the Allianz Premiership Women's Rugby club competition, currently the English domestic league³⁵. Further consideration is outside our Terms of Reference.

H. The current position & next steps

193. The situation is generally better than it was. There is more investment, better access to elite training facilities and a more defined development pathway is being put in place and resourced.
194. Contracts had been discussed for at least 4 years. Nigel Walker was appointed performance director from September 2021 and says he immediately noticed the scepticism of everyone involved in women's rugby about whether there would ever be progress. He made a point of delivering contracts as soon as he could. People noticed the clarity and the alignment of action and speech. This started to rebuild trust.
195. There is still occasional difficulty about access to facilities at the National Centre of Excellence and women continue to hear that men should take precedence. There remains some offensive language relating to race, sex and sexuality. For these reasons we recommend a manager with responsibility for the culture at the National Centre of Excellence.
196. There is a lack of publicity about women's and girls' rugby. Again, this has improved from near invisibility but there is further to go, such as visibility in stadia and training centres, increased social media activity, telling players' stories and documenting activity and progress.
197. The creation of hubs to support the women's pathway is incomplete. This should be concluded (or a similar system introduced to support emerging players).

³⁵ Obviously this would require agreement from the RFU; we simply set out for readers some thoughts of those involved in Welsh rugby. We were also told that this was investigated in 2021 and there was no agreement to include a team from Wales.

198. Women's rugby needs its own voice within the WRU. People told us Nigel Walker provided this as performance director. There was concern that pushing for changes in women's rugby could be career limiting. Trust is still cautious, although much improved compared to 2021. This will be a key consideration for the new director with responsibility for women's rugby. Following the EGM in March 2023, Article 43(d) of the Articles of Association now provides for:

one Director with the ability to support and/or further the women's Game and/or with experience of playing, coaching or otherwise participating in the women's Game, who shall be appointed by the Board of Directors from time to time.

199. Disagreements in the women's game became unmanageable in part due to lack of clarity about managerial responsibilities and strategy. Warnings to directors did not translate into action, even though the directors knew of allegations of misogyny. People are still unsure about the management and reporting structure. Proper managerial accountability for the women's game should be secured by the incoming new director.

200. Their other role is defining a strategy for supporting and developing women's rugby, sharing it with the team and staff and ensuring it is accepted by the management. We heard people are still unsure what the strategy is. A women's rugby strategy was approved by the Board in December 2018 for implementation from January 2019. However, there was still consultation on key elements in November 2019. Although the situation is much improved from the period 2019 – 2021 it is not clear what the next 5/10 years will look like. The strategy must deal with the route to the next cycle of contracts. Players must be able to plan leaving and returning to their non-rugby careers, families and club commitments. At a time of inflation, the real value of salaries needs careful monitoring. The initial number of contracts (12) was also an issue and even the increase to 24 was barely enough to maintain a team of 15 professionals. The 31 current contracts is about the minimum (given injuries and replacements). The number of contracts also raises a duty of care issue, as the risk of injury is more significant if players do not have training and support equivalent to that of their competitors.

201. There is a long way to go in the development of women's professional rugby, across all unions, but slow progress cannot be accepted. Women's and girls' rugby is growing fast and efforts should be made to ensure progress is maintained and Wales improves its position relative to other unions.

EMPLOYMENT AND EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

202. In 2008 the WRU had about 140 staff. Over the following 10 years this grew to about 400. At the start of that period the WRU had a largely functional HR role focussed on payroll and basic policies. The approach became more professional. Some pay analysis was done, alongside introduction of more objective recruitment procedures.

203. HR has for much of the recent period been part of the legal function. We heard this led to good compliance but a legal attitude to employment issues, rather than problem solving and support.

204. In September 2021 a new People Director was employed. She reports to the CEO. This is an important additional resource which should be a basis to develop the workplace culture.

205. This is a third area (along with governance and women's rugby) where the WRU has commissioned an external report. Again, it was critical and implementation of its recommendations is incomplete.

A. Context on equality, diversity & inclusion

206. The Financial Reporting Council published "*Board Diversity and Effectiveness in FTSE 350 companies*" in 2021³⁶. The executive summary explained:

³⁶ Written by SQW and the London Business School Leadership Institute

“What scholars have found, however, is other important benefits to demographic diversity, and other performance indicators. More diverse boards appear consistently to have the ability to consider a greater range of solutions and provide access to broader social capital and resources such as increased firm reputation, greater corporate social responsibility, higher innovation levels, and other performance indicators. More diverse boards appear consistently to have the ability to consider a greater range of solutions and provide access to broader social capital and resources...³⁷”

207. McKinsey & Company reported on diversity in 2015, 2018 and 2020. Its report “*Diversity Wins*” concluded:

“Our latest report shows not only that the business case remains robust but also that the relationship between diversity on the executive team and the likelihood of financial outperformance has strengthened over time.³⁸”

208. This mix of the benefits of diversity was identified in the Review of EDI conducted by Plan4Sport and Inside Inclusion in February 2022 (see below). It included fulfilling everyone’s potential, increasing participation on and off the pitch, attracting and retaining the best talent, avoiding “*groupthink*” and meeting legal and regulatory obligations.

B. Context for workplace culture

209. Defining culture is difficult, as is measuring or analysing it. One useful definition of organisational culture is:

“The norms and values that determine the behaviour of those who work within an organisation. These norms result from complex processes of emulation and reinforcement, sometimes unconscious, by each employee of their colleagues’ behaviour...³⁹”

³⁷ <https://www.london.edu/-/media/images/leadership-institute-refresh/frc-board-diversity-and-effectiveness-in-ftse-350-companies.pdf>

³⁸ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters#>

³⁹ Culture Shock: Creating a Changemaking Culture in Local Government, Adam Lent and Jessica Studdert <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Culture-Shock.pdf>

210. The Governance Institute produced a report in 2018 Organisational Culture in Sport⁴⁰ which advises:

- The onus is on the board to set the tone from the top and determine and monitor the culture and values of the organisation. Board members should try to experience the culture of the organisation.
- Culture is under-discussed at board level and thinking is focussed by crises. There is a place for culture on the risk register.
- Board composition is vital and it needs to be clear that roles are fitted to skills. Elections do not always produce the best candidates and can lead to cliques. Leadership should reflect the diversity of the community served.
- Dominant personalities are a risk – they can drive change but they can intimidate, subdue and have an air of impunity. This might arise from people with ‘reputation as a participant’, i.e. former players.
- Openness and transparency are key to accountability. There is a particular role for stakeholders.
- Diversity allows the organisation to call on a wider range of lived experience and offer potential for growth in under-represented ‘markets’.
- Poorly designed Key Performance Indicators have a negative effect on behaviour.
- Accepting a duty of care to participants is part of the organisation’s responsibility to people.

211. We note the link with governance and organisational behaviour. Also, the reference to dominant personalities is a risk for many organisations. We have already set out that staff were vulnerable to this.

C. Equality, diversity & inclusion Report, February 2022

212. This report, by Plan4Sport and Inside Inclusion, opens with a clear statement of the meaning and value of inclusion:

⁴⁰ <https://www.cgi.org.uk/assets/files/policy/research/Organisational-culture-in-sport.pdf>

“Central to this is the importance of developing long-term strategies where difference is not just acknowledged but valued, where everyone has equal access to opportunities, and where no one experiences barriers to participation because of their identity or perceptions about their identity.”

213. The report found that *“every group consulted pointed to a lack of leadership on EDI by the WRU and that this must be addressed urgently”*. This applies both internally and externally and:

“Internally, poor employment practices, a lack of an EDI Strategy and Delivery Plan, team of experts, failure to mainstream EDI in all areas of the business and a lack of data are significant risks to the WRU from a legal, financial and reputational perspective.”

214. The report identified four strategic priorities:

- Lead by example with *“visible, vocal and transparent leadership on EDI”*.
- Good governance: corporate processes should embed EDI and be based on data.
- Build confidence and capacity both internally and externally and within clubs and regions.
- Engage and collaborate – ensure the WRU is vocal, demonstrating a clear advocacy and working with clubs to build a shared sense of purpose.

215. Staff had limited EDI training and policies needed to be updated and applied consistently.

216. The report recommended an executive director for EDI and an EDI advisory group made up of external stakeholders. The WRU *“could consider building an EDI framework into existing club development accreditation programmes”*.

D. The WRU position In response

217. In April 2022, two months after the EDI report, the BBC reported on an Employment Tribunal against the WRU, stating it included *“accusations of sexism and misogyny”*.

The WRU refused to comment on the particular allegations but said:

“We are on an EDI journey ... that’s been ongoing since like 2020. We have had various board training sessions, consultation with staff, we have an executive board sponsor who is Nigel Walker⁴¹.”

218. Again, the WRU accepted that progress on embedding EDI was insufficient.

219. As with governance some changes were underway prior to the BBC Wales programme of January 2023. An EDI manager was recruited in June 2022 (a significant step which, along with the post of People Director, should give the WRU the resource to follow the recommendations in the EDI report and in our report). A new dedicated EDI section has been created on the WRU intranet.

220. On 1 February 2023, shortly after the BBC Wales programme, the Chair wrote to the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport in the Welsh Government setting out steps the WRU had taken prior to the BBC Wales programme to advance its EDI provision. It is difficult for the WRU to say the allegations in the programme were a shock given the earlier press statement acknowledging the WRU’s EDI journey and that the press had started covering the issues months earlier. The changes identified included:

- Appointing a new People Director in September 2021. The role is broader and more strategic than a traditional personnel manager. Previously this role sat with legal services which would tend towards a compliance-based approach to personnel rather than to planning and building teams. The People Director reports to the CEO.
- Training for all staff and board members on EDI.
- Creating an anonymous, external, whistleblowing line.
- Carrying out a staff survey in September 2022.
- Offering all staff the opportunity to participate in EDI focus groups in August 2022.
- Creating a senior leadership group to improve cross department communication.

⁴¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/61126215>

221. Following the BBC Wales programme, the WRU took steps to get in touch with employees. One was establishing a “Have a Voice Project”, a programme in which 119 employees took part in 20 groups of facilitated restorative conversations. Themes which emerged included “Trust, A sense of purpose, Honesty, Inclusion and Support”. It also started regular calls amongst the senior leadership group to help break down silos between departments.

E. Equality and Human Rights Commission

222. As the national equality regulator responsible for enforcing the Equality Act 2010, the EHRC’s duties (as set out in the Equality Act 2006) include reducing inequality, eliminating discrimination, and promoting and protecting human rights.

223. The EHRC has a range of enforcement powers, also set out in the Equality Act 2006, which include: investigating “suspected” breaches of equality legislation (s.20 Equality Act 2006) or, instead, entering into “Agreements” (s.23 Equality Act 2006) where an organisation voluntarily agrees not to commit specific unlawful acts and enters into an action plan setting out how it will develop its practice to prevent future unlawful acts.

224. The 2023/24 EHRC business plan includes the following work stream:

5B - Work with sporting organisations and specific service providers to promote respect for others and prevent prejudice.

225. We make clear that our recommendations should not be seen as standing in the way of the EHRC fulfilling its statutory role and any difference of view should be resolved in favour of the EHRC’s. We cannot and do not purport to limit what is required to give effect to the law or to work with the EHRC.

F. Employment policies and their operation

226. Several of the WRU policies in place at the time of the BBC Wales programme were from 2019, including the Harassment and Bullying, the Disciplinary and the Grievance

policies. We were told they had been reviewed in 2022 but it seems the “*detailed review and redrafting of [some] policies*” recommended in the EDI Review had not happened.

227. The whistleblowing policy in place prior to the BBC Wales programme was basic. It repeated the legal obligations for a system to report malpractice such as criminal activity, breach of legal regulations, endangering health or safety, environmental damage or an attempt to conceal those.
228. The phraseology of the policy tended to discourage disclosures. Disclosures had first to be made to the head of legal affairs or the human resources department. Second, any subsequent action depended on the view taken by that person, so it was possible nothing would happen. Third, whilst the whistleblowing policy stated employees are protected from adverse consequences, that paragraph ends suggesting an employee can be liable to pay compensation: “*Both we, as employer, and the person taking detrimental action, can be liable where an individual has disclosed malpractice and is then penalised in some way for doing so. If you penalise a colleague, you may have to pay compensation personally*”. That is confusing, without context.
229. Rather than further reviewing the text of the policies we are concerned about how they operated. Some staff felt there was a clear system for bringing grievances, set out in the staff handbook and known to everyone. They also told us they experienced an inclusive environment, “*respectful and supportive*”. The people who reported this work on the administrative side of the WRU, as opposed to performance, and generally recognised that the culture on the administrative side might be more supportive.
230. The staff survey (below) shows most staff know about the policies and believe they could use them. However, the qualitative data is that at times, in respect of some people or issues, the grievance system could not be operated.
231. We heard of a “*strong fear culture*” particularly around some at a senior level or that only “*strong*” staff would be able to use complaint mechanisms. This was also reflected in

our survey where we read that bullying was not sufficiently challenged. The WRU did take some steps to investigate this type of concern. Exit interviews were held and followed up. Meetings were held with staff who were leaving, and concerns were sometimes escalated. In at least one case, team members were asked about the approach of their manager (whom they said was tough but not providing a basis for further action).

232. However, the references to some managers being intimidating are sufficiently common that we accept it did occur. We heard an observation by a third party of someone *“belittling people in front of other people. And that seemed to be systemic, almost aggressively talking to people rather than pulling them aside and having a quiet chat”*. A low number of people were identified where *“I can’t believe what wasn’t managed. I can’t believe nobody had that difficult conversation to tell that person”* to stop. We asked someone if they had seen bullying: *“well, I would say hostility and aggression”*.

233. As with the issues in women’s rugby conventional approaches (in this case exit interviews and follow up) did not identify and solve the problem. We have recommended reverse mentoring, 360-degree appraisals and assessing inclusive collegiate management style in appraisals of managers as ways of responding.

G. Staff survey

234. We circulated a staff survey to all employees of the WRU with three aims. One was to make sure as many as possible had the chance to contribute. We included opportunities for written comments on most questions and reminded people how to submit evidence. Second, to identify the extent to which people had suffered racist, sexist, misogynistic or homophobic behaviour, per our terms of reference. Third, to listen to the staff about what ought to change.

235. We considered inviting some of the staff who gave their name to expand on their comments. On balance, we did not. We had several times asked people to contribute,

using online invitations and in the survey itself. We thought it better to respect people's decision about how they wanted to contribute.

236. Eighty-five people replied. Of these, twenty-nine were women, six preferred not to give their sex and fifty were men. There were people from a range of ethnic groups and with different sexualities, which we don't specify because the numbers were small, and we are careful not to give information which might identify someone.
237. Only eleven had not watched the BBC Wales Investigates programme. Almost sixty out of the eighty-five responders who had were surprised by the contents. Some felt the reality more complex than presented stating, for example, that not all those said to have behaved poorly were male, so it was inaccurate to portray the issues as particularly relating to sexist behaviour. Similarly, some said the issues concerned disputes amongst individual senior staff, not the tenor of the wider workplace. Prior to broadcast twelve responders considered the WRU had serious issues.
238. Before asking about mistreatment relating to sex, sexuality or race and ethnicity we sought opinions on the WRU as an employer, looking for some general impression of its culture, management and personnel services overall. Nine thought the WRU was not a good employer and eighteen that it was similar to other employers, with some strengths and some weaknesses. The rest thought it was good. There were general concerns such as pay and conditions, and the lack of appropriate performance management (i.e. positive feedback for those contributing and follow up for those not). People with these concerns pointed out that national sports bodies paid less than private companies and they felt training and career progress at the WRU could be better organised. Several mentioned a male dominated culture or the need for more training in EDI issues and for more transparency. Staff who considered the WRU a good employer commended benefits, work-life balance, friendliness and an atmosphere supportive of family responsibilities. They felt valued and included. Some felt the WRU was a good employer but still said significant change was needed. Their rationale was generally that

their previous employers had greater problems, i.e. the WRU was a better employer than others but still needed to improve.

239. Six people felt how they were treated by the WRU was influenced by their sex, sexuality or race/ethnicity. Generally, the treatment identified might be termed 'casual' or 'everyday sexism', such as assuming the woman at a meeting would make the tea. However, the answers went beyond 'everyday' discrimination in several instances.

240. Staff plainly thought carefully before completing the form. For example, only two of the six who said they had been subject to treatment on account of their sex, sexuality or race/ ethnicity considered the WRU a bad employer. The others considered the difficulties were – belatedly – being reduced or were driven from outside the organisation or were occasional/ one off.

241. Ten responders had experienced comments on their sex, sexuality and racial or ethnic group and which made them uncomfortable. There was not a complete crossover with those who experienced adverse treatment, and the total, taking both groups, was 12 out of 85, 14% of those who responded. At least 5 of the reports related to issues in the community. Points included being told not to go on work trips, comments dismissed as 'what a woman would say' and being watched doing physical things because of being a woman.

242. Twelve considered other staff had been treated differently on account of their sex, sexuality or race/ethnicity. One was positive, receiving additional support. Three referred to external issues (related bodies such as clubs) and at least two to past events.

243. Nineteen had heard comments in the course of their work which made them uncomfortable. Eight cited individual events or were specific: the comments were very rare or one-off. Several said they were quickly closed down. The comments covered the range of protected characteristics in this review as well as disability.

244. Staff were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how easy it was to raise concerns with the WRU. Only eight chose 1 or 2 (relatively difficult) and sixty chose 4 or 5. Complaints had been made by nineteen individuals, eight of whom thought the process easy. A large majority of the complaints was some years ago.
245. Nineteen responses said the community game was affected by sex, sexuality or race/ ethnicity. All of those answers related to sex, such as the dominance of men in the game, the lack of facilities for women and the absence of women at a representative level. Quite a number said the game had moved a long way fast but had started as extremely male dominated.
246. Twenty-one felt club and community rugby was less open to people based on their sex, sexuality or race/ ethnicity. Responses pointed out the game was run by white men, and some felt the culture had been sexist, homophobic and racist in the past. Those who said club and community rugby was not affected by those factors often had the same starting point but saw progress as more advanced and rugby now much more inclusive. Support for further work on inclusion was very widespread, fifty-three contributors asserting more could be done to improve inclusion, partly on the basis that more can always be done but also because the journey is continuous and important.
247. Some asked why we included questions about the community game. Our purpose was to understand the WRU's role in leading the community game and how the culture of the WRU affects and is affected by the wider game. Our Terms of Reference do not require a separate review of the community game, so we address only its relation to the WRU. We asked whether opportunities in the senior squads were affected by race/ethnicity, sex or sexuality. Eight people said yes, referring to the relative lack of development of the women's elite pathway and the historical lack of support for women's rugby.
248. Many individual submissions were useful and thoughtful. We have not quoted from them because individual answers were confidential. We have of course considered

those responses along with answers to closed questions (and we agree with those who pointed out that some questions aren't easily answered directly).

249. We draw these conclusions:

1. The number of staff subjected to treatment or comments relating to protected characteristics, or who have seen or heard that treatment or those comments, is too high. Some reports were of one-off events, and some were from some time ago, others more recent and more challenging.
2. These difficulties have particularly affected women. Five of the six who experienced adverse treatment and eight of the ten who experienced inappropriate comments were women. 27% of people who answered the survey and stated they were women had experienced an adverse environment at work at some point (as above some events were one off or some time ago). Again, this is too high.
3. We heard one instance of racial discrimination, which we do not explain so as to respect anonymity, but it was concerning, since it affected how the person could do their job or involved more sustained comments.
4. A number feel bullying has not been challenged and making complaints is too difficult. The concerns about dominant characters are echoed in our detailed interviews.
5. However most staff were clear that the four paragraphs above are not descriptive of the WRU day to day, for three reasons. First, they said most reported misconduct was some time ago. We are cautious about this because if you ask people about a wide period of time most events identified will probably not be recent. However, it seems clear that over the last few years staff have felt there is engagement with EDI and culture is improving. Second, many events were driven by people outside the WRU, albeit in connected areas, such as rugby clubs. Third, events tended to be sporadic and not part of people's daily working life.

250. Finally, the WRU carried out its own staff survey in September 2022. 89% of respondents were proud to work for the WRU. The greatest concerns were that people worked in silos and that recognition and reward were not fairly distributed. There were notable concerns about lack of open communication and of clear strategy.

H. Discriminatory language & actions

251. Many were concerned about the gendered nature of the organisation and use of discriminatory language.

252. People told us of a significant difference in culture at the Stadium compared to the Vale (the National Centre of Excellence). The latter was much less formal, with more bad language and sexual innuendo and a lot of teasing.

253. Board membership comes with a range of gender-based benefits. We heard of the importance attached to the WRU blazer (given to Board and Council members) and the confusion when the system had no ready equivalent for women on the Board. Prior to many matches the Board has a social event with Board members from the opposing team. We were told that men and women used to dine separately. Surprisingly there was some disagreement about when this ended. Some said they were not aware of any instances in at least 10 years, others said there were several instances more recently. Either way, the corporate culture revealed is strikingly unusual. These are work social events for the Boards of companies. If Board members socialised together, and their partners socialised together - and each group had always been entirely male or entirely female – that would have been at the least a sort of coincidental segregation. Organising things this way risks making inclusion more difficult, not only when a woman joins the Board but if a Board member were in a same sex relationship:

“It's this culture of the prestige ... Whether that's the freebies in terms of the dinners, the tickets, the away games, the home games, the clothes. It's very different, because it hasn't changed for decades and it's been so male dominated between the men and the women.”

254. We heard reports of language and actions which were discriminatory or derogatory towards women:

- Gossip claiming a female manager had ‘slept her way’ to her job.

- Asking a woman whom she was meeting if she came to work in clothing fitting traditional views of being attractive.
- The greeting 'hello sugar-tits' (we are aware of its use on a popular TV programme but it is inappropriate for work and affects the environment).
- Comments about the (asserted) sexual behaviour of particular female colleagues.
- Asking a FTSE 100 executive what she knew about governance.
- A Council member posting a message stating that women are inferior to men.
- Sending email 'jokes' to staff which are misogynistic.
- Asking women if men or women are better at sport.

255. Most people felt the issues were greater in the community, for example expecting women to make the tea, not treating their contributions seriously, winking or staring at them while they did physical tasks.

256. Similarly, we heard about homophobic language and actions. For example:

- We heard there was often chatter about the sexuality of the women's team. There was a feeling amongst women involved in rugby that they had 'grown up with this' – it was an attitude they had always been subject to.
- Saying to a woman going to see her boyfriend 'at least you play for the right team'.
- Use of slurs about women in same sex relationships.

257. The WRU accepts that a member of staff did use the P-word in a meeting – as reported on the BBC Wales programme - and that the response at the time was not appropriate. This was serious and a straightforwardly abusive term which has never been acceptable. It needed an uncompromising zero tolerance approach, which must always include informing human resources⁴². We had several other examples of completely unacceptable language but have not given them so that people are not identified.

⁴² We understand that after the BBC programme an investigation was undertaken, the person was interviewed and disciplined.

258. A Council member posted sexist and misogynist comments online. A disciplinary process was followed, leading to sanctions. There was controversy about the sanctions and much debate about any loss of ticketing privileges. Later, when his election to the Board became a possibility, some people felt obliged to intervene. They were concerned that they were doing so as individuals, rather than the WRU dealing with the situation.
259. One particular example of a failed interaction shows the issues in practice. At a teambuilding session between the community and performance teams in April 2022, during normal working hours, some turned up having done no preparation and (it was at an external venue) drank alcohol. One member of staff said a woman in the team had left because of the behaviour of some staff. Some people put up pictures of members of staff with dogs and referred to their 'bitches'. We asked a member of the executive team about this. He was incredulous and angry and confirmed that such behaviour was not part of working in sport or an example of being relaxed and unconventional. It was unprofessional, wrong and should not have happened.
260. The above examples show cultural failings in the WRU. However, the positive is that some staff were content with how the WRU had responded and this number has increased significantly over time.
261. Too often the WRU was not acting on a values-based narrative, starting at the top. We recommend a fit and proper person test for candidates for the Board. There should be an expectation that Board members lead by example. Clearly further work is required to ensure these values are effectively communicated to all involved in the WRU.

I. Steps to imbed equality, diversity & inclusion

262. There is now a brief introductory training on EDI for new staff members. Gradually the WRU has been rolling this out for current employees. It should become a regular programme.

263. We have advised that EDI training is built in at director level so it can be embedded throughout the organisation.
264. A new EDI strategy was approved by the Board in February 2023. An EDI delivery plan was due to go to the Board in September 2023. One component will be improved data collection. The delay in having these policies and plans drawn up and approved shows the challenge WRU has experienced with the 'EDI journey' it referred to in response to the BBC report in April 2022.
265. The WRU reports an increase in disciplinary and grievance proceedings in the most recent 12 months. It suggests this shows a greater trust in bringing concerns to the organisation. That can sound counter-intuitive to those not involved in personnel management, but we have heard this before and heard in this review how staff used to be reluctant to bring complaints or grievances. We agree grievances can be a sign of open communication. Obviously the WRU needs to consider this interpretation carefully.

LOOKING OUTWARDS: VALUES, TRANSPARENCY AND RELATIONSHIPS

266. We repeatedly heard that the WRU struggled to establish positive and open relationships with staff and stakeholders. We also heard it failed to communicate its commitment to EDI to the rugby community.

A. Statements of values

267. The WRU lacks a sharp focus on vision and values and is yet fully to embrace those values publicly.
268. WRU headed paper ends, in English and Welsh, with: "*values: excellence, integrity, success, courage, family, humour*". None easily extends to respect or diversity.

269. The Irish Rugby Football Union lists five core values as “The Spirit of Rugby: respect, integrity, inclusivity, fun and excellence”. It spells out that “*rugby is a sport of choice for all, it transcends barriers and differences of race, gender, religion and sexual orientation*”. The English RFU includes “*respect*” in five values but explains it as giving and learning respect in general rather than as inclusion.

270. In 2009 the member unions of World Rugby identified the following values: “*integrity, passion, solidarity, discipline and respect*”. Its website reads “*These are now collectively known as the World Rugby values and are incorporated within the World Rugby Playing Charter, a guiding document aimed at preserving rugby’s unique character and ethos both on and off the field of play*”⁴³. That website describes solidarity: “*rugby provides a unifying spirit that leads to lifelong friendships, camaraderie, teamwork and loyalty which transcends cultural, geographic, political and religious differences*”. That is a broader statement than the one adopted by the Welsh Rugby Union but nonetheless sex and sexuality are not obviously included in any of those terms.

271. It would be appropriate to include respect or inclusivity as one of the WRU’s values.

B. Expressing values

272. The WRU has not yet found its voice for expressing its values.

273. We heard the WRU on social media had spoken out more about general bullying than about racist or sexist abuse. We asked the WRU for examples of it expressing its commitment to inclusion and the material received did seem to reflect what we were told. There is more for the WRU to do so its commitment to inclusion in rugby is clear to the entire community.

274. The WRU told us about its work to develop grants to community rugby so inclusion will be one aspect of distribution. We are very hopeful this could play a significant role in

⁴³ <https://www.world.rugby/organisation/about-us/values>

club rugby and needs to be monitored and audited. We recommend one criterion is that clubs operate a proper disciplinary policy for discrimination and bullying off the field. We recognise there must be a boundary where rugby stops but some behaviour off the field raises issues meriting a response from clubs.

275. One club sought support from the WRU about unacceptable behaviour by one of its teams and some extreme social media activity which included racial and sexual misconduct. The police regarded the material as vile and worked with the club, providing restorative support and posters and leaflets about racism. The WRU pointed out to the club the importance of clear responsibility in investigations and disciplinary matters and declined to be involved. Its approach was technical rather than values led: *“In relation to your email, and the statement that our disciplinary code does not cover social media, this is incorrect as we have a social media code of conduct. The issue with the comments being on social media related to the criminal offence not being made out, due to it being comments made in a private What’s App group... We did state that we were satisfied that this was not a safeguarding matter, as it did not relate to actions committed against children or adults at risk.”*

276. Although the WRU could not be directly involved (disciplinary proceedings were in train), it missed the opportunity the police took to work with the reporting body on the cultural problem it had.

C. Transparency

277. We heard the women’s performance review had been shown in part – only the recommendations – to a few staff. Equally, the governance report was not made public, perhaps a factor in why the October 2022 AGM did not approve the proposed changes. We have set out the results of the two reports.

278. As these reports went to such small, senior, groups, their usefulness and potency were greatly diminished. First, it was hard to benchmark or audit their implementation. Second, they could not be used to build a coalition for change, for example, by

persuading members to vote for change in governance or empowering those involved in women's rugby to argue for more support.

279. Non-disclosure clauses were over-used in settlement agreements. Non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) are agreements that an employee will not say certain things about an employer or former colleagues and are sometimes entered into when employment ends in contentious circumstances. Settlement agreements terminating employment will often contain a confidentiality clause which preserves the privacy of the settlement's terms – an NDA goes further and prevents someone making negative statements about their former employer. Where people have left after negative experiences, they may feel this prevents them talking about why the employment ended. NDAs came in for strong criticism during the #Me Too movement.

280. The WRU seems to use non-disclosure clauses in its settlement agreements generally – possibly for the simple reason that they are in the precedent agreement it uses. Non-disclosure clauses seemed to be used even where junior staff left with extremely limited compensation (in contrast, were a member of staff to resign s/he could share their thoughts about the WRU). For example, an employee who left with enhanced notice pay of a few thousand pounds entered into an agreement not to make statements which were detrimental to the WRU, its employees or managers.

281. ACAS guidance on NDAs recommends (amongst other things) that they⁴⁴:

- *should not be used as a matter of routine*
- *should not be used to cover up inappropriate behaviour or wrongdoing, particularly when there is a risk of repetition*
- *should not try to stop someone from reporting discrimination, harassment, or sexual harassment*
- *must not try to stop someone from whistleblowing*
- *must not try to avoid a legal requirement to make a referral to a regulatory body, government agency or to the police*

⁴⁴ <https://www.acas.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-03/non-disclosure-agreements.pdf>

- *should not be used before alternative options have been explored.*

282. Likewise, EHRC guidance on NDAs recommends use only on a case-by-case basis and generally only where victims of discrimination want confidentiality or a falsely accused person needs protection. The Commission points out that one disadvantage of NDAs is “the impact that confidentiality agreements may have on the culture of the organisation”⁴⁵.

283. The experience of the WRU shows the wisdom of the guidance from the EHRC that NDAs can affect the culture of an organisation relying on them. Several people’s attitude to complaints was *‘they’ll buy it off and bury it with an NDA’*. In this way an NDA undermines a culture of openness in which managers act collegially and staff are encouraged to communicate their thoughts.

284. We are unaware of the WRU taking any action, prescriptively or reactively, in connection with actual, perceived or alleged breaches of NDAs, despite all that has been reported and repeated in the media, including the BBC programme. This is common for bodies in the public eye and leads many to question the purpose of an NDA absent special circumstances. The WRU waived non-disclosure agreements, on a mutual basis, for any ex-members of staff who might choose to contribute to this review.

D. Stakeholder relationships

285. Many people recounted tensions in key relationships between the WRU and external stakeholders particularly with the four leading professional regional teams. There was a sense of too much competition for the same pool of commercial and fan support and a lack of trust in how that would be divided. Covid was seen as having left clubs in an impossible financial position. They had to do anything the WRU told them to and decisions about how to manage that challenge were not made collaboratively.

⁴⁵ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/guidance-confidentiality-agreements-in-discrimination-cases.pdf>

286. The WRU must bear three running costs: its own operation, the ring-fenced community expenditure and the representative teams. The rest of its income is distributed to the regions. During Covid this fell from £25.4m to £3m (financial year 2021). The WRU received no government grants in relation to this and had to borrow money, eventually refinanced with the Welsh government. As a result, the game in Wales is in significantly greater debt and the regions struggling, month to month.

287. We asked the new chair, Richard Collier-Keywood, his reflections on his appointment. One was that key relationships, including with the regional clubs, were strained. This is what we heard and his early perception of the need to build bridges bodes well.

288. The WRU has many stakeholders but only the member clubs have a formal voice. We recommend that a wider group of stakeholders is involved in the WRU's structures.

E. Closed culture

289. One difficulty might arise from the high status of the WRU as an employer. There was a pride in working for the WRU but also, at times, an attitude that *"we are who we are and if you don't like it, you can sod off"*.

290. Staff involved in the BBC Wales programme told us they are used to organisations responding to allegations and seeking to engage. They were surprised the WRU at first declined to give an interview in response and then challenged the BBC's sources, including sending a Freedom of Information request.

291. We heard of a lack of trust and a dislike of being challenged. Thus, people operated in silos and dealt with their own environment as best they could but left others to their own devices. The organisation could be defensive. We heard of competition between the stadium, performance development and the community, rather than of cooperative working. There was scant help for those dealing with identifiable strong characters

whom others found difficult to challenge. We heard work teams had no common procedures, goals, or policies.

292. One senior stakeholder described relationships with the WRU as “*master-servant*”.

POSITIVE VOICES

293. The importance of the WRU as the governing body responsible for rugby in Wales was acknowledged by everyone, recognising rugby as central to the identity of Wales. The men’s team had great success during several periods, including that of the senior men’s national team under Warren Gatland in the past and in the Rugby World Cup 2023. People said the WRU deserved credit for this (but also that the WRU used it to deflect criticism). Wales has the smallest population of the leading rugby nations, and its performances reflect a men’s club rugby environment with continuing strengths, successful player development and effective use of resources. Wales won the Six Nations championship in 2005, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2019 and 2021.

294. Many told us of the excellent work the WRU does in the community. One example was the Fit and Fed programme in which the WRU and clubs from each of the 9 districts provide children with a good breakfast and lunch either side of exercise and games. Another is the WRU’s role in the creation of a Nightingale Hospital at the Principality Stadium during the pandemic. We heard several times from outside the WRU that it does not receive sufficient credit for its community work.

295. The WRU has also achieved considerable commercial success. It now has an income of around £100 million, which has taken hard work and care. To achieve this it negotiates sponsorships, manages hospitality, negotiates television rights, hires out its facilities and, of course, arranges ticketing. When Steve Phillips was appointed chief executive the WRU announcement read:

“In the 13 years since he first joined the Union he has filed a succession of Annual Reports charting a significant rise in the turnover of the WRU, which reached £90.5m in the accounts for the year ending 2019 and overseen the reduction of the company’s

debt from in excess of £50m when he took over to an all-time low of £6.2m. These accounts also showed the WRU re-invested a record £49.6m (2018: £42.8m) across the game in Wales.”

296. The WRU received a Gold Award from Disability Sport Wales in April 2022⁴⁶ for its work on inclusion and disability specific provision throughout Wales⁴⁷. It was the first national governing body to achieve that award. On its website Disability Sport Wales writes positively about its experience working with the WRU and explains how the WRU has widened access to rugby:

In successfully achieving the insport NGB Gold award, the Welsh Rugby Union have positively identified the commitment of the organisation to inclusion and as a result have raised the expectation within communities of disabled people interested in rugby and looking to play, coach, and volunteer across all forms of the game in Wales.

297. On 13 July 2023 both men’s and women’s Welsh deaf rugby teams won their World Cups.

298. The commitment to rugby and to the WRU shone through from everyone to whom we spoke. People whose exit interviews explained the problems they had experienced generally expressed their commitment to the WRU and occasionally a preparedness to return.

299. Messrs Evans and Walker would have been under great pressure before the Senedd on 2 February 2023. Their decision to face up to the results of the reports summarised above, and unreservedly to accept that the WRU had not tackled issues as early or as fully as it could have done, was almost certainly the start of a more positive future.

⁴⁶ <https://www.wru.wales/2022/04/wru-first-to-receive-gold-inclusion-award/#:~:text=The%20Welsh%20Rugby%20Union%20has,specific%20provision%20throughout%20the%20country.>

⁴⁷ <https://www.wru.wales/2022/04/wru-first-to-receive-gold-inclusion-award/#:~:text=The%20Welsh%20Rugby%20Union%20has,specific%20provision%20throughout%20the%20country.>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Appoint an oversight body:

- a. The WRU should appoint an external oversight group of no fewer than 3 people. At least one should be nominated by an outside body and at least one experienced in people management or organisational culture.
- b. For the next 3 years the WRU should report quarterly to this group, setting out its goals, actions taken to meet them and how success is measured. We hope that substantial progress will be made in the first year but recommend that the body stays in place for 3 years so it can oversee the constitutional review and changes.
- c. The group's remit should be to consider steps by the WRU to implement the recommendations in this report and to create an inclusive environment for staff and for all those involved in rugby in Wales.

2. Continue reform of the Board:

- a. The WRU is a national sporting organisation which is also a large corporate body. Its Board must be an efficient body with clear responsibilities for the governance of all aspects of the WRU and should not be seen as just representing the community clubs. The executive should report to the Board on all aspects of the WRU's work.
- b. The size of the Board should be further reduced to 10 by lowering the number of Council representatives, elected or appointed, to 2 from currently 4. The changes made at the March 2023 EGM should be given time to take effect before further reform of the Board, so this change need not be immediate but be developed during the 3 years in which the oversight body operates.

- c. We recommend that within two years the WRU commissions an external report on governance. That report should consider how the March 2023 reforms are operating and how committees can be streamlined to avoid duplication (along with other relevant matters).

- d. Implement a “fit and proper person” test for Council/Board members and candidates for the Council/Board.
 - 1. Board members, elected or appointed, should be able to show that their membership of the Board would not undermine the reputation of the WRU or make it harder for the WRU to promote rugby in Wales.
 - 2. The test should consider honesty, integrity, public statements, experience, any breaches of club or WRU standards, and commitment to inclusion of all in the sport of rugby (for example, a commitment to the standards set out by World Rugby).

- e. There should always be a current strategic plan for key areas of the sport, shared with relevant managers and (subject to competitor knowledge) published. This should include professional rugby, community rugby, men’s rugby, women’s and girls’ rugby, rugby for those with disabilities, and broadening inclusion. All plans must be approved by the Board. Staff need to understand what they are asked to deliver.

- f. Set up a structured system for reporting to the Board which includes:
 - a. Written reports to the Board from the executive at least quarterly and always in good time prior to each Board meeting.
 - b. Papers to the Board should identify relevant options and include clear decision-making principles or criteria.
 - c. Each report should include KPIs for individual members of the executive and departments of the WRU which should be monitored and appraised.

- g. The administration of the Board should be streamlined:
 - a. A dedicated support service should be provided to help the Chair, chairs of committees and Board members with their roles.
 - b. Each Board member should participate in a skills review, have a skills matrix drawn up on appointment and be encouraged to undertake appropriate development according to needs identified on their skills matrix.
 - c. Everyone appointed to the Board should be offered induction training on (i) their duties as a director; (ii) good practice in governance; (iii) equality, diversity and inclusion; (iv) representing the WRU; and (v) the current state of Welsh rugby and the WRU's strategic plans.
 - d. The role of executive staff attending the Board should be clarified.
 - e. Clarify the fiduciary role of Board members to oversee all the activities of the company, uphold its values and respect one another's skills and experience.

3. Council:

- a. The Council is the key representative body, the forum through which member clubs engage in the WRU. It currently comprises 14 Members elected from the nine Districts and 5 nationally elected Members.
- b. Article 47 of the Articles of Association reads: "The Council shall formulate the strategy for the community game in Wales, such strategy to be submitted to and agreed with the Board of Directors and the Council shall thereafter oversee the execution of that strategy. The responsibilities of the Council from time to time shall be set by the Board of Directors following consultation with the Council."
- c. The Council currently elects 8 of its Members to the Board. Following the March EGM, it may only elect 4 of its Members to the Board and may have up to 6 Members appointed by the Board. It will then have a maximum 25 Members.
- d. The Board has a sub-committee, the Community Game Board, which also comprises the 14 Members elected from the nine Districts and the 5 nationally

elected Members, plus a maximum 2 Executive Board members. “It is responsible for managing and delivering the execution of the strategy for community rugby as set by the WRU Council and approved by the WRU’s Board from time to time.” (WRU website)

- e. In view of the duplication of Members between Council and Community Game Board, the shared responsibility for establishing the strategy for community rugby, seeking Board approval and then delivering the approved strategy, the constitutional structure should be streamlined and simplified in a single entity. It could perhaps be described as the Community Council. It should be expanded to include a wider group of stakeholders.
- f. To fulfil this role the Community Council should be drawn from a broader base of those involved in rugby in Wales:
 - a. Membership of the Community Council should be a maximum 16⁴⁸: 9 elected from districts, 1 elected nationally and 6 representing other rugby community interests, as set out below.
 - b. The six new places on the Community Council should be for people representing (1) schools rugby; (2) rugby in colleges and universities; (3) community rugby players⁴⁹; (4) women’s and girls’ rugby (5) rugby for players with a disability and (6) officials. Where possible these should be elected but it might be difficult to identify an electorate and arrange elections at a reasonable cost in all these areas. If so, the WRU should run a competitive appointment process according to a person specification it should draw up.
 - c. Members of the Community Council should be limited to 3 consecutive terms of 3 years (with the possibility of re-election after one fallow period).

⁴⁸ Currently we understand the Council has 19 members: 5 National Council members and 14 District Council members – 2 each from Districts A – E and 1 each from F, G, H and J. Following the EGM in March 2023 the Board may appoint up to 6 Council members.

⁴⁹ The WRU will need to consult and draw up a definition. We recommend a broad definition. One option is election by captains of teams that play in leagues in Wales other than the regional sides in the United Rugby Championship. However, the exact approach we leave to the WRU.

- d. The individual elected nationally should chair the Community Council and have a seat on the Board. The other Board member should be elected by the Community Council.
- g. We recommend above that the Board should approve and maintain the strategy for all areas of the game, including the community game. The Community Council should be a representative, not a management, body and should not direct management or set strategies or budgets.
- h. Membership of the Community Council should involve at least induction training on representing the WRU, its inclusion and diversity policies, its current strategic plans and their implementation.
- i. Clubs should not see these changes as a diminution of their role. They will continue to elect or appoint Board members, attend and vote at the Annual General Meeting and have a representative forum in the Community Council.

The recommended transformation of Council and of the Community Game Board would be fundamental to governance, requiring amendment to the Articles. It should thus be considered within the external report on governance, recommended in paragraph 2(c) above, and would probably accelerate that report's commissioning within the next two years.

4. Take steps to become more transparent:

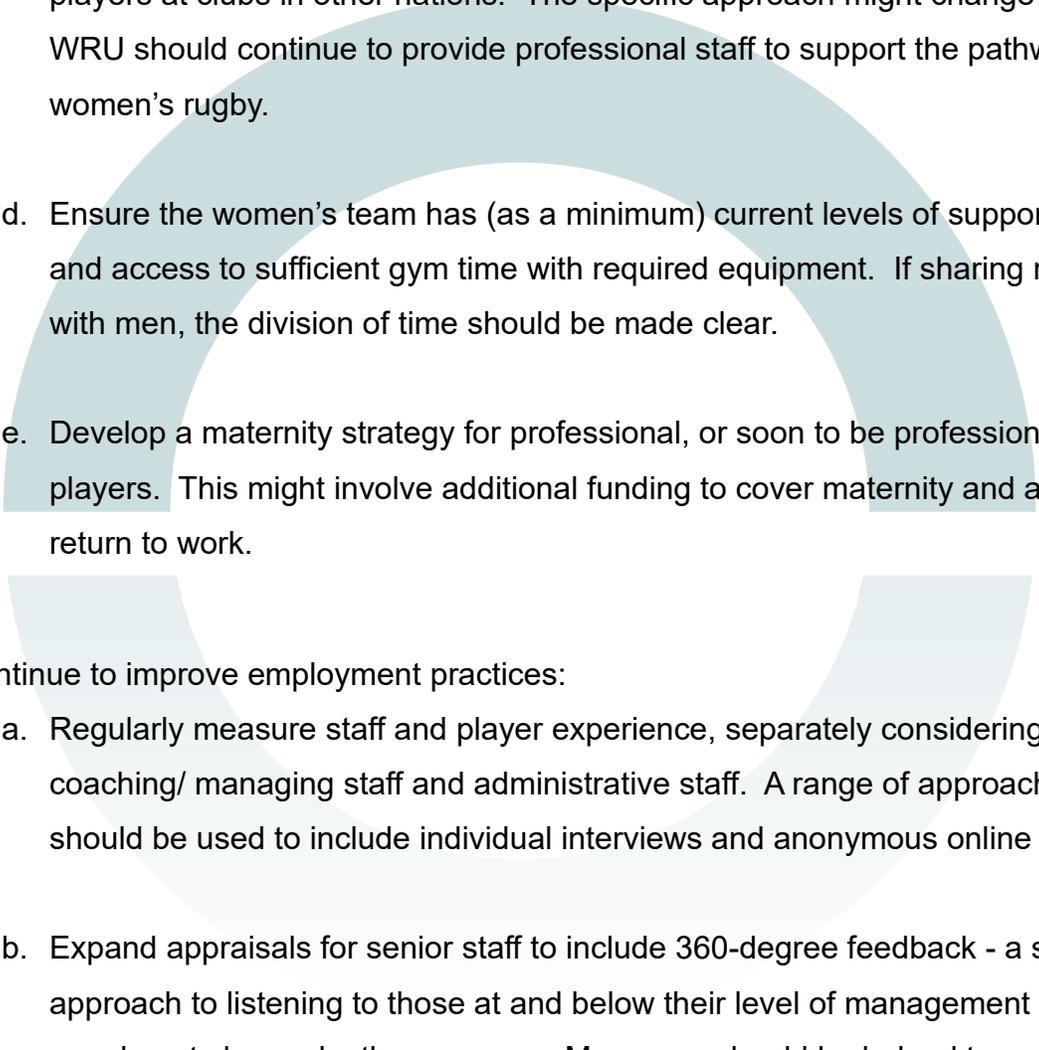
- a. Draw up a transparency policy setting out when the WRU will give information to the public, the rugby community and employees based on the principle of sharing as much as possible. The primary reasons for withholding information should be (i) competitor knowledge; and (ii) legal obligations.
- b. Publish the privileges associated with membership of the Board and Council, and for senior staff (distinct from, for example, attending matches as a host in a working role). The grounds for reduction or removal should also be set out.

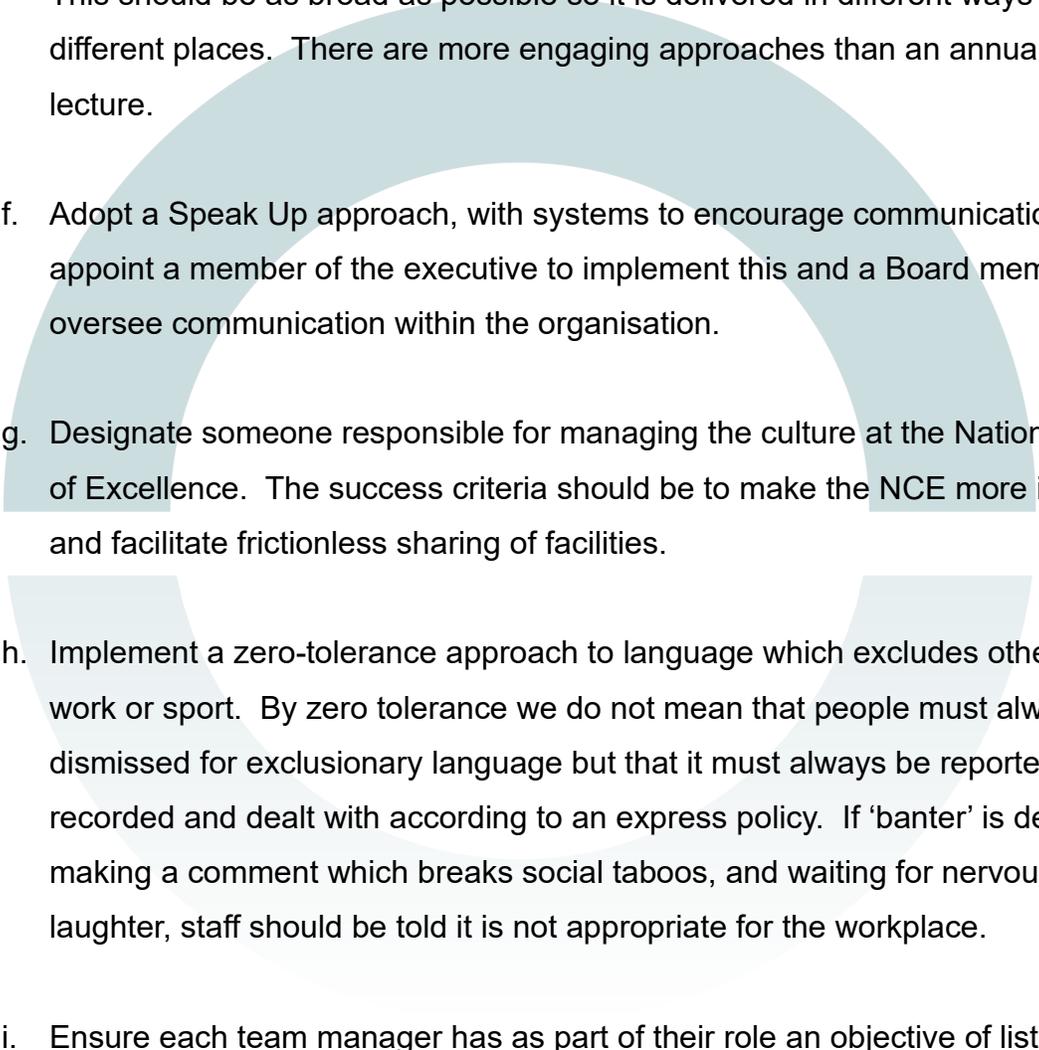
- c. When terminating employment, the WRU should only use non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) for an express purpose, not as a matter of course. This does not preclude the use of confidentiality clauses about the terms of a settlement agreement.
 - d. When reports are commissioned about general matters (rather than specific employees) they should be published unless there is a particular and agreed reason not to do so. If publication is not appropriate, the authors should be asked to write a brief summary of the issues, and their conclusions, for publication. The WRU would have been in a better place at the start of 2023 had it been known that it had commissioned reports into women's national rugby, governance, and equality, diversity and inclusion which recommended significant change.
Debate about the organisation and funding of Welsh rugby should be actively encouraged and the WRU should seek to share information to engage people's productive participation in a structured, not speculative, way. Underlying this is greater acceptance of constructive criticism with a view to improvement. A number of people commented on the WRU seeking to control the rugby environment too much.
5. Align the WRU clearly and publicly with inclusion and diversity, demonstrating visible and vocal leadership on equality, diversity and inclusion. The WRU's commitment to inclusion and its opposition to abusive behaviour, exclusion and discrimination need to be unambiguous:
- a. Amend the WRU's statement of values to include one related to diversity and inclusion.
 - b. Give greater publicity to women's rugby and rugby for people with disabilities.
 - c. Respond robustly to discrimination and hate crime in stadia and online.
 - d. Express clearly and publicly the WRU's commitment to the inclusion of all members of Welsh society both in rugby and in its own staff group.

- e. Have a clear equality, diversity and inclusion strategy underpinned by a delivery plan.
 - f. Work collaboratively with the EHRC, should the EHRC take any steps in relation to WRU.
6. Reform financial support to clubs with a view to achieving key goals reflecting the WRU's strategy for the community game. These should include all facilities for women and girls (including training and club house facilities), steps to broaden access to rugby for all communities, proper disciplinary policies and procedures in clubs for responding to unacceptable behaviour (including discriminatory behaviour) off the pitch.
7. Invest in the women's and girls' game:
- a. Analyse the expenditure on the women's and girls' game in light of
 - (i) income and expenditure of other unions;
 - (ii) growing sponsorship, broadcast revenue and attendances at women's matches; and
 - (iii) the need to invest to develop the gameso that funding for women and girls is benchmarked and expressly managed based on data. Spending should be in line with other unions and with spending on men and boys and appropriate to a growth and investment phase.

This analysis will require decisions about allocating income⁵⁰ and expenditure and is not intended to be an exact exercise but to inform decisions. The analysis should include support for the community game as well as player development and national squads.

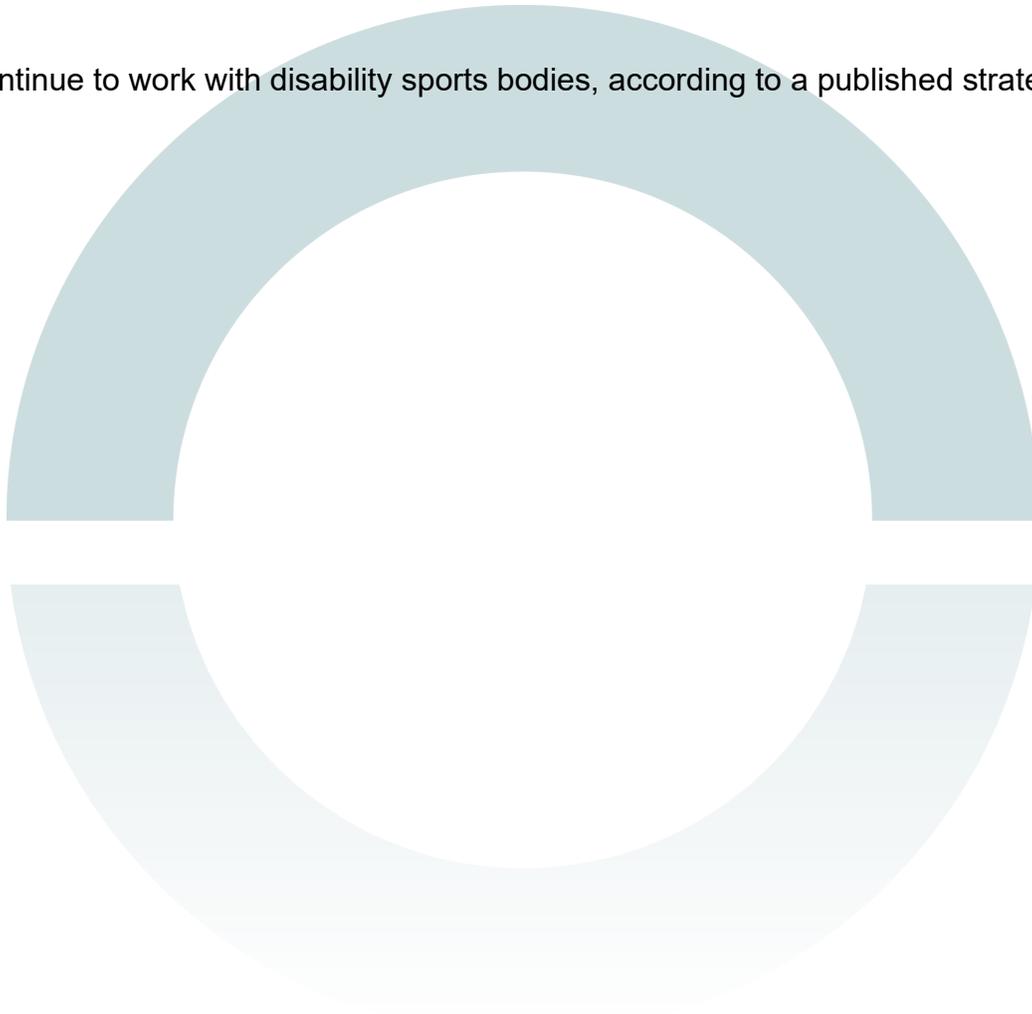
⁵⁰ For example how does one allocate general sponsorship? The sponsor will want the exposure from large TV audiences currently obtained by the men's first team. That will affect how much they pay. However sponsors will pay nothing to an organisation the public sees as excluding groups in society.

- 
- b. Keep the salary for professional female players at a level competitive to other careers and other nations and ensure the number of contracts is sufficient to support full national teams.
 - c. Embed a player pathway for women and girls by completing development of the hubs offering support to players in Wales and by continuing outreach support to players at clubs in other nations. The specific approach might change but the WRU should continue to provide professional staff to support the pathway in women's rugby.
 - d. Ensure the women's team has (as a minimum) current levels of support staff and access to sufficient gym time with required equipment. If sharing resources with men, the division of time should be made clear.
 - e. Develop a maternity strategy for professional, or soon to be professional, players. This might involve additional funding to cover maternity and advice on return to work.
8. Continue to improve employment practices:
- a. Regularly measure staff and player experience, separately considering players, coaching/ managing staff and administrative staff. A range of approaches should be used to include individual interviews and anonymous online surveys.
 - b. Expand appraisals for senior staff to include 360-degree feedback - a structured approach to listening to those at and below their level of management - from people not chosen by the manager. Managers should be helped to a sense of how they are perceived by others.
 - c. Offer mentoring and reverse mentoring. Each will best be used for limited groups and defined periods given the time commitment of proper mentoring.

- 
- d. Include as KPIs for senior staff to be assessed in performance reviews (1) co-operation with managers at an equivalent level; (2) breaking down departmental barriers/ 'silos'; (3) adopting a collegiate management style towards junior colleagues.
 - e. Annual training in equality, diversity and inclusion should take place for all staff. This should be as broad as possible so it is delivered in different ways and different places. There are more engaging approaches than an annual zoom lecture.
 - f. Adopt a Speak Up approach, with systems to encourage communication and appoint a member of the executive to implement this and a Board member to oversee communication within the organisation.
 - g. Designate someone responsible for managing the culture at the National Centre of Excellence. The success criteria should be to make the NCE more inclusive and facilitate frictionless sharing of facilities.
 - h. Implement a zero-tolerance approach to language which excludes others from work or sport. By zero tolerance we do not mean that people must always be dismissed for exclusionary language but that it must always be reported, recorded and dealt with according to an express policy. If 'banter' is defined as making a comment which breaks social taboos, and waiting for nervous laughter, staff should be told it is not appropriate for the workplace.
 - i. Ensure each team manager has as part of their role an objective of listening to concerns and helping communication. The approach is likely to include 360-degree appraisal and communicating to WRU necessary changes to manage stress, relationships, group and personal concerns.

j. Arrange for someone independent of the WRU to sit in on final interviews for Board members, the Chair and Chief Executive and any members of the Community Council who are appointed (see above), reporting in writing to the Board on whether the appointment followed good practice and the stated process. This should not be an audit or lead to a detailed report but a simple conclusion.

9. Continue to work with disability sports bodies, according to a published strategy.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – BACKGROUND ON RUGBY UNION IN WALES

The Welsh nation is understandably proud of and devoted to its national sport. Wales understands and embraces the sport; it is effectively, a feature of its DNA. Wales has the smallest population of the leading rugby nations but over many years it has soared in achievement. We are confident it will meet today's challenges and soar again.

a. MEN'S RUGBY IN WALES

By the start of the twentieth century Wales was the dominant force in rugby. It has enjoyed periods of exceptional achievement, for example prior to the First World War and in the 1970s with three Grand Slams in that decade alone.

Four events in recent decades are vital context to understanding rugby in Wales.

First, in 1995 the old International Rugby Football Board (now World Rugby) made men's rugby into a professional game. A change of this significance has primary and secondary effects which take decades to work through a system. It has been accompanied by more money entering rugby – albeit not on the scale of football and, unlike football, mainly for national teams.

Second, at the start of the 2003/4 season the structure of men's club competition in Wales changed when regional teams were formed. There were initially five regional teams but the Celtic Warriors closed after one season, leaving four professional teams playing in the top band (Cardiff, Scarlets, Ospreys and Dragons) which now play in the United Rugby Championship with teams from Ireland, Italy, Scotland and South Africa. Ospreys and Scarlets have won that competition 6 times between them but neither has done so since 2017.

Below those four leading professional teams are more than 200 clubs affiliated to the WRU which play in the Welsh Premier Division and the Welsh Divisional leagues. However, some people told us clubs were now less connected to their communities than previously and questioned whether the South Wales valleys any longer had a representative team.

Third, Wales has had another period of great international success for the men's team, winning Grand Slams in 2005, 2008, 2012 and 2019 making Wales the joint most successful team across the Home Nations, 5 Nations and 6 Nations tournaments⁵¹. Some believe the WRU defends challenges to its behaviour by pointing out the success of the Welsh men's national rugby team.

Fourth, the funding to the regions from the WRU and the payments to players for representing Wales mean the WRU is involved in key decisions for the regional teams and in more aspects of players' professional lives.

b. WOMEN'S RUGBY IN WALES

Women have long played rugby in Wales, with a famous early game at Cardiff Arms Park in 1917 between Cardiff Ladies and Newport Ladies⁵². However, the attitude to women's participation in contact sports has at times been repressive, the Welsh FA banning women's football at any club from 1922 to 1970, in line with many other countries⁵³.

In 1983 the Women's Rugby Football Union was formed to govern women's rugby across the British Isles. In 1987 Liza Burgess⁵⁴ led a Wales women's team in the first official match against England. In 1988 the Women's International Rugby Board was established. The first Women's World Cup was in 1991 in Wales although the competition was not formally adopted by the International Rugby Board until 1998. In 1994 the Women's Rugby Football Union broke up and the new Welsh Women's Rugby Union affiliated with the WRU.

A Home Nations competition in 1996 was followed by a women's Five Nations starting in 1999. In 2007 the Welsh Women's Rugby Union merged with the WRU. In 2009 Wales' women for the first-time defeated England, on their way to a Triple Crown.

We received a unanimous "no" to our enquiries about whether the WRU had built on this or prepared for the growth of women's rugby both from a playing and a commercial perspective.

⁵¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_Nations_Championship

⁵² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales_women%27s_national_rugby_union_team

⁵³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_football_in_Wales

⁵⁴ Who went on to be a member of the WRU Board

Participation in women's rugby is growing fast. World Rugby gives the following data⁵⁵:

Female participation levels are at an all-time high with 2.7 million players globally. More than a quarter of the overall playing population is now female, and there has been a 28% increase in registered players since 2017.

Developments of the women's game continue at pace, for example equal, joint inclusion in the Olympics from 2016 in the Sevens format.

c. THE WELSH RUGBY UNION

The WRU is a limited liability company registered under the Companies Acts. Welsh rugby clubs are in effect its shareholders and have control over the company through general meetings. WRU governance arrangements are set out in its Articles of Association and so changes are made through votes by the clubs.

The WRU has an income of about £100m and employs about 400.

It owns the Millennium Stadium (now the Principality Stadium, sponsored by the Principality Building Society for 10 years from 2015) through a wholly owned subsidiary, Millennium Stadium plc. This is significant source of revenue from ticket sales and venue hire.

Starting in the early part of the 21st-century the WRU began to develop training facilities in Hensol, now the National Centre of Excellence.

The WRU has a Rugby Services Agreement with the four Welsh Regions. Through this system money is paid to the Regions to be spent on developing Welsh players. The Agreement also supports dual contracts with leading players where both the WRU and the Region contribute to a player's wages to ensure leading players play in Wales.

From 2017 to 2023 the WRU took a significant role in Newport Gwent Dragons after the club got into financial difficulties, showing the financial connection between the governing body and club rugby.

Covid had a particular effect on rugby as a close contact sport. Revenues to the WRU stopped overnight and the WRU entered into significant additional debt. A lot of people told

⁵⁵ <https://www.world.rugby/organisation/about-us/womens>

us about the continued distribution during Covid of ring-fenced financial support to community rugby made no sense where club rugby was banned, and the professional teams were struggling to survive. People said this showed the excessive power of clubs over the WRU.

d. GOVERNANCE OF THE WRU

The WRU is a company limited by guarantee, whose principal object is to promote rugby union in Wales. Like any company it has Articles of Association, directors and members (shareholders). The Articles and list of directors are available from Companies House. The Articles can only be amended by 75% of those attending and voting at a general meeting.

The members of the company are the roughly 200 rugby clubs in Wales. In order to be a member a club must be run by a committee or board appointed by the club members, have insurance and follow the World Rugby bye-laws (along with other obligations). The Board has power to discipline, suspend or expel member clubs including for conduct 'prejudicial to the interests of the game'. Member clubs are allocated to one of 9 districts, which can hold their own annual meetings.

An Annual General Meeting of the WRU must be held each October or November and each club has one vote. This meeting considers reports from the main office holders and considers the accounts, in line with usual practice. A general meeting has the power to dismiss the Board.

The Board of directors was predominantly made up of elected members but over recent years an increasing number of members have been appointed members. Prior to the EGM on 26 March 2023, 8 of the 12 directors were elected from the Council. Since that EGM that number has been 4 and the Board of directors is made up as follows:

- An independent chair and appointed chief executive, both by competitive process
- Two District Council Members (who are elected)
- Two National Council Members (who are elected)
- The Chair of the Professional Rugby Board
- Four appointed independent non-executive directors
- A person to advance the women's game.

There is also a Council. People are elected to this body either by districts or nationally. Districts elect 1 or 2 members to the Council (depending on the size of the district). These people are 'District Council Members' and, prior to the EGM on 26 March 2023, there were 14 such members of Council. Also 5 people are elected to the Council by all clubs in Wales and these are 'National Council Members'.

The Council can have a maximum of 25 members but at present there are 19: districts A-E each elect 2 members and districts F, G, H and J each elect 1, with 5 National Council Members. In addition, the Board has power to appoint up to 6 members of the Council, but no current members have been appointed. At the EGM in March this year the Board was given the power to appoint up to 6 members of the Council, making the maximum number of Council members 25.

People may be members of the Council for 9 years. This is an absolute cap and further terms are not possible. There is a similar limit on the term of office for directors.

The Board has the following sub-committees:

- Community Rugby Board. The Community Rugby Board is responsible for setting and over-seeing the strategy for community rugby. All Council members are members of the Community Rugby Board, as is the executive director for Community Rugby. In turn the Community Rugby Board has sub-committees: a Disciplinary Committee, a Club Development Committee and a Competitions Management Committee.
- Professional Rugby Board. The Professional Rugby Board is responsible for overseeing the Board's strategy for professional rugby. Members include each regional club, an appointed chair and the group CEO and finance director. There are three sub-committees: the Rugby Management Board, the Finance Management Board and the Business Management Board.
- Finance Sub-Board. This handles all finance matters other than dealing with the auditors.
- Appointments and Remuneration Committee. This is the committee which leads on the appointments of Board members.
- Audit and Risk Committee.

e. PARTICIPATION IN RUGBY TODAY

We heard that - like many things – participation sport has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. World Rugby records 7.6 million people who play rugby including 4.2m active, registered, players as well as those just starting to try the sport. 24% of participants are female and they make up 17% of the 54,000 teams.

At 3.1 million Wales has the smallest population of the leading rugby nations, compared to about 5 million in each of Scotland, New Zealand and Ireland. World Rugby gives the figure for active players in Wales as 46,879 compared to 42,000 in Scotland and 44,000 in Ireland – reflecting a high participation rate in Wales. New Zealand has 84,000 active players. Countries with much larger populations tend to have more active players, for example France at 191,000⁵⁶.

Anyone who follows rugby will know that results do not reflect those figures but lots of people pointed out to us that Wales is having to do more with less. Those high participation rates in Wales show rugby is deeply ingrained into Welsh society.

People told us rugby is a declining force in Wales. We heard results sheets show many 20-nil scores, giving statistical support to apocryphal comments that even some well-known clubs are struggling to put out competitive teams. Football in Wales has been through its own Golden Era, with Wales qualifying for the World Cup in 2022, and this naturally diverted children to watching and playing football. The issues surrounding early onset dementia and pending group litigation add to a challenging health background. We were also told that post-Brexit Welsh people are gradually re-evaluating their national identity.

A number felt the change to regional teams in 2003/4 was forced on Welsh rugby with too little consultation and broke the link between clubs and their local community. A trip to watch the match on Saturday became less automatic.

On 25 October 2023 the Today programme on Radio 4 reported on rugby in Wales, opening with “rugby feels to many Welsh people like a part of the culture of the nation” and ending with Wyre Davies saying “rugby is almost a religion in Wales”. The report noted Wales again

⁵⁶ <http://publications.worldrugby.org/yearinreview2021/en/46-1>

“outperformed” at the World Cup. Hugh Bevan, head of performance at the WRU, pointed out that they “must have been doing something right” given the success achieved with the available population.

In the report, Wyre Davies asked if this success had “papered over the cracks”. He said “rugby was at the heart of almost every community” in Wales but that the game was “struggling” with 13% of matches below professional level cancelled last year, largely due to lack of players. Rugby clubs had financial difficulties. A BBC survey of 140 schools found that two-thirds had run a sixth form team in the past but almost half of those schools had stopped in the last 20 years, often because of lack of staff or lack of pupil interest. Finally, the report explained that more Welsh boys were playing in England – one English college identified had 10 players from Wales in the first team.

APPENDIX 2 - Letter from Tonia Antoniazzi MP and 121 former players to the Welsh Rugby Union, April 2021

Tonia Antoniazzi MP

Ty Newydd Community Centre

17 West Street Gorseinon SA44AA

Wednesday 14th April 2021

Dear Steve,

As former Welsh women's rugby players we are writing to you, the WRU and the executive, as the custodians of our national sport.

Governing bodies have a moral and ethical responsibility to develop the national game and implement a vision befitting the commitment of the women who pull on the red jersey of Wales.

As players we never own the jersey, we are merely looking after it for future generations. It is our duty to leave the game in a better place and improve the legacy for the next players. This is why we cannot stand by and turn a blind eye to the deepening inequality of provision in the women's game in Wales.

The inaction of the WRU in providing a performance pathway for women and girls continues to negatively affect the national team's performance.

The WRU Strategy affirms:

'to commit to support each player through all levels of the game and beyond, and as a consequence our players choose to stay in Wales, our teams 'win' at every level'.

We want you to know that today this statement could not be further from the experience of representing Wales as a female rugby player. You have failed to provide a route for our female players through any elite level, our top players are encouraged to play outside of Wales, and our only women's team on an international stage is not winning.

The results of the last two Six Nations games are a product of the current environment, which brings us to the crisis point we have feared was inevitable; your systematic dismantling of the age grade and development pathways, which you inherited from the WWRU, contribute significantly to the failures of the women's game in Wales today.

The WRU has yet to publish a strategy for long-term development of female rugby players or defined pathways for them. We urge you to rise to this challenge to do better, be true custodians of our game, and implement a strategy, setting clear and measurable goals, timelines for the development and implementation of these programmes and specific high-performance targets to ensure the success of our national game.

Beyond Rugby, the WRU's own strategy, states that you...

'have a responsibility to be role models, to make a positive difference to Welsh society and to help to define Wales as a nation'.

While you stand at this crossroads, in a moment of time where more eyes are on our national team than ever before, we are looking at how you, as the governing body, can provide a positive change for women and girls playing rugby in Wales.

We expect you to be the role models our nation of female players and their supporters need, and to make a positive difference by committing to a clear pathway from grassroots to the national teams by building an environment of expectation of success and winning at all levels.

We cannot stand by and watch the women's game deteriorate any further, we want to work with you. This letter is an offer of support for a 'working party', bringing a variety of experience to work together and achieve the best outcomes for the future of women and girl's rugby in Wales.

I'd like to invite you, on behalf of the signatories of this letter and a small working group to discuss this further via zoom the week commencing the 26th April.

We look forward to meeting with you soon, Kind regards,

Tonia Antoniazzi MP for Gower

Former Wales Squad Members.

120 passionate women who have represented Welsh squads from 1988 - 2020.

[121 names followed]



APPENDIX 3 - Resignation speech and letter from Amanda Blanc, November 2021

15th November 2021

Private & Confidential

To the Chair of the WRU,

I am writing to advise you of my resignation from the WRU Board and as Chair of the PRB. I am informing you of my intentions in advance of telling the PRB Regional Chairs in due course.

I am sorry to say that I have been deeply saddened at the approach taken towards the Women's Game Review and more generally at some of the conversations regarding women that I have experienced.

Following some high-profile resignations earlier this year, the Women's Review was originally created to investigate, among other areas, the important cultural aspects of the WRU organisation. The Board agreed to this approach, but the subsequent scope of the Review was focussed more on contracts, performance and pathways. We should remember that the Women's Review originated following bullying allegations towards the women's coach, but I am yet to observe any specific actions to address the cultural transformation that is required.

The intention of the Board was to make the findings of the Review public some months ago - and yet we are largely still waiting.

The Review was trumpeted as being the key component to fix the women's game and a priority for the WRU. Yet only 45% of Board members and 27% of Council members found the time to contribute to it. Moreover, I am still at a loss to understand how only 3 out of 8 of the Executive felt it important enough to respond and can only imagine how this would be perceived nationally.

With this backdrop and having reflected carefully on the recent Board discussion regarding a Council member's derogatory and disparaging comments about women, I am afraid that I can no longer be associated with the decisions made by the Board in this area. The conversation about the sanctions being excessive if too many complimentary game tickets were taken from the individual concerned was extremely disappointing.

It was this conversation that finally concluded my decision to resign.

In addition, I have also raised behaviour, tone and in particular governance many times before in various guises over the last 2 years. Despite the platitudes from others, I am afraid I do not see any meaningful progress towards better governance and an effective Board.

I would once again strongly recommend that you carry out a Board Effectiveness Review, both to assist with much needed governance changes and also as a 360-degree mechanism for you to examine some of the Board behaviours which fall short of what is expected by stakeholders in 2021. I have offered to assist with this but again the willingness to engage is not there. I would caution with your best interests at heart that unless the Board recognises that change is needed, the implications could be far reaching.

My observations if such Review were ever to take place would be: -

- 1) Outside of the Non-Execs, what is the Board competence to run a £100 million turnover organisation? Where is the skills matrix to assess the experience and capabilities needed on the Board?
- 2) On taking the Chair role, Rob stated that he would seek to change the governance during his one- year term so that an Independent Chair could be appointed. There has been no discussion about an Independent Chair and Rob has just been reappointed, unopposed.
- 3) The CEO recruitment process was not undertaken in line with good governance and ended with a fairly meaningless vote and the decision to appoint ratified by a divided Board.
- 4) Exco roles have largely been appointed by reshuffling the team and the opportunity has not been taken to recruit talented individuals who would prepare the organisation for the digital and Private Equity world.

When you look for a successor to chair the PRB can I also suggest that you give some consideration as to the scope of this voluntary role.

On taking the position I was advised I should be available to attend 6 PRB meetings per year and 8 WRU Board meetings. As at the end of October I have attended 84 meetings this year - including several half days and some full days, many of which have not been a good use of time such as the CEO recruitment process. Almost all of these have been in my spare time,

over weekends, holidays, etc. Candidly, I think you are probably being unrealistic to expect somebody who has current Board room experience to carry out this PRB / WRU role on a voluntary basis. In my view it is at a minimum, a one day per week appointment and probably ought to be remunerated.

I have given considerable thought as to whether I should remain in position to try and continue to pursue change from inside the Board. However, I have sadly concluded that after two years of trying this will not be fruitful.

That said, I will of course continue in role until you have found a replacement and will advise the PRB members accordingly. For any communications issues that you wish to discuss relating to disclosure of my resignation then please contact emurphy@brunswickgroup.com

In conclusion, I would just like to say that I continue to wish the women's and the men's national team and all four Regions the best of luck and remain a fervent supporter of them all.

Kind Regards,

Amanda Blanc

Hi everybody and thanks Rob.

Firstly I wanted to thank you for giving up some time this evening.

As you will know, I handed in my resignation letter to Rob some three weeks ago. I am not sure if Rob has shared that letter with you all - I hope he has - but I wanted to be absolutely sure that there was no ambiguity for the entire board as to why I am leaving.

There has been much speculation and so far I have resisted national media contact so that I could communicate with you first.

Whether you have seen the letter or not, having witnessed how quickly an issue can rip apart an institution like Yorkshire Cricket Club, literally overnight, I feel obligated to make sure that you are fully aware.

Some of you may consider the reasons overly forthright, some of you may consider that they should have remained private to only me - especially for those of you that are used to operating under rules such as secret anonymous voting for board matters.

I on the other hand am used to transparency and corporate governance that is rigorous and fit for modern society and so I make no apologies about this responsibility.

There are three key areas why I feel I can no longer align myself with the decisions made by this board.

Firstly,

The Women's Review is beyond disappointing and verges on insulting towards women.

I would encourage any directors that are new to the board to make time to read the review and note its conclusions if they haven't already done so.

We should remember that the review was started because of very specific bullying allegations - I know that because I sat in a car park for a 1hr 20 minute board meeting deciding what to do - where the first 1 hour and 6 minutes was listening to a discussion about how to defend the man at the centre of the allegations.

It wasn't until I raised this very fact that there was an acceptance that culture and behaviour should be reviewed.

Just to be very clear - I had conversations with Rob about resigning at this stage but was told to give the Review a chance and stay on the pitch to bring about change.

However, the Terms Of Reference were subsequently watered down and the cultural aspects quickly moved aside.

I should have known when only 27% of council members and 45% of this Board found the time to contribute to a Review about Women that there was a serious and deep rooted problem.

3 out of the 8 executives felt that it was important enough to contribute to.

3 out of 8 - can you imagine how that would be perceived across the nation.

Just to put that in perspective that is less than the percentage of former women players that contributed to the review when asked.

Women who have already played the game for Wales and moved on care more about this issue than the current Board, the District Council members and the Executive. That's the public perception - and there's the reality to back it up.

There were 40 actions in the Review - how many have been implemented or started.

I would just remind the Board that the headline finding was that this was a strategic, operational, financial, commercial, political, social and reputational risk to the WRU. That's pretty much a full house...

In my experience any review that has such serious consequences like this for an organisation would be discussed in each and every board meeting. We have discussed it once around July when it was produced and have hardly referenced it again.

The Review was trumpeted as being the key component to fix the women's game and that the findings of the review would be made public - yet we are still waiting.

Every Monday on Twitter a certain woman tweets to the world - another Monday, another week where the WRU have failed women with no review released - you are probably not even aware this happens but the public are.

But it's ok because this week when I asked as a concerned NED about progress, I was told - it's alright, I went to watch the women training.

Seriously - that was the answer.

I couple all this to my own experience of being a woman on this Board and I am even more concerned for the WRU.

I have raised behaviour before.

I have had a written apology from another member of the board.

Unbelievably I have even been questioned by the Board about whether I have sufficient business experience - none of you, absolutely none of you would question Henry about his business experience and you know what, Henry would never ever question mine either - but

for some reason it is ok for some of the WRU Board with hardly any business credentials to question my experience.

I wonder what the difference is between Henry and myself for that to happen.

My feelings were reinforced with the recent, truly offensive discussion about reducing the sanctions for a WRU District Council member who had made public misogynist comments. This was simply staggering.

I still can't quite believe what I heard.

Women should know their place in the kitchen and stick to the ironing. Men are the master race.

To have to sit in room and listen to some of you say that taking away too many free six nation tickets from this man would be completely unfair was beyond insulting.

I would say that some of you need to sit down, pause and reflect on what answer you would give to a Select Committee if this evidence was put in front of you. What would you say to the nation when an MP asks - does the WRU respect women?

You have two women with employment tribunals after what looks like years of neglect. You are left with one woman on the board and by the way, absolutely no ethnic diversity at all.

I am the UK Governments Women In Finance Champion - if I don't call out problems whenever I see them then that is a hollow appointment.

My integrity won't allow me to sit silently and I am telling you loud and clear with your best interests at heart - You have a problem.

Set in the context of the world as it is today - racism in cricket, gender equality being a priority, diversity and inclusion being integral to every organisation - you are sitting on a ticking time bomb.

All of the above I believe has been created and driven by my second area of concern.

I am afraid that in my opinion the Board is simply not experienced enough to run a £100 million, modern organisation.

It's not a reflection on the character, or the desire, or the enthusiasm, or the positive intentions of the Board or individuals - just the honest truth about the the skills and capabilities for an organisation of this size.

When Rob was initially appointed Chair he made a commitment to revisit the potential rule change to allow the appointment of an independent Chair. This has not been done.

At the time and on a number of occasions over the last year I have spoken to Rob about the skills and capabilities on the board and the need for a board effectiveness review. I have even offered to assist in setting this up.

A board effectiveness review is best practice in any organisation, whether it is for profit or not for profit. Despite assurances - again it has not even been started let alone completed.

If you ask Cat or Henry or any other NED they will be all too familiar with a board effectiveness review and the value it brings. If there was a skills matrix completed we would look at whether we have the right skills here like digital, IT, commercial and people skills to oversee this business.

Boards operate with directors who can challenge and hold the executive to account. If the board does not have that competence then how can they carry out that valuable function.

Early on at my time here we were discussing the succession for the Chair role in a board meeting. One of you said that there was plenty of experience amongst the people eligible for the Chair role to be able to do this successfully. Respectfully I disagreed then, I disagree now.

I would never dispute that the Board know rugby inside and out, but that's not solely what this board needs or in fact is crying out for.

Just take my own resignation and how it was handled.

I am not looking for any public gratitude at all, I don't need it, but for any organisation to send out a press release without even thanking the person leaving is yet another example of people who don't have enough experience of handling the commercial world.

The media spotted it, leapt on it and that is why I got calls from the BBC, ITV, The Times. Too many people here have the best of intentions but are simply out of their depth.

It is frightening for example, that this organisation does not have a strategy and we have never discussed a strategy during my time at the WRU.

In two years of board meetings no strategic discussions, we have discussed museums but never a strategy.

And finally the appointment of the CEO - this was another example of a really poor governance process that would never have been approved in any other organisation I have experienced around the world.

It just wouldn't stand up to external public scrutiny.

Ultimately I would urge you to look at governance, a board effectiveness review and creating some much needed structural change to get a better balance of skills and experience on the board.

It's the only way that I can see you ensuring the long term future of the organisation.

So to my third and final area of concern.

I would highlight to you all that the role of PRB chair is a voluntary one.

When I accepted it, I was informed I would need to be available for a PRB meeting every other month and be required to attend WRU boards.

As at the end of October, I had attended 84 meetings this year.

84 scheduled meetings in 10 months - lasting from an hour to a whole day.

Almost all of them at weekends, late evenings, holidays.

Again I would urge you to look at the nature and scope of this role. It is simply not sustainable for anyone who has any other significant commitments to take this on.

I assume you will again be looking for a specific and current skillset to hold 4 commercial, experienced, headstrong, talented, business savvy regional chairs together but let's be honest - that's a very hard search criteria on a voluntary basis.

I have mentioned to Rob that you may need to move this to a remunerated role to find an agreeable candidate.

The treatment of the Pro Clubs also needs very serious review.

If you all believe that the flow of talent from the Pro Clubs to the welsh game is essential for the future of welsh rugby, then I strongly suggest you push Steve for a coherent strategy which starts again with the PRA and looks to invest in the game properly to ensure future relevance and success.

In my view the PRA is unworkable in its present form.

So in conclusion I believe you need to

- consider the treatment of women at the WRU
- modernise the governance here for the 21st century
- change the shape of the PRA and the PRB chair role.

Look, I appreciate this probably hasn't been an easy listen and there may be aspects you fundamentally disagree with.

However when any director leaves an organisation it is a golden opportunity to welcome the feedback as free consultancy, open up a debate internally and reflect on whether change is needed and how fast.

I hope it is accepted in the spirit it is meant.

Thank you for your time listening - I remain a fervent supporter of all the national teams ,and the four Regions, and I wish you the best of luck in whatever you decide to do at the WRU.

I will always be proudly welsh.

Thanks.

APPENDIX 4 - Open letter from Hayley Parsons, January 2023

Dear Ieuan,

I write to you today to urge you to take immediate and decisive action to address the issues raised in this week's BBC Wales Investigates programme, but also against a backdrop of a long-standing and deep-rooted culture of toxicity and bullying within the Welsh Rugby Union.

In my role as a non-executive director at Cardiff Rugby, I constantly witness and have to deal with the fallout of incompetence at the Welsh Rugby Union. I believe the board, in its current state, does not possess the expertise and experience to run the WRU, which is essentially a £100million company. As a group of individuals, they are not fit for purpose, and the future of Welsh rugby requires people with the capability and experience to turn this urgent and dire situation around.

Many people have told me first-hand about the culture of bullying and manipulation within the WRU. I was saddened but not shocked to read the comments from Amanda Blanc, one of the UK's leading businesswomen who invested her time and effort in the future of Welsh rugby, only to be disrespected and devalued, subsequently leaving her role.

How many more experienced, professional and good people need to leave Welsh rugby before you take action and say enough is enough?

As a business professional and entrepreneur, who founded a multimillion-pound business that remains in Wales, I am pleading with you to make the right decision for the WRU, both as a business and for rugby as our national sport.

Ieuan, you are surrounded by amazing business professionals who already invest their time and energy into Welsh rugby. They have the desire and capability to help you through this crisis. They sit as non-executive directors within the WRU, they are your sponsors and are in your regions, and they want what is right and fair for the people of Wales, our fans and our game.

Pick up the phone to Amanda Blanc, Andrew Williams or Henry Engelhardt and ask for help, and I guarantee you they will go out of their way to help because our staff, our players and our game are worth it. We all want to make Welsh rugby great again.

Welsh rugby needs a clear overarching business strategy that the whole of Welsh rugby and its regions can work towards. This week's crisis isn't new, it's just brought the underlying issues that we have experienced for years to the fore.

As regions, we have been in crisis for so long that our only strategy at present is survival - to stay afloat in the hope that the governance of the WRU is changed soon so we can make it to the next season. This cannot carry on – we all deserve better, as do our players, staff and fans.

As regional clubs we hold back on a range of issues, too scared to go against the Union for fear of retribution, because of the utter choke hold it has on us. It is akin to being in an abusive relationship, and as such, is unacceptable and untenable.

Yet still, despite allegation after allegation, mistake after mistake, sacking after sacking, statement after statement, denial after denial, the WRU does not appear to have modern governance structures or a proper strategic business plan in place to affect positive change and nurture rugby at a regional, never mind national level.

The WRU's dedicated and hardworking staff, most of whom are a credit to the game and work tirelessly to champion it, are being failed by the WRU's continued unwillingness to accept responsibility for the failures at board level to tackle the toxic and oppressive culture within the Union.

The treatment of its staff, its regional clubs and its dominance and total control over the game has to change, now. The only way to truly remedy these issues is to appoint a new board made up of people who know how to run a Union and a business properly, with a thought out, well executed business strategy, and stringent and clear governance system.

You have rightly called for governance reform as our new Chair. The Board Governance report conducted in 2022 outlined major concerns and issues with the governance structure. Those changes must now be urgently implemented and explained to the membership at an Extraordinary General Meeting. We must restore confidence in the leadership of our game, and I'm sure we will all as regions, commit to supporting you in delivering those changes.

Please don't underestimate our combined determination, frustration, disappointment, shame and despair at what is, and has been happening at the WRU. We will not stop campaigning until change is actioned, until the current CEO and the WRU board is either sacked or resign to safeguard the future of Welsh rugby – in what is a pivotal World Cup year for our game.

I have watched in admiration how the Football Association of Wales has turned around its fortunes with its clear business and development strategy for the future of football, which is in stark contrast to that of the WRU. It puts the WRU to shame, demonstrating how archaic rugby governance and management is in Wales and further demonstrating how change must happen, and happen now.

I believe we have the will, we have the people, we have the resolve, we have the expertise, and we have the passion - and please believe me, we will not stop campaigning on this matter until something is done. The WRU needs to clean up its act, it needs to listen to its staff, its players, its fans and work with its regions to make a positive change for the future.

We are here to help, and I can assure you I have no other agenda than to do what's right for our people and Wales. You have the perfect opportunity to grab hold of Welsh rugby and make it great again and you have an army of people who understand great culture and what great looks like - you have the "best boss in the world" Henry Engelhardt within touching distance of you and many others.

Yours sincerely

Hayley

Hayley Parsons OBE



Anne Rafferty

Dame Anne Rafferty

Quentin Smith

Quentin Smith

Maggie

Maggie Alphonsi MBE

13 November 2023

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