

The House of Commons Select Committee on Welsh Affairs

The Future of Rugby in Wales

Note From Gwlad Rugby

Introduction

1. [Gwlad Rugby](#) is a leading and vibrant social media platform for Welsh rugby and related topics. It has existed in various forms for over 25 years and has been hosted on its current platform since 2016. It has a reputation for evidence-based discussion and debate, sometimes robust but always with the best interests of Welsh rugby at its heart.
2. Its membership includes expatriates in places as far apart as California and New Zealand and for whom it offers a real connection with Wales and Welsh rugby. There is a wide range of backgrounds amongst the members who include experienced businesspeople, lawyers, scientists (including data specialists), academics and published authors. Many of the members are also Welsh speakers.
3. The future of Welsh rugby is a permanent topic of discussion. For over a decade, concern has been expressed about the WRU leadership. In September 2025, a survey was organised as an alternative to the WRU's flawed and self-serving "engagement survey".
4. It is assumed that members of the committee are familiar with the history of the professional game in Wales. For further reading about the period up to 2023, *Welsh Rugby : What Went Wrong*¹ by Seimon Williams² is essential reading.
5. This note is intended to assist the committee's preparation for the evidence of Richard Collier-Keywood ("RCK") and Abi Tierney. It identifies a number of central themes and suggests questions which may be put to these witnesses.

Attendance at regional matches

6. There is a concern that the senior leadership at the WRU rarely attend matches below international level which may impede their understanding of, and ability to take decisions about, the regional game. Each of the Welsh regions played at least two derbies over the Christmas and New Year period.
7. **Suggested question for RCK only: how many Welsh derbies have you attended (a) in the last 5 weeks and (b) since you were appointed as chair?**

¹ ISBN 10: 1912631504 ISBN 13: 9781912631506 [Y Lolfa: Welsh books from Wales' foremost publishing press](#) | Y Lolfa

² Seimon is also a co-author of this document.

Consultation and surveys

The WRU's consultation document

8. On 20 August 2025 the WRU launched its consultation paper, [The Future Of Elite Rugby In Wales Dyfodol Rygbi Elit Yng Nghymru](#). The consultation document focused on elite rugby in Wales covering both the Men's and Women's National Teams at all ages, Men's Professional Teams and Women's Professional Teams and the Men's Academies and Women's development centres.
9. It was stated on Page 5 of the consultation document that the aim of the document was to provide a level of information that would *"enable stakeholders to understand the options being considered and by doing so, allow stakeholders to highlight potential issues, propose alternatives and make amendments which can be carefully considered by the WRU Executive and the WRU Board"*.
10. It was further stated in the document that *"The work done so far by the WRU in defining the models presented in this document has been extensive, but not exhaustive. As a result of the consultation process, further detailed work will be required to understand the operational detail required to deliver any chosen option"*.
11. The document has faced extensive criticism from clubs, players, supporters, and independent bodies for several key reasons, including:
 - 11.1. **Predetermined Outcome:** A primary criticism is the belief that the consultation was not a genuine information-gathering exercise, but rather a way to rubber-stamp the WRU's pre-determined preference for a two-team professional model. The document's structure was seen as promoting this specific "optimal" solution while barely mentioning the other three options (four teams unequally funded, or two versions of three teams);
 - 11.2. **Lack of Transparency and Data Inconsistencies:** Dragons RFC, among others, claimed the financial and performance data provided in the document "contained inconsistencies" and "questionable assumptions". There was a general feeling that the WRU was not transparent about its finances and where money was being spent, leading to a lack of trust;
 - 11.3. **Alienation of Stakeholders:** The proposals, particularly the reduction to two teams, sparked an "unfavourable reaction"³ from a wide range of stakeholders. Concerns were raised that forced mergers would damage historic regional identities and alienate long-standing fans, many of whom threatened to disengage from the sport entirely; and
 - 11.4. **Impact on Player Pathways:** The WRPA warned that cutting two teams would reduce professional playing opportunities in Wales, particularly for younger players, and drive existing talent to leave Wales for opportunities in England or France.
12. In essence, critics argued that the WRU's approach was symptomatic of long-standing governance issues, a lack of trust, and a disconnect between the governing body's executive and the wider Welsh rugby community.

³[Seismic change or a plan B? What now for Welsh rugby? - BBC Sport](#)

The WRU's engagement survey

13. On 1 September 2025 the WRU launched a survey in English, purportedly to “*help inform the decisions we make about the future structure of our professional game*”; a version in Welsh followed at a later date. That survey attracted well-founded criticism in both mainstream and social media for its lack of sophistication, lack of context to questions and self-serving questions which appeared to steer the respondent to a particular conclusion; see, for example [What's in a question? - by Ben James - Inside Welsh Rugby](#) and [A 14-step plan to wean yourself off Welsh rugby](#).
14. The most concerning aspect of the survey was that the questions did not align with the WRU's own consultation paper; for example, nowhere in the survey was a respondent asked about the four models for the professional clubs nor were views sought on the WRU's central control of all rugby-related matters with private investors relegated to running commercial operations under licence from the WRU.
15. The WRU claimed that the survey was designed to consult as widely as possible about the reforms proposed in the consultation document. Given that the questions were not aligned with that document, the answers could not report the respondents' opinions of it. Any conclusions drawn from this data therefore were deeply flawed.
16. The public engagement survey was widely criticised for being poorly written, containing leading or biased questions, and lacking an option for participants to directly comment on the different proposed structural models. This led to an alternative, more rigorous, survey being created by supporter group Gwlad Rugby to capture a more accurate fan sentiment.

Suggested questions in relation to both the consultation and the survey:

17. **Page 4 of the consultation document states: “*As a result of the consultation process, further detailed work will be required to understand the operational detail required to deliver any chosen option*”. Has this further detailed work been carried out? If so, what has it concluded and if not, how can the WRU now understand what is required to deliver its chosen option.**
18. **How was the survey produced? In house or externally? If the latter does the WRU believe it represents value for money?**
19. **Who within the WRU is accountable for the survey methodology?**
20. **Why were the survey questions not aligned with the consultation document? Specifically, why were respondents not asked about the four proposed models?**
21. **Given that good practice requires a questionnaire to ask about one idea at a time, do you think a question that asked respondents to give their opinion on the success or otherwise of both the men and women's team (i.e. two ideas in the one question) would have any value and if so, what insight could you get from any response to such a question.**
22. **Was the alternative survey produced by Gwlad Rugby discussed at a board meeting (as requested)?**

Finance

23. The following has been reported in the media: (1) the WRU has breached at least one its banking covenants recently⁴; (2) in the summer of 2025 the WRU was hoping to refinance £35m of NatWest debt on to a longer term at a lower interest rate with one or more new lenders (3); by September, the then CFO admitted that they were only going to be able to refinance for 4-5 years at higher rates⁵. At the time of writing it appears no refinancing has taken place.

Suggested questions

24. **Why haven't you yet refinanced and when do you expect this to happen and at what sort of term and rate?**
25. **How many covenant breaches have there been and which covenants were broken?**
26. **Why was there a delay of 2 months in autumn 2025 in redeeming matured debentures?**
27. **Do you agree that the above are, individually and collectively, indicators of impending insolvency?**

Lack of clear leadership

28. There has been a conspicuous lack of clarity in the WRU's approach to its proposals. They have moved from four equally funded clubs prior to April 2025 to four unequally funded clubs in May 2025, two equally funded clubs in August 2025 and three equally funded clubs in October 2025.
29. **Suggested question : given that you clearly do not have confidence in your own strategy, why should we trust your final decision on the structure of the professional game in Wales?**

Central control

30. For many years, the WRU's relationship with the regions has been marked by an obsession with control over their activities especially on the field. This seems to be driven by an unproven view that it will improve the national team. This control is at the expense of the third party investors whose money is also required to make the game financially viable. The latest proposals, which go far beyond what was in the Professional Rugby Agreement (PRA25) signed by Cardiff and the Dragons in May 2025 - and withdrawn from the Scarlets and Ospreys - give the WRU total control over all rugby matters and relegate the investors to matters such as catering and merchandise. Furthermore, it has been reported by Wales Online that the WRU expects external funders to buy 10-year licences with a fixed annual fee in excess of £1m while repaying existing debt. From year six, when it is assumed existing debt will have been paid off, there will be a variable licence fee of 50% of net surplus⁶

⁴ [WRU chairman on a new funding deal with the regions and the performance of its hotel and Scale attraction | Business Live](#)

⁵ [The WRU's commercial boss on its finances, the Parkgate Hotel and interest in acquiring Cardiff Rugby | Business Live](#)

⁶ [WRU to centrally contract every Welsh rugby player as full details of new control emerge](#)

Suggested questions:

31. **In which other countries is a similar model in place?**
32. **In your discussions with the owners of the four professional clubs and with prospective buyers for Cardiff Rugby, how many have accepted the principle of unconditional Union control over rugby and how many have rejected it?**
33. **Reports suggest that the WRU expect the licence holders of the professional clubs going forward to take on and repay significant levels of historic debt. Is this a factor in the Union being unable to secure the sale of Cardiff Rugby to date?**
34. **Given that investment in a region is an emotional decision rather than purely financial, why do you think that investors should part with millions of pounds each year on the basis outlined above?**

Governance

Rafferty

35. Members of the committee will no doubt recall the exposure, by BBC Wales in January 2023, of a toxic culture of sexism, misogyny, homophobia and racism within the WRU accompanied by a dysfunctional leadership and a lack of support for women's rugby.⁷ That led to a review and report by Dame Anne Rafferty, a retired Court of Appeal judge. The report made 36 recommendations. During 2024, the WRU published a number of updates on its implementation of the recommendations, the last of which appeared in December 2024.⁸

Suggested questions:

36. **What is the present position in relation to the Rafferty recommendations and specifically the reduction in elected Council members to 2?**
37. **Why have you stopped sharing updates on your website?**
38. **Is it because progress has stalled?**

Annual report and governance validation

39. The WRU's Articles of Association require the annual report and accounts to be circulated to member clubs at least 21 days before the AGM. The 2025 report and accounts were only sent to members 36 hours before that year's AGM as a result of which discussion has been postponed to two follow up meetings timed for 5.15 pm and 12 noon on working days. Those meetings are of little assistance to member clubs whose representatives are volunteers often with full time jobs.
40. On 9th January 2026 a letter was sent by the WRU to member clubs arguing against the need for an EGM which included the statement that *"Independent experts have confirmed ...significant progress on financial and governance matters"*⁹

⁷ The lack of support for women's rugby was subsequently compounded by the national team's treatment during contract negotiations in late 2024 [WRU to apologise for contract row but denies sexism allegations - BBC Sport](#)

⁸ [WRU-Independent-Review-Response-against-recommendations-December-2024.pdf](#)

⁹ [WRU accused of 'scaremongering' in clubs dispute](#)

Suggested questions:

41. **Why did the WRU breach its own constitutional requirement to circulate the annual report to members at least 21 days before the AGM?**
42. **Was that failure reported to and discussed at a board meeting? Did this take place before or after the AGM? What was the outcome of the discussion?**
43. **Do you accept that this failure reinforces a lack of trust in the WRU by all member clubs?**
44. **Who are the independent experts referred to? Will you provide an assurance to the committee that a full copy of their report will be published on your website within 7 days?**

The community game and the professional game

45. In the years since professionalism, the community and professional games have developed into very different entities with different aspirations and needs. Anecdotally, it seems that the community game resents the amount of money received by the regions whilst supporters of the professional clubs question the amount of money allocated to the amateur side.
46. Meanwhile, the WRU acts both as the regulator and a funder of both groups; in the case of the Dragons and Cardiff, it has also acted as an owner of last resort. The present state of affairs is unsatisfactory and contributes to a general lack of confidence in the WRU over and above the distrust that it has generated itself.

Suggested questions:

47. **Should the Union be split into two bodies, each having responsibility for the community game and the professional (and semi-professional) game?¹⁰**
48. **Can you provide an assurance that this will form part of the seemingly overdue governance review to which the Union agreed as part of the Rafferty recommendations?**

The United Rugby Championship (URC)

49. For many supporters the URC is an unpopular competition. In a survey conducted by Gwlad Rugby over 75% of respondents said they would prefer to play in the Prem than in the URC; only 16% of respondents supported continuing participation in the URC.¹¹ Apart from local derbies, away travel is prohibitively expensive and means that fans of all clubs are present in only tiny numbers when playing away. Travel costs are huge with a corresponding environmental impact. The league is dominated by a small number of teams funded to a level way beyond what the WRU can afford even with three teams.

Suggested questions:

50. **What are the annual travel costs for the 4 Welsh regions in the URC?**
51. **What discussions has the WRU had with the RFU and Premiership Rugby about the regions joining that league and what was the outcome?**

¹⁰ The Principality Stadium would be owned by a separate company with the community and professional unions holding shares and sharing profits in agreed proportions.

¹¹ [Gwlad Rugby Survey Report](#)

52. **Does the WRU accept that any prospect of joining The Prem is unlikely for so long as it insists on its proposed levels of control over all rugby matters?**

Senedd oversight

53. The Senedd, via the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee appears to have stopped scrutinising the WRU having taken some interest at the time of the misogyny scandal and also when free to air broadcasting rights were being discussed. This is surprising given that the Welsh Government is a major creditor of the WRU with an outstanding debt of £12.5 million recorded in the 2025 accounts.
54. Recent events have brought into sharp focus the need for effective scrutiny of the WRU and its senior leadership. One way that might be achieved is by a greater interest being taken by this committee coupled with a more hands on approach by the Welsh Government at the committee's behest.

Conclusion

55. Welsh rugby is used to crises. It seems to lurch from one to another. The present state of affairs is especially concerning. Irrespective of any marketing dark arts deployed, the WRU's proposals will see at least one professional region soon cease to exist. Thousands of supporters will be disenfranchised at the end of a process that has been marked by indecision and delay and for which no evidence has been put forward to support its likelihood of success.
56. In addition, there are signs of early financial distress, a lack of transparency around governance reforms and an attempt, ongoing at the time of writing, by member clubs to requisition an EGM to propose, amongst other things, a vote of no confidence in the board chair. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the WRU is at an existential tipping point.
57. Gwlad Rugby welcomes the interest taken in this issue by the select committee and looks forward to contributing to its proceedings and discussion.

16th January 2026

Gwlad Rugby