

CULTURE, WELSH LANGUAGE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

FOOTBALL IN WALES

A Review

February 2007

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Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee

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Foreword



This has been one of the most interesting and challenging policy reviews the Committee has undertaken. It has also been something of a disappointment since one of the key stakeholders, the governing body of football, chose not to engage in our discussions. Despite this we received evidence from over 40 organisations in the football community, and from a sufficiently broad spectrum to provide a credible insight into the issues facing football in Wales.

There were mixed views on the state and fortunes of football in Wales. Internationally Wales has not done well for some considerable time, but in other, equally important areas of the game, such as football for women and girls, and for the disabled, great strides have been made. What football needs most however, is a vision for its future both in Wales and abroad. The Committee was surprised to find no public statement of what that might be or how available resources can best be used for the range of interests in football.

We have made a number of recommendations which cover three fundamental issues:

- the need for a strategy and vision for football in Wales
- the need for the governing body to modernise and gain the confidence of the football community in Wales
- the need for the governing body to take visible responsibility for the overall direction and development of football in Wales.

I hope this review will help to resolve some of the key issues in football in Wales today. The Committee believes that the most popular sport in Wales deserves the best from those who govern it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosemary Butler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rosemary Butler
Chair
Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee

CULTURE, WELSH LANGUAGE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

PHOTOGRAPHS OF COMMITTEE

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- A long term strategy and vision is needed for Welsh football. This should be developed by the governing body and include:
 - i. operational and financial plans
 - ii. development plans for young people, women and girls, disability football, referees and facilities
 - iii. roles and responsibilities of the supporting agencies
- The Football Association of Wales needs to modernise its governance structure and responsibilities particularly for football development
- In the absence of any immediate commitment by the governing body to taking the recommendations in this report forward, serious consideration should be given by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Sports Council for Wales to future public investment in football in Wales
- Progress on the implementation of this report's recommendations should be reviewed within 12 months of its publication by a relevant Committee of the National Assembly for Wales

OVERVIEW

Football is the most popular sport in Wales. It can be a powerful tool for addressing a wider social agenda as well as a focus for national interest. Involvement in the game includes boys and girls, men and women, participating in schools and communities, local and regional clubs, as well as those competing professionally and at a national and international level. The Committee was impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication of most people and organisations contributing to the development and support of the many aspects of football in Wales.

The overall picture however is one of some confusion and lack of co-ordination, with no obvious plan or vision for Welsh football. There has been some debate in the media and strong views expressed in the review about this apparent lack of direction and the impression that the governing body is something of a “closed shop”. The Committee has had no evidence to balance these claims since the governing body has declined to participate actively in the review; we can only conclude therefore, that there are failings in the current system.

In terms of professional football, Wales does not have a good record at an international level, and there were a variety of views about the possible causes of this. There was particular concern about the position of the “exiled” clubs, (which have chosen to play within the English FA structure) and their qualification to represent Wales in European competition. It is not a matter for us to dictate how Welsh football chooses to organise itself at a professional level. However, it is a matter for politicians and the Government to decide how and where public funds are used and to monitor the use of those funds.

We want to see all aspects of football in Wales flourish. This report is intended as a framework to help to realise that.

STRATEGY AND REVIEW

Review

Some serious concerns have been expressed to the Committee about the current state of football in Wales. It was suggested that these would best be addressed by an independent review, and that this should look at the relationships between the national team and the domestic game; the pyramid structure and arrangements for promotion and relegation; the “exiled” clubs; the relationship between the Football Association of Wales (FAW), the clubs and the Football Association of Wales Trust (FAW Trust); the managerial structure of the FAW; funding; and young players.

The Committee noted that recent reviews have taken place in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland which have resulted in reorganisation of the governance arrangements. Despite the lack of evidence from the governing body in Wales, this review has already provided sufficient evidence of issues and shortcomings in the current system.

The Committee does not feel therefore, that anything further will be gained at this time by embarking on another examination of football. Nonetheless, whether or not the recommendations of this report are taken forward, the Committee believes that the position should be reviewed by a future committee in the Third Assembly; 12 months after this report has been published would seem to be reasonable time for progress to have been made or not.

Strategy

The lack of a strategy and vision for the game is of serious concern. Whether there has been a lack of openness on the part of the governing body about the existence of any such strategy, which the FAW has chosen not to share with the Committee or others, or whether such a strategy does not exist is difficult to judge. Its very absence from the evidence however, has underlined the claims that football is not being as well managed or supported as it might.

If it does not exist, then we recommend they develop one in partnership with the key organisations who make a contribution to the playing and development of football in Wales. Although it is not for the Committee to dictate how the professional element of football should be run, it is not unreasonable for us to expect that the sport as a whole be managed professionally by its governing body in Wales.

Recommendations

- *The Football Association of Wales should develop a long term strategy and vision for the development of the game at all levels, and give an immediate commitment to undertaking this*
- *The strategy should be developed in conjunction with and agreed by all the key organisations which can contribute to the development of football*
- *The roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders in football in Wales need to be clearly identified, understood and agreed as part of the vision and strategy for football. We suggest the stakeholders are: the Football Association of Wales; the Sports Council for Wales; the Welsh Premier League and other Welsh clubs; the Football Association of Wales Trust; local authorities; the Welsh Schools Football Association; the Federation of Disability Sport Wales; and the Welsh Assembly Government*
- *In the absence of any immediate commitment by the governing body to taking the recommendations in this report forward, serious consideration should be given by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Sports Council for Wales to future public investment in football in Wales*
- *Progress on the implementation of this report's recommendations should be reviewed within 12 months of its publication by a relevant Committee of the National Assembly for Wales*

DEVELOPMENT

Young players

Opportunities for young people to participate and develop are key elements to the success of any sport. There is a lot of good work being achieved in this area by clubs, the Football Association of Wales Trust, the Welsh Schools Football Association and local authorities. However, there is no overall picture or assessment of the extent to which opportunities are available to all young people who wish to participate in football, whether as part of a club, within the school or in the community.

This is an area in which co-ordination of resources is required in order to maximise opportunity and access for all. We acknowledge the importance of appropriate standards in this area and note that any strategy needs to consider those applied by UEFA. We would hope that any wider plan for development will include as a key feature, more general but robust standards, including those for child protection.

Football Development Officers

The work of individual Football Development Officers is a key element of support for young players. To make better use of these valuable posts, priorities and workload need to be agreed between the local authorities and the governing body.

Volunteers

A key element of support for football is the volunteers. The Football Association of Wales Trust made a vigorous and sound case for a more structured and supportive approach to attracting and retaining a volunteer workforce to match the growth of participation and clubs. The Committee commends these proposals to the governing body.

Women and Girls

Great progress has been made in Wales in developing opportunities and support for women and girls' football. The Football Association of Wales Trust has produced a comprehensive strategy but here again, it needs the backing of the sport's governing body to be realised in full. This should be included in a wider strategy for football. This would both underline the FAW's commitment to women and girls' football as well as placing it within the mainstream of the game in, for example, the recognition and support for junior girl's teams as well as those for boys.

Disability Football

This is another area in which the Football Association of Wales Trust has developed some significant plans. Their five year strategy for disability football is a real achievement and the Committee wholeheartedly supports its objectives, including better integration with the wider game. This would be helped by co-ordinating of the work of the Football Development Officers based within each local authority with that of the disability sports officers of the Federation of Disability Sport Wales. This is yet another area where the authority of the governing body is needed to take the strategy forward. It should therefore be incorporated within an overall strategy for football in Wales.

Recommendations

- *The organisation of, and support for, development for young players needs to be clarified and co-ordinated within an overall plan which should comprise all the key areas of support. These should include support in schools and the community, the academies run by clubs and by the Football Association of Wales Trust as well as the proposals for centres of excellence from the Welsh Schools Football Association. The plan itself should form part of an overall strategy for football in Wales*
- *A plan for the development of football for young people should take account of relevant child protection measures as well as the appropriate standards for clubs set down by UEFA*
- *The future roles and responsibilities of the Football Development Officers based within the 22 local authorities in Wales need to be clarified and agreed between local authorities and the Football Association of Wales and the Football Association of Wales Trust and set out in a wider development plan to ensure no conflicts of interest*
- *There needs to be a more structured and supportive approach to attracting and retaining a volunteer workforce. This should be included in a wider plan for development*
- *The strategies developed by the Football Association of Wales Trust for women and girls need to be supported and incorporated within an overall plan for football in Wales*
- *Similarly, the strategies being developed by the Football Association of Wales Trust for disability football need to be supported and incorporated within an overall plan for football in Wales. The plan should include proposals for the co-ordination of the work of the disability sports officers of the Federation of Disability Sport Wales with that of the local authority based Football Development Officers*

ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE

Any review of a major sport needs to take its governance into account. This review has been unusual in that the governing body of football, the Football Association of Wales, has declined to participate. It did invite the Committee to discuss the recommendations of its report “following its (the committee’s) evaluation of evidence and before the production of the report to discuss its preliminary findings”. Given that this was a formal review of a Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, whose proceedings are undertaken in public, it would have been inappropriate for us to take up the FAW’s invitation. We did however receive a copy of an extract from a match handbook which described the FAW’s five priorities “This is What We Do”, but no other formal written statement or evidence.

This is a disappointing response from the governing body which has a responsibility to the sport as a whole; it cannot regard itself as independent from other organisations and concerns in Wales which also have an interest in the future and development of the sport. The Committee wished to discuss the many issues raised about the performance of the FAW as a governing body. The FAW’s absence from the review has only served to underline the unease expressed in the written and oral evidence. We cannot ignore the evidence from the Sports Council for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government’s principal agency for implementing the policy for sport and physical activity in Wales, and the awarding body for sports governing body status. We note in particular the Sports Council’s view that the FAW needs to embark on a programme of modernisation.

Without necessary change, governing body status could be removed from the FAW. This would have unfortunate consequences for the sport as whole including Wales’ recognition by UEFA. The Committee does not wish to see that happen and believes that if the recommendations in this report are accepted by the FAW, the concerns of the Sports Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government will have been met. Equally importantly it would go some way towards building the confidence of the football community in the Football Association of Wales as an authoritative governing body.

Organisation of the game

Wales last qualified to attend the final stages of an international competition in 1958 when the national team reached the quarter finals of the World Cup. The subsequent lack of success on the international field was highlighted many times in the review. The professional element of football however is not a matter for the Committee although we did note the rather complex organisation of football in Wales and the feeling of isolation of some clubs in terms of overall structure and development.

We also noted the position of the so called “exiled” clubs and their exclusion from European competition as representatives of Wales. We would have liked to have explored ways in which the Committee or the Welsh Assembly Government might have supported the FAW in finding a possible solution to this, but the FAW’s absence from the review discussions prevented us from taking the issue forward.

Development Responsibilities

A main area of concern for many in the review was the organisational responsibility for the development aspects of football. This currently rests with the Football Association of Wales Trust which was set up in 1996 by the FAW in order to ring-fence funding for youth development. The Committee supports the intention behind the decision but the outcome today is that the FAW Trust appears to have grown independently from the governing body which itself should have the ultimate responsibility for development issues.

We are aware that this apparent separation has been a source of debate with the Sports Council for Wales and of concern to the Welsh Assembly Government, not least since some £750,000 of public funds a year are currently made available to the Trust for football development. The FAW have made statements that it does not directly receive public funding since money goes directly to the Trust. We believe this view is disingenuous. As a governing body, the FAW must take responsibility for the development of the whole game and the funding which goes into it, particularly its subsidiary company.

Since the Trust is not the governing body it does not have the authority to take forward some of the key initiatives which it has developed. Furthermore, its apparent separation from the Football Association of Wales has caused confusion about responsibilities in the minds of some of the organisations across Wales with which it deals.

Referees

Another area where accountability is unclear is the recruitment, training and development of referees. This currently rests between the Football Association of Wales Trust and the Referee area associations, but neither appears to have the overall lead.

Despite that, some excellent work is being undertaken by members of the Referees Associations and we congratulate them on their commitment, in particular to the development of young people. There are many problems though in respect of recruitment, retention and training of referees which need to be resolved. This is a responsibility of the governing body rather than any of its agents and, as in other areas, would benefit from some direction and planning.

Recommendations

- *The Football Association of Wales needs to give an immediate commitment to accepting the recommendations of this report; to modernising its governance structure and to implementing the changes within a reasonable timescale*
- *The development of football should be one of the principal objectives of the governing body and needs to be clearly identified as the responsibility of the Football Association of Wales. Whilst it can delegate implementation to the Football Association of Wales Trust it cannot delegate responsibility*
- *There needs to be a specific plan for the recruitment, training and retention of referees. The roles and responsibilities of the Referees Association, the Football Association of Wales and the Football Association of Wales Trust need to be defined, although the ultimate responsibility must remain with the governing body which should co-ordinate the development of the plan*

FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Facilities

If the sport is to develop and flourish, provision of good quality facilities is essential. Whilst funding is something of a problem, so too is the lack of co-ordination and planning in order to make the best use of available facilities. It is difficult to match up supply and demand and the information base ought to be better than it is. Matters would be improved if the key agencies such as the Football Association of Wales, clubs, the Sports Council for Wales and local authorities were to join forces to address the issues.

Funding

There is no clear picture of the financing of football in Wales or, equally important, objectives and plans for using available funds. We have seen the FAW's "This is What We Do" five priorities which contain some financial statistics, but this does not equate to a coherent plan for the future and development of football in Wales. This is badly needed if football is to be, and be seen to be, a professional organisation in Wales. We acknowledge that the FAW has fluctuating income depending on which countries Wales draws in World Cup and European Championship qualifying matches. Nonetheless, we would expect that a rolling financial plan should be in place.

The Committee was concerned about claims surrounding the lack of transparency in the governing body's financial situation. Given its responsibilities to the sport and to the many interests in it, it seems reasonable for the Football Association of Wales to make clear how it proposes to use its available funds to benefit football as a whole.

In terms of funding responsibilities, we have seen a statement from the Football Association of Wales that it receives no public funds. This is somewhat disingenuous. As a governing body the FAW must take responsibility for the development of the whole game and its financial management. We do not consider the current arrangements where government funding for football in Wales is channelled via the FAW Trust, which is not the governing body, to be appropriate.

There are areas where we believe that football needs additional support from the public purse, but this is unlikely to be forthcoming without a comprehensive statement of need and intent.

We note the work of the Football Foundation in England which was launched in July 2000 by the football authorities and the UK Government to provide investment into the grass roots of football. The Football Foundation is match funded by the Premier League, Football Association, and the UK Government,

through Sport England, as equal partners. For every £1 invested by Government, a further £5 is invested in the Football Foundation's work - £2 from football and £3 in matching funding or commercial sponsorship. As the largest sports charity in England the Foundation has so far invested in 1,660 varied football projects worth a total of £390 million. It has another 350 projects worth around £125 million in the pipeline. A further £45m package has recently been announced by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Another recently announced package of support in England is the Barclays Spaces for Sports, a new three-year £30m community sponsorship. This scheme is a partnership between Barclays, Football Foundation and Groundwork, and focuses on regeneration and sports, creating sustainable sports sites for people to engage in sport and physical activities in areas without such facilities.

The Committee is sympathetic to the lack of major sponsors whose headquarters are based in Wales. However we believe there is scope for the Welsh Assembly Government in partnership with the Football Association of Wales to go some way to addressing this.

Supporters Direct

The Committee was impressed by the work of the supporters' organisation "Supporters Direct". We understand that it would like to develop its base in Wales and we note the recent award from the UK Government of £1.8m over 3 years. We believe that the Welsh Assembly Government should give serious consideration to any application for funding for Wales.

Recommendations

- *There needs to be a national plan for the development of facilities for football, including pitches and their availability for the different levels and aspects of the game throughout Wales. The plan needs to involve local authorities and the football and sporting agencies; the governing body should co-ordinate its development*
- *We need to ensure that the provision of future facilities takes account of equality of opportunity and access for all*
- *There needs to be a plan for football funding in Wales which should address how existing resources from all available sources can best be used; it should also identify gaps in provision. In addition there should be a rolling operational and financial plan in which the roles and responsibilities of the supporting agencies should be clearly identified*
- *The funding relationship of the Sports Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government for football, should be through the governing body itself and not an agency*
- *The Football Association of Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government should consider whether arrangements in England for the support of grass*

roots football, such as the Football Barclays sponsorship might be developed in Wales

- *Consideration needs to be given by the Welsh Assembly Government to funding the development of Supporters Direct in Wales*

ANNEX A

THE REVIEW AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee agreed on Wednesday, 19 October 2005 to undertake a review of football in Wales. The terms of reference for the review were:

To review aspects of football in Wales in order to establish:

- the future direction and priorities for the development of football in Wales
- the effectiveness of the current structure supporting football in Wales including:
 - whether it enables delivery for all and contributes to the Welsh Assembly Government's agenda
 - the relationships between the FAW as the governing body and the FAW Trust as the development arm
- Funding and resources for football

The review began in February 2006 with an overview of issues in Welsh football from the Sports Council for Wales. Views were sought from 261 organisations in a written consultation in April 2006. The Committee also held ten oral evidence sessions from February 2006 to October 2006, one of which was held in Swansea and one in Llangollen.

In all the review was informed by forty six organisations and individuals who gave evidence either direct to the Committee or in writing.

ANNEX B

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE REVIEW

Oral presentations can be found in the minutes of each meeting under “Agendas and Papers” at the following link:

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassemcultwelsport/index.htm>

1 February, 2006

Sports Council for Wales - Huw Jones, Chief Executive, Manon Roberts, Liaison Officer

CWLS(2) 02-06 (P2)

23 March, 2006

Welsh Premier League - John Deakin, Secretary

CWLS(2) 05-06 (P4)

5 April 2006

Football Association of Wales Trust - Neil Ward, General Manager, Phil Pritchard

CWLS(2) 06-06 (P2)

11 May 2006

Newport County Football Club - Chris Blight, Chairman

BBC - Keith Jones, Head of Programmes, Nigel Walker, Head of Sport

CWLS(2) 07-06 (P4)

S4C - Gareth Davies, Commissioner for Sport, Rhian Gibson, Director of Communications and Development

CWLS(2) 07-06 (P5)

15 June 2006

Bangor City Football Club - Huw Pritchard

CWLS(2) 09-06 (P1)

TNS Football Club - Mike Harris, Managing Director

CWLS(2) 09-06 (P2)

North Wales Coast Football Association - Brian Lawlor, North West Wales Referee Officer

CWLS(2) 09-06 (P3)

Rhyl Football Club - Joseph P Furnival, Licensing and Administration Officer

CWLS(2) 09-06 (P4)

Supporters Direct - Richard Lillicrap, Director
CWLS(2) 09-06 (P5)

Colwyn Bay Football Club - Grant McIndoe, Company Secretary, Bob Paton,
Chair
Presented oral evidence in Committee

28 June 2006

Welsh Schools FA - Cledwyn Ashford, Under 16 Selector, David Nickless, Under
16 Secretary, Keith James, Vice Chair
CWLS(2) 10-06 : WSFA Presentation

FAW Trust - Jamie Clewer, Youth and Disabilities Officer, Debbie Wise, Woman
and Girls Football Coordinator
CWLS(2) 10-06 (P4)

Children's Commissioner for Wales - Peter Hosking, Senior Policy Officer,
Gareth Jones, Policy Officer
CWLS(2) 10-06 (P5)

28 September 2006

WLGA - Dr Chris Llewelyn, Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure & Information,
Trevor Gough, WLGA adviser, Heledd Tomos, Policy Officer for Leisure, Culture
and Language
CWLS(2) 12-06 (P4)

Ann Jones AM
Presented oral evidence in Committee

11 October 2006

Sports Council for Wales - Huw Jones, Chief Executive, Manon Roberts, Senior
national governing body development officer
CWLS(2)-13-06 (P1)

ADDITIONAL WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM CONSULTATION

Written submissions can be found at the committee's website under "Policy Reviews". Click on "Review of Football" and then "Submissions to Committee", or follow this link:

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassemcultwelsport/content/subcomm-e.htm>

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Cardiff City Ladies FC
Carmarthenshire County Council
City and County of Swansea
Denbighshire County Council
Development of Ethnic Minorities Sports Association
Disability Sport Cymru
Ely Rangers FC
Federation Of Disability Sport Wales Ltd
Football Association of Wales
Gôl Football Centres
Gwynedd Council
Hartridge High School, Hartridge Football Academy
Holyhead Hotspur FC
Huw Pritchard – Private Individual
Isle of Anglesey County Council, Sports Development Unit
Joshua Parry – Private Individual
Llanwern AFC
Mike Davies - independent football coach
National Playing Fields Association Cymru
NEWI Cefn Druids FC
Pedr S. McMullen - Referees Association of Wales
Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
Richard Griffiths – Private Individual
Scottish Executive Education Department
Wayne Edwards – Private Individual
Welsh Language Board
Wrexham County Borough Council