

**National Assembly for Wales**  
Communities, Equality and  
Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League

November 2012



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**National Assembly for Wales**  
Communities, Equality and  
Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League

November 2012



## **Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee**

The Committee was established on 22 June 2011 with a remit to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising expenditure, administration and policy matters encompassing: Wales's culture; languages; communities and heritage, including sport and the arts; local government in Wales, including all housing matters; and equality of opportunity for all.

### **Current Committee membership**



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Welsh Labour  
Vale of Clwyd



**Peter Black**  
Welsh Liberal Democrats  
South Wales West



**Janet Finch-Saunders**  
Welsh Conservatives  
Aberconwy



**Mike Hedges**  
Welsh Labour  
Swansea East



**Mark Isherwood**  
Welsh Conservatives  
North Wales



**Bethan Jenkins**  
Plaid Cymru  
South Wales West



**Gwyn R Price**  
Welsh Labour  
Islwyn



**Ken Skates**  
Welsh Labour  
Clwyd South



**Rhodri Glyn Thomas**  
Plaid Cymru  
Carmarthen East and Dinefwr



**Joyce Watson**  
Welsh Labour  
Mid and West Wales

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# Summary of Key Recommendations

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## Overview

It is clear from the evidence we received that the Welsh Premier League has developed significantly since it was established, in terms of the quality of players and coaches and of the infrastructure of clubs. However, if this development is to be sustained, there are many issues that will need to be addressed, and we hope that this report will go some way to achieving this.

In this section, we will outline our recommendations in four key areas, which are fundamental to taking forward football in Wales:

- 3/4G pitches
- the relationship between the FAW and the Welsh Government;
- the Community Hub Model for WPL clubs; and
- the relationship between the FAW and WPL clubs.

These issues are, in our view, all linked. They can also lead to significant, long-term impact on the sustainability of the league. By putting in place measures to assist the WPL, there will be a positive effect on grassroots football, and in turn, by improving grassroots football, improvements in the WPL will naturally follow.

During the course of our inquiry, witnesses raised a number of issues that are outside our remit, including the structure of the WPL; moving the league to the summer months; and media coverage of the WPL. We have offered views on these issues, but have not made recommendations as these are not matters for us.

## 3/4G Pitches

While the success of the community hub model is not absolutely dependent on having 3/4 G pitches, if a club wants to increase the use of its facilities by the community, for obvious reasons it will need a surface that can sustain that increased use.

We received much evidence of the significant benefits that can be delivered by 3/4G pitches more generally, including the obvious advantages to participation and grassroots football.

**Recommendation: The Welsh Government should develop a strategy for developing 3/4G pitches across Wales.**

**Recommendation: The FAW and Local Authorities should explore opportunities for WPL clubs wishing to develop the community hub model to seek financial support for the development of 3/4G pitches.**

### **FAW and the Welsh Government**

It is only in recent years that the FAW has developed a more outward-looking culture. This is evident in the FAW's strategic plan, published in 2012, and which sets out the FAW's ambitions for football in Wales and the WPL.

In its evidence, the FAW referred to examples of local and central governments supporting sporting bodies such as the FAW. It must be acknowledged that, historically, the relationship between the FAW and the Welsh Government has been non-existent and there is no surprise therefore that the FAW has not received the support that bodies in other countries have received. There needs to be a period of developing such relationships, over the coming years, if the FAW wishes to engage the support of the Welsh Government in delivering its strategic plan.

If the FAW wants support for the WPL from central or local government, it will need to demonstrate that it can deliver the wider policy agenda of supporting grassroots sport and improvements in levels of participation. We think that the FAW is taking great strides in this direction, particularly with the concept of clubs as community hubs, and the academy system.

**Recommendation: The FAW, Welsh Government and Sports Wales need to develop a joined up approach to developing football in Wales.**

**Recommendation: The Welsh Government and the FAW should hold discussions on how support for the WPL can play a role in delivering Government policy.**

### **Community Hub Model**

The community hub model is seen by the FAW as central to ensuring the sustainability of clubs and the WPL. We agree with this view. We feel that the WPL clubs should be seen as an excellent tool to deliver improvements in grassroots football, particularly in participation levels.

In terms of financial support, we do not believe that we can recommend, especially in the current financial climate, that the WPL should be supported directly by the Welsh Government.



However, given the potential of the community hub model, and its potential to support the delivery of wider policy objectives, we think that the FAW and the Welsh Government should explore whether there is any scope for clubs who fit this model to access existing resources.

**Recommendation: The Welsh Government should work with the FAW to develop a strategy to outline its vision for WPL clubs as community hubs, to ensure that the strategy supports the wider vision of supporting grassroots football and widening participation.**

### **The relationship between the FAW and WPL clubs (and clubs in the feeder leagues)**

One of the key themes to emerge during our evidence gathering, particularly our visits to football clubs, was a feeling amongst the clubs and the fans that the FAW and its strategies were largely irrelevant. Individual after individual told us that, despite a number of strategies being introduced, they couldn't see any improvement on the ground.

It might be that the effect of the various strategies and initiatives is not being felt yet, but there was clearly a sense of disaffection amongst those we spoke to. There is a lot of work to be done by the FAW to build relationships between it and the clubs. While the FAW's strategies are impressive and ambitious on paper, they will not succeed if they don't take the clubs (and their fans) with them.

Of course, the most effective way to build this relationship is to deliver results that are tangible, visible and improve the standing of the WPL and its clubs. However, as part of the process we think the FAW needs to prioritise communication and relationship building with the clubs.

**Recommendation: The FAW needs to prioritise communication and relationship building with the WPL clubs, because without their co-operation, it will not be possible to deliver any of their strategies.**

## Recommendations in Full

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**Recommendation 1.** The FAW, Welsh Government and Sport Wales should develop a co-ordinated approach to developing football in Wales. The Minister for Sport should report back to the Assembly on the progress of discussions. (Page 18)

**Recommendation 2.** The FAW and Welsh Government should explore how the WPL clubs can support the delivery of broader policy objectives and the support that the clubs can access, financial or otherwise, to do so. (Page 19)

**Recommendation 3.** The FAW needs to prioritise communication and relationship building with the WPL clubs, because without their co-operation, it will not be possible to deliver any of their strategies. (Page 20)

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should work with the FAW to develop a strategy to outline its vision for WPL clubs as community hubs, to ensure that the strategy supports the wider vision of supporting grassroots football and widening participation. (Page 20)

**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government should develop a strategy for developing 3/4G pitches across Wales. (Page 36)

**Recommendation 6.** The FAW and Local Authorities should explore opportunities for WPL clubs wishing to develop the community hub model to seek financial support for the development of 3/4G pitches. (Page 36)

**Recommendation 7.** As part of the FAW's proposed Community Hub model, the FAW and Local Authorities should work together to ensure that the clubs have assistance to reach all parts of their communities. (Page 37)

**Recommendation 8.** The FAW and Sport Wales should explore how the academy system can be used to support grassroots football. (Page 43)

**Recommendation 9.** The FAW and Sport Wales should explore whether additional financial assistance can be put in place to support young people who wish to play football, but who find it difficult to do so because of the financial demands (e.g. purchase of kit, travelling costs etc). (Page 43)

# 1. Introduction

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1. The Committee agreed on 1 February 2012 to conduct an inquiry into the Welsh Premier League.
2. The [Welsh Premier League](#) (currently named the Corbett Sports Welsh Premier League) is the main domestic football competition for clubs in Wales. The league falls within the jurisdiction of the Football Association of Wales (FAW) and has a membership of 12 clubs. The purpose of the Committee's inquiry was to look at the success of the league during its 20-year history and how it contributes to sport and football in Wales today. The publication of the FAW's overarching Strategic Plan in January 2012 and the appointment of a new secretary for the Welsh Premier League made this piece of work particularly timely.

## Terms of Reference

3. The terms of reference for the inquiry were to examine:
  - the extent to which the standards of football in the WPL have developed during the past 20 years;
  - the competition format, looking at possible alternative models such as a move to a summer season;
  - the development and progression of players, coaches and managers from the WPL to other levels of the game;
  - how the WPL contributes towards player development and participation at lower levels, including issues of equality of opportunity;
  - the WPL's standing within the Welsh sporting landscape and its visibility in Welsh media outlets;
  - the member clubs, their infrastructure and resources; and
  - how the FAW's recent Strategic Plan 2012 will contribute towards strengthening the WPL, and how the WPL will contribute towards the Strategic Plan's aims.

## Methods

4. We issued a call for evidence on 5 March 2012. 29 written submissions were received. The written submissions can be accessed here.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?lId=3280>

5. 16 witnesses were invited to give oral evidence over 4 meetings. Details of the witnesses who appeared, transcripts and consultation responses are provided in Annexes A, B and C respectively.

6. Agendas, papers and transcripts for each meeting are available in full on the Committee's pages on the National Assembly for Wales' website, which can be accessed here.<sup>2</sup>

7. The Committee held public meetings at Llanelli Football Club and Llandudno Football Club. Members of the Committee also visited Newtown Football Club and The New Saints Football Club.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=226>

## 2. Funding and Governance Issues

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### Introduction

8. On 26 January 2012, the FAW published its new Strategic Plan for the future, highlighting how it intends to bring football forward in Wales, with the ultimate aim of achieving success at the highest level.<sup>3</sup> The strategy outlines how each component of the FAW's work within football intends to contribute towards this. There is specific emphasis on teamwork, communication, evolution, and winning. With regard to the WPL, the plan states that the FAW has a vision of a 'Premier League and domestic competitions that have a strong identity within the Welsh sporting psyche'. The strategy also states that the FAW will attempt to 'optimise the standards, interest and coverage of our two flagship Leagues' (the WPL and the corresponding Women's Premier League). This will include continued broadcast presence of live WPL matches.

### The relationship between the Welsh Government and the FAW

9. John Loosemore from the FAW's Licensing Body suggested that relationships between the FAW, the Assembly and the Welsh Government have not been particularly effective in the past, but that he was seeing signs of improvement:

"My sense is that things in the FAW are moving forward. I am an outsider, but I sense that things are moving forward. I hope that it would move forward in conjunction with the Assembly. I do not know whether there has been too much dialogue in the past. I have not been party to any of that, but, looking as an outsider, one wonders whether there has been. However, I hope that this is the beginning of a continuing dialogue and I hope that it does not just stop at chat and that it results in real growth for Welsh football."<sup>4</sup>

10. Asked to comment on this relationship, the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage said:

"They are cordial and constructive and are undergoing a process of change. That process of change is the critical thing. There is recognition that we are interdependent when it comes to the development of football, and that Government is not a cash machine for football to access. There is recognition that we have an agenda and that we represent the

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<sup>3</sup> Football Association of Wales, *Strategic Plan*, January 2012 [accessed 26 January 2012]

<sup>4</sup> Oral Evidence, 9 May 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8009/9%20May%202012.pdf>

communities in which football is embedded and takes place. We seek to be open to the agendas with which the FAW or the WPL may come to us, whether they are driven by excellence or by a need for facilities.

“The impression that I have gained over the past year in this job is that this is quite a young conversation as yet, despite the fact that devolution is more than a decade old. There is huge potential here for getting things right, but people must come to the table with the realisation that they are a part of the Welsh footballing or sporting community and they do not have any exclusive rights over the way that things develop. They have a very important and valued voice, that is for sure, but there is a relationship that has still yet to be worked out between local government, the Welsh Government and these various sporting organisations.”<sup>5</sup>

11. Dr Huw Jones from Sport Wales expanded on this point:

“Relationships have changed enormously. I recall giving evidence before Rosemary Butler’s culture committee some four or five years ago and I was enormously critical, at that time, of the FAW, its strategic thinking and the way in which it had not changed as an organisation. I felt that it was moribund and needed to look at its governance structure and a whole host of things. The Assembly voted on that and there were lots of concerns. To its credit, the FAW has changed. Under the leadership of the current president, Phil Pritchard, supported by Jonathan Ford, the chief executive, there have been changes. That does not mean that everything is fine and hunky-dory and that there does not necessarily need to be continuing change, but it is very much on the right road. We have very constructive relationships. We would not invest in it to a significant degree if we did not believe that it could deliver at the end of the day. We do not invest in people because they happen to be there; we invest in them because they deliver on the agenda that the Government wants us to deliver. The relationship as I have been describing it in terms of the 3G issue and how we are trying to work with other sports and local authorities on the strategic agenda illustrates the very constructive relationship between the Welsh Football Trust, the FAW, us and local authorities. The role of the Welsh Premier League within that is a unique one, and it is unique to a particular area of footballing interest.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

## **The Welsh Government's support for football and the WPL**

12. One of the themes raised by witnesses was the perceived lack of support from the Welsh Government towards football infrastructure in Wales. Jonathan Ford from the FAW told the Committee:

“I can quote many examples from around Europe of Governments working very closely with sporting bodies to ensure that money is invested. Forgive me, but there is very little from the Welsh Government going into sporting infrastructure. It needs to change [...]”<sup>7</sup>

13. The FAW said that this approach was in contrast to many other nations where both local and central government have taken active steps to improve their major leagues as well as football more generally:

“The FAI [Football Association of Ireland] has received 35 million Euros from the Government to raise participation [...]”

“Monies invested into Football in most other UEFA Countries outweigh that of the investment of local councils and the Welsh Assembly Government here in Wales.

“Last year the Irish Government continues with its £110 million ground investment scheme to upgrade football, rugby and Gaelic stadia and the Turkish Government has just announced that they will fund the installation of 350 3G pitches.

“The Football Foundation in England was founded in 2000 and is jointly funded by the Premier League, the FA and Government and invests £30 million every year in grass roots and community projects.”<sup>8</sup>

14. Within the WPL itself, Carmarthen Town FC said the Welsh Government could do more to assist clubs to locate funding sources:

“Apart from direct funding, practical support for clubs must be considered. As most Premier League clubs are run by volunteers, there is often no specialist knowledge in searching for additional funding sources”

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<sup>7</sup> Oral Evidence, 25 April 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s7562/25%20April%202012.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> WPL 19,

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s7158/Consultation%20Response%20-%20CELG4%20WPL%2012%20Football%20Association%20of%20Wales.pdf>

“Clubs need a clear list of funding sources, with additional assistance on how to fill in the application forms in order to utilise these sources.”<sup>9</sup>

15. The statistician Mel Thomas similarly asked whether current Welsh Government funding for community projects could be used to assist WPL clubs:

“Co-ordination is what we would be looking for. Any community projects being run by the Welsh Assembly Government could be keyed in, in part, to the local Welsh Premier League club, which would, itself, be adding money to the pot. That is one way that the Welsh Government could help[...]

“I respect the fact that the Welsh Government is restricted in what it can provide, but, by possibly looking at what is already set up under the Welsh Government, the clubs themselves could be involved in some of those projects.”<sup>10</sup>

16. The Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage responded by telling the Committee that, from the £6 million of funding provided by Sport Wales to National Governing Bodies of sport in Wales, over £800,000 has been allocated in 2012-13 for the Welsh Football Trust. This is used to ‘support coach education, increasing rates of participation and to nurture our more talented young players’. The Minister pointed out that the amount invested by Sport Wales in football was considerably higher than the support provided to other sports, such as rugby.

17. However, the Minister acknowledged that ‘the Welsh Premier League and the professional game in Wales do not receive any financial support from the Welsh Government’. He explained that funding for football in Wales was targeted specifically towards grassroots football:

“On this sort of spend and the priorities of Sport Wales and the Welsh Government, we are clearly about development at the grass roots, the future, and reaching out to groups within Welsh society that have perhaps traditionally not been drawn into the fold when it comes to particular sports [...]

“The Welsh Premier League is something of a unique organisation in terms of the way in which most countries would organise their football structure.

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<sup>9</sup> Additional Information from Carmarthen Town AFC, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8498/Additional%20Written%20Information%20-%20CELG4%20Carmarthen%20Town%20AFC.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Oral Evidence, 9 May 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8009/9%20May%202012.pdf>



It is engaged with the professional game and the primary focus for us, quite rightly, is in expanding the grass roots of the game [...] So, in the best of all possible worlds, I suppose the Welsh Premier League and others could be talking about deserving direct Welsh Government support, but I do not know whether that is necessarily the first priority. I think that we have our priorities straight on this [...]"<sup>11</sup>

18. Dr Huw Jones from Sport Wales expanded on this:

"The question that we should be trying to answer [...] is: what would be the rationale behind funding the Welsh Premier League? What would be the purpose of doing that? We have two objectives, one of which is to encourage greater participation by children, young people and adults in sports, and football in particular in this context. The other objective is to raise standards. Therefore, what would be the purpose of funding the Welsh Premier League in terms of contributing to either one or both of those objectives? The answer is that there are different ways of achieving those objectives: through the trust, as the Minister said, and through local authorities, but not through the premier league. I recognise that we want to see money being invested in premier league facilities but that is a matter for the premier league, and not only a matter for the public sector and us as an institution."<sup>12</sup>

### **The FAW's role in supporting the WPL**

19. Some submissions to the inquiry stated that the FAW itself could do more to support the WPL, especially from a financial, administrative and practical perspective. Others criticised the lack of a strategic plan to establish the WPL as a strong and professional entity and to develop it as a product that can be successfully marketed.

20. Bangor City FC were also critical of the fact that Welsh Football Trust funding for improving facilities only seemed to be available to lower league clubs and not to those in the WPL:

"It seems to me that the Welsh Football Trust at the moment [...] has said that there is currently no funding for the Welsh Premier League clubs and that it is all for the lower leagues. That does not make any sense to me. For example, would it be worth us being relegated for a season so that we

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<sup>11</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

can get funding to improve our ground? Where is the logic in that? There is no logic to that.”<sup>13</sup>

21. Jonathan Ford from the FAW explained why this was the case:

“In the last few seasons, we have directed funding to the lower league clubs. The rationale for that is that when we set out the Welsh ground improvements, we needed to concentrate on the tier 1 clubs, in other words, the premier league clubs, because the licensing programme had come into place. Now that they have managed to achieve the standards for the licence, we wanted to ensure that the moneys were directed down to the lower leagues so that they have a promotional opportunity. To go back to the previous question, if the clubs do not have the grounds available, they cannot adhere to the standards of the licensing programme and that means no promotion or relegation. So, we have directed our funding down to the feeder clubs to ensure that there are likely to be greater promotion or relegation opportunities, because they hit the licensing standards. We just do not have enough money.”<sup>14</sup>

22. In this context, many witnesses were concerned about the lack of success by WPL teams in European competitions, which subsequently impacts on the league’s ranking in the UEFA co-efficient tables. As such, they called for more support from the FAW for those teams, in terms of arranging games, providing facilities and assisting with preparations. Gwyn Derfel from the WPL responded by stating:

“In my time here, and looking back at last season, the FAW has contacted all the European-qualified clubs to ask them what assistance they wanted, and they were given that assistance. Obviously, it was not significant financial assistance, which is what the clubs are probably asking for, but with regard to coaching, help with travel arrangements and explaining what was required, those services were offered. I have already contacted the clubs that have qualified for European campaigns this year and have offered to help them with any assistance that they require.”<sup>15</sup>

23. Jonathan Ford similarly said:

“We offer financial assistance to all of those clubs. Given the costs of travelling abroad to the away legs, we give advances to these clubs on

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<sup>13</sup> Oral Evidence, 9 May 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8009/9%20May%202012.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

their prize money—we have done that for several years, and I have just approved three such loans, and they are being advanced to the clubs that sought them, so that they can now afford their away travel.

“Organising friendlies is normally done at club level. It is a very good idea and something that we will absolutely try to support wherever we can.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The WPL’s representation on the FAW Council**

24. Some witnesses said that one of the difficulties facing the WPL was the fact that the FAW Council only includes one representative from the WPL. This makes it difficult for the clubs to seek the changes that they would like to make in order to improve the league. On a related issue, Carmarthen Town FC were critical of the support provided by the FAW Council to the WPL in this respect:

“There is a lack of respect, in a way, from the FAW [Council] towards the Welsh Premier League. There are excellent people in the FAW, but they were there before the WPL was established they have no experience of running clubs in the WPL, and so we are losing out because we do not have a strong enough voice in the FAW. Until that happens, we cannot improve what we have. We need to make it much more attractive, and it is the clubs that will know how best to do that, not the FAW, in my opinion.”<sup>17</sup>

25. Jonathan Ford from the FAW responded to this by stating:

“I will make two points on this: first, we are an organisation, like many sport organisations, with a structure in place whereby there is a particular council. We are no different from rugby or athletics—they have the same structures. A lot of sports are run in a similar manner, because they were volunteer organisations before they became successful and needed to employ people like me and Gwyn, and so that structure remains. Many of those people have been working in football for 20, 30 and 40 years on a purely voluntary basis. Without them, domestic football would not exist in this country. If those people were not there, running their leagues, clubs and area associations, domestic football would not exist and I take my hat off to them for the amount of work and effort that they put into that. I ask of a lot of people when they are criticised, ‘What are you doing yourselves?’ Many people criticise them, but do not do anything themselves. If those people can turn around and say that they volunteer

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<sup>16</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Oral Evidence, 9 May 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8009/9%20May%202012.pdf>

for this and that, then fine, they are doing their bit, but an awful lot of people who criticise do not do their bit, and so I would say, 'Hang on a second, you need to do something yourself.'

"You mentioned that the WPL has only one representative. I am pleased to say that, within the FAW strategy, which we launched with the First Minister this year, there is an important aspect with regard to the governance of the association. It comes under three points. First, the FAW is to rewrite the articles of the association. Done. Secondly, we need to redraft and rewrite the rules of the association. Done; they come into play from August. The third most important area is the governance review that we will be going through. The governance review should question the idea as to the appropriate representation of football in this country on our council. I would probably be happy to go on record and say that I do not think that it is quite fair at this moment in time."<sup>18</sup>

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### ***The relationship between the FAW and Welsh Government***

26. We received evidence that the relationship between the FAW and the Welsh Government has not been effective in the past, but we were pleased to hear that this issue had improved considerably in recent times.

27. This issue is important, because co-ordination between all of the relevant bodies, including the FAW, Welsh Government and local government, is vital to developing football at all levels in Wales. We accept that each body will have their priorities, but we think that the impact will be even greater if these bodies can work together.

**Recommendation: The FAW, Welsh Government and Sport Wales should develop a co-ordinated approach to developing football in Wales. The Minister for Sport should report back to the Assembly on the progress of discussions.**

### ***Welsh Government support for football and the WPL***

28. We do not feel that, at this time, we could recommend that the WPL should receive direct funding from the Welsh Government. One of the difficulties, as alluded to by witnesses in evidence, with the issue of whether or not the WPL

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<sup>18</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

should receive financial support from the Welsh Government is the very nature of such a league. A league is not one entity, but is made up of a variety of clubs, each with different priorities.

29. We do not feel that the WPL (as an entity) should be funded by the Welsh Government or Sport Wales. We agree that the Welsh Government and Sport Wales priorities should be to support grassroots football, and to encourage participation in children and adults.

30. However, we think that there is a role for WPL clubs in delivering improvements in the areas mentioned above. This would consequently increase the chances of WPL clubs being able to access existing support, financial and otherwise, to take these ideas forward. The FAW's model of the club as "Community Hub" is an excellent example of this. (We give further consideration to this issue in Chapter 3).

**Recommendation: The FAW and Welsh Government should explore how the WPL clubs can support the delivery of broader policy objectives and the support that the clubs can access, financial or otherwise, to do so.**

### ***The Relationship between the FAW and the WPL clubs (and clubs in the feeder leagues)***

31. One of the key themes to emerge during our evidence gathering, particularly our visits to football clubs, was a feeling amongst the clubs and the fans that the FAW and its strategies were largely irrelevant. Individual after individual told us that, despite a number of strategies being introduced, they couldn't see any improvement on the ground.

32. It might be that the effect of the various strategies and initiatives is not being felt yet, but there was clearly a sense of disaffection amongst those we spoke to. There is a lot of work to be done by the FAW to build relationships between it and the clubs. While the FAW's strategies are impressive and ambitious on paper, they will not succeed if they don't take the clubs (and their fans) with them.

33. Of course, the most effective way to build this relationship is to deliver results that are tangible, visible and improve the standing of the WPL and its clubs. However, as part of the process we think the FAW needs to prioritise communication and relationship building with the clubs.

**Recommendation: The FAW needs to prioritise communication and relationship building with the WPL clubs, because without their co-operation, it will not be possible to deliver any of their strategies.**

***The FAW's role in supporting the WPL and WPL representation on the FAW Council***

34. On the issue of the FAW's role in supporting the WPL, we feel that there is a good case for the FAW to develop a specific strategy for the WPL. This is particularly important if the FAW wants clubs to develop the community hub model.

35. Such a strategy should also outline the assistance available to clubs to develop (e.g. assistance in marketing).

36. In terms of the WPL's representation on the FAW council, we think this is an issue that needs further consideration and are pleased that it will form part of the FAW's governance review.

**Recommendation: The Welsh Government should work with the FAW to develop a strategy to outline its vision for WPL clubs as community hubs, to ensure that the strategy supports the wider vision of supporting grassroots football and widening participation.**

### 3. The Welsh Premier League

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#### Introduction

37. The Welsh Premier League (WPL) was established as the 'League of Wales' in the 1992-93 season by the FAW. Prior to this, Wales did not have its own national football league. League competitions were organised on a regional basis, and the only truly national competitions were knockout cup competitions (such as the Welsh FA Cup).

38. With the break-up of eastern bloc nations in the early 1990s, the subsequent influx of new European football nations, and pressure from other sections of the football world, it was felt that the status of Wales's national football team had become vulnerable.<sup>19</sup> Wales was already almost unique in comparison with other European associations in not having its own national football league. An additional complication was the historical legacy of teams from Welsh towns and cities playing in the English football league. As well as the established football league trio of Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham, these included teams playing further down the English football 'pyramid'.

39. Following the establishment of the League of Wales, the FAW ordered a number of these teams to join the new setup. While a number did, others refused, preferring to remain within the English league system. As a result, they were effectively 'exiled' by the FAW and forced to play home games over the border. A number of divisive court cases ensued, before the teams were eventually allowed to move back to play in Wales (although many decided to remain part of the English pyramid). The formation of the WPL nevertheless meant an increase in the number of Welsh clubs playing in UEFA European competitions such as the Champions League and Europa League.

40. Geographically, membership of the league has been generally spread throughout Wales, although there have been a significant number of clubs from the mid, north and west Wales regions. Apart from during the early years of the league, there have been relatively few clubs from the south east region and the major population centres.

41. Some of the main issues for WPL clubs, as at all levels of football, are financial. In order to join the league, clubs must be in possession of a valid FAW domestic club licence which involves meeting a number of criteria which have financial implications.<sup>20</sup> These include stadium criteria (such as capacity,

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<sup>19</sup> Welsh Premier League, [A brief history of the league](#), [accessed 12 April 2012]

<sup>20</sup> Football Association of Wales, [Club licensing](#) [accessed 12 April 2012]

floodlights and a television studio), a youth academy and certain administrative and legal requirements. However, some clubs will inevitably not meet these off-field standards, regardless of how good their playing staff is, which has led to teams being unable to gain promotion to the WPL and clubs refusing to accept promotion to the league as upgrading their facilities would not be practical on financial grounds.

42. Attendances at matches are another problem for clubs, with many potential spectators participating in sport themselves on Saturday afternoons, and others preferring to watch football or other sports at higher levels. Many clubs have experimented with alternative kick-off times in the past to try and address this, although average attendances remain comparatively low.<sup>21</sup>

43. The issue of the Welsh clubs playing outside the Welsh football pyramid also remains. The possibility of these clubs fielding 'reserve' teams in the WPL has been looked at in the past.<sup>22</sup> It is likely that this would involve complications surrounding a club fielding teams in two different national league competitions, both from an administrative point of view, and from the point of view of current league member clubs. However, it remains a matter of debate for many.

### **The infrastructure of the clubs**

44. Despite the introduction of the domestic licence, many witnesses were still concerned about the lack of resources and facilities available at the WPL's clubs. While acknowledging that the situation has improved over recent years, S4C in particular was critical about the standard of floodlighting and television gantry access. Meanwhile, several witnesses have drawn attention to a long-standing problem at the league's grounds, namely the poor quality of pitches. Rondo Media said:

“The standard of the football games is dependent on the condition of the pitches, and although the condition of the pitches of some clubs has improved substantially over the past years, in general, the condition of pitches in Wales needs to be greatly improved.”<sup>23</sup>

45. Some have called on the FAW to start helping clubs out in this respect, stating that the quality of the pitches is a major reason which prevents the standard of football from improving. In its written evidence, the FAW

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<sup>21</sup> Welsh Premier Football website, [Historical Welsh Premier average gates](#) [accessed 12 April 2012]

<sup>22</sup> BBC News, [Welsh exiles' Europe plan pitched](#), 9 January 2008 [accessed 12 April 2012]

<sup>23</sup> WPL 22,

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s7867/Consultation%20Response%20-%20CELG4%20WPL%2022%20Rondo%20Media.pdf>



acknowledged this issue but again stated that the difficulty of attracting match funding for its projects was an obstacle:

“Whilst there is much being done to continue to raise the standards in Welsh domestic football, the club and ground infrastructure is below standard.

“Almost all grounds in the WPL and other leagues throughout Wales are either fully owned or rented from local councils. The costs of maintaining and upgrading these facilities are hindered by the lack of investment from other parties.

“This often means that playing surfaces are not maintained to the level which will encourage further development in playing standards – which will in turn enhance the reputation of our National League and increase participation levels.

“The FAW has investment up to £600,000 per annum through the sister company, Welsh Ground Improvement (WGI) in addition to the other initiatives mentioned, but has not been successful in persuading local or national Government of the importance of on-going and match funding investments.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Facilities and next generation pitches**

46. According to Gwyn Derfel from the FAW, the introduction of 3G and 4G pitches at WPL grounds could ‘transform the fortunes of all of our WPL clubs’ and could ‘generate income to the clubs and enhance community engagement’. He referred to countries such as Turkey, Sweden and Northern Ireland which all have specific strategies for installing 3G/4G pitches and which all provide significant government funding for that purpose. Jonathan Ford from the FAW made a similar point in calling for more support from the Welsh Government in this respect:

“I would love to see a 3G facility at every premier league club throughout this country. That is a programme that I have started to work on, so it is in its formation at the moment, but I would love the Welsh Government’s investment assistance to make that a reality. It would take football forward in this country immensely.”

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<sup>24</sup> WPL 12, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s7158/Consultation%20Response%20-%20CELG4%20WPL%2012%20Football%20Association%20of%20Wales.pdf>

“We are desperate for help from other investment partners [...] If we could have more investment in facilities, particularly in helping us to match fund any funding to do with artificial surfaces and the 3G plans that we are looking to put in place it would have a significant impact [...]

“Our turnover is just under £10 million per year. We are putting good percentages into infrastructure, but that is just scratching the surface. The problem that we have had over those years is that none of those funds have been matched to any great degree. Of course, one of the things that I would desperately be trying to do in the future is to find matching partners through local government and national Government to ensure that you invest in the same way as a lot of other countries around Europe invest in infrastructure [...]

“It will be a long project, for sure, and I understand that. We need to bring everyone together, and we need to ensure that there are appropriate business plans put in place. In the Welsh Premier League clubs alone, many of them already have the facilities, desire or opportunity for conversions [...] We are pushing against an open door here with the clubs and local authorities, and if we can do that together, we will be successful.”<sup>25</sup>

47. The FAW emphasised the huge benefits of installing 3G/4G pitches at WPL clubs, especially if the grounds are owned by local authorities. These could all then become valuable and income-generating community hubs:

“The main costs to LAs will be facility provision because the majority of WPL clubs play on council owned pitches. Due to the fact that many councils now have a decommissioning strategy to close down costly and under used facilities it would be beneficial to clubs and communities and a prudent financial investment to position 3G/4G pitches as they produce a revenue stream and can absorb activity from 6 to 8 grass pitches.

“This 3G/4G strategy with the 12 WPL clubs becoming community hubs for all sections of society would benefit and strengthen community links, health, civil obedience and make the clubs far more sustainable.

“Due to the fact that 3G/4G pitches generate income – no further investment would be required once the 9 year life span of each pitch came to an end. The total, one off investment, to introduce 3G/4G pitches to all

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<sup>25</sup> Oral Evidence, 25 April 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s7562/25%20April%202012.pdf>

WPL clubs, either as first team pitches or training facilities for club and community would cost a maximum of £5 million.”<sup>26</sup>

48. The Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage responded to these points by stating:

“On the 3G and 4G pitches, I recognise that we are talking about an investment that is new and has multiple advantages in terms of the amount of traffic that they can take; they are weather-proof to a large extent and can be available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. There really is something there for the Welsh Government to take up. Things are at an early stage in terms of what I can say here this morning, but I want you to know that we see the advantages of the 3G and 4G pitches, but there is a two-way conversation to be had on that as well. It would be entirely self-defeating, in my view, if there were to be heavy Welsh Government investment in such facilities without the conversation being had on how the community would benefit from what it was to receive. We could ask, for example, ‘Which new kids are you going to reach out to now that you have this fantastic facility and, if you team it up with floodlighting and so on, how will you ensure that women and girls are also a part of what you are doing in terms of footballing in your community?’. All those conversations must be had and must go alongside any kind of investment in 3G and 4G pitches, just as they would with regard to any other capital investment.”<sup>27</sup>

49. Dr Huw Jones from Sport Wales expanded:

“The first thing that we need to do—and we have been working with representatives of football, rugby and hockey on this—is develop strategic thinking on what is needed where: where does hockey need its pitches? Where does rugby need pitches for training and where does football need its pitches? The majority of those will be 3G pitches, simply because of the amount of football that takes place there, but there are strategic issues that need to be looked at.

“Secondly, and this news will not be new to you, local authorities are going to be suffering real challenges over the next few years in terms of funding, particularly in asset management. They will have to look at the

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<sup>26</sup> Additional information from the Football Association of Wales  
<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8499/Additional%20Written%20Information%20-%20CELG4%20Football%20Association%20of%20Wales.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012  
<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

rationalisation of assets. It is within that context that some of these decisions will have to be made. If more artificial pitches are to be created and maintained, then, almost certainly fewer grass pitches will be maintained. There has to be that financial deal. If I were the local authority chief executive, that is the kind of question that I would be asking in terms of the reduced funding that is available.

“Thirdly, and I have discussed this with the FAW, we are very supportive of this, but it has to be, as the Minister said, an opportunity to really transform - not just to bung a pitch down strategically. We have to consider the strategic implications of what we are trying to create and for whom, and also how we improve the infrastructure of football, not just the built infrastructure, but the people infrastructure. We need to transform area associations so that they are developmental in nature and do not just look at the structure of the league and when fixtures are played. They need to be developmental in the true sense. If we can put all of that together, there is a good deal to be made. We will address this strategic issue over the next two to three years.”<sup>28</sup>

## **The domestic licence**

50. The FAW emphasised that the requirement on each club forming part of the WPL to be awarded a FAW domestic licence is a ‘clear indication of improved standards and governance’. It stated that this has ‘demanded an improvement in facilities, coaching standards and financial fair play’ and that it is ‘confident that all aspects of our National League will grow and improve even further in the next twenty years’.

51. An issue raised by witnesses in this context has been the reluctance of some teams in the WPL feeder leagues to apply for a domestic licence due to the costs involved. Even if these teams win their leagues, this prevents them from being promoted. This is complicated further by the fact that only one team from the south feeder league and one team from the north feeder league can be promoted each season, as Bangor City FC explained:

“If you have one club that has finished in the bottom two of the Welsh Premier League and another that has finished runner up in the Welsh alliance, say, and has achieved the licence requirements, then, unfortunately, at the moment, the rules of the FAW state that only one club can be promoted. That needs looking at, in my opinion. If you finish in the

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<sup>28</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

relegation places in the Welsh Premier League, you should be relegated, especially if there is a club ready to take your place. This season, for example, Carmarthen Town and Newtown would have been relegated and, even though there were no clubs coming up from south Wales, Rhyl should have had the opportunity to come up to the Welsh Premier League.”<sup>29</sup>

52. Witnesses at the Llandudno outreach event similarly agreed that if a team from either the north or south feeder leagues did not wish to be promoted, two teams from the other feeder league should be given that opportunity. Gwyn Derfel from the WPL responded by stating that Andrew Howard, head of FAW competitions, is currently preparing a report on this very issue. He told the Committee that this report should be presented to the FAW Council in the ‘near future’.

53. Other witnesses suggested that the FAW should look at the possibility of introducing a play-off system to decide on promotion from the feeder leagues, which would generate more excitement and interest.

### **Media visibility and coverage of the WPL**

54. The vast majority of witnesses were very complimentary about the coverage of the WPL on S4C (through the *Sgorio* programme produced by Rondo Media). However, there were constant criticisms from witnesses about the lack of coverage on other outlets, particularly the news on BBC Wales and ITV Wales and in certain newspapers. This situation is compounded by the lack of WPL teams in some of the most populous areas of Wales such as the south-east and the valleys. As such, many witnesses called on the Welsh Government and the Assembly to put pressure on certain media outlets to provide more support and exposure for the competition, bearing in mind its status as Wales’s flagship national league. In responding, the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage said:

“[...] our role is more one of persuasion. It is more a case of our having the ability, on behalf of the people of Wales, to point out—particularly to the BBC, which has a public service role—that Welsh sport generally is important to the cultural life of Wales and civic society and that, even in very difficult times such as these, the BBC in particular has a public duty to be a part of that sporting community and to cover events with that in mind. You are right to say that S4C really takes the lead here, and there is a conversation to be had with ITV and, indeed, newspapers about giving a

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<sup>29</sup> Oral Evidence, 9 May 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8009/9%20May%202012.pdf>

true voice to Welsh sport in the widest context, and in this case to football.”<sup>30</sup>

55. Dr Huw Jones from Sport Wales said that this was an issue affecting Welsh sport in a wider sense, particularly as BBC Wales will be facing further cuts to its resources in the future:

“I think that, if you had representatives of other sports around this table, they would have a very similar complaint and that, if you had representatives of women’s sports here, they would have even greater complaints about coverage. As the Minister was saying, they have a real responsibility and there is a strategic issue for some of the broadcasters to address. They need to consider exactly what their role is with regard to the coverage of sport. This is particularly the case with the BBC, given its public service role. Of course, this situation will be compounded by the fact that they are going to be suffering cutbacks over the next few years. This committee may want to think about the implications of that for Welsh sport generally. All of the rumours coming out of Llandaf seem to suggest that sport will be a significant sufferer as a result of some of those cuts. It will not just affect football. It has already taken out bowls and a number of other sports. That is a serious concern to us as an organisation.”<sup>31</sup>

56. Some witnesses also questioned the role of the FAW and WPL in this respect, asking whether it was doing enough to encourage media outlets to provide coverage and exposure to the league. According to Bangor City FC, for instance:

“The onus should be on the FAW to try to sell the Welsh Premier League, not just to the media but to sponsors as well. We were in the embarrassing position last year of having no sponsor for the premier league in Wales until the week before the season started. I was vociferous in my disappointment about that [...] So, not only should it be selling to the media what the Welsh Premier League is all about, it should have us as clubs endorsing and backing that. However, at the moment, there seems to be a rift between the clubs and the league when it comes to sponsorship and the media.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Oral Evidence, 9 May 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8009/9%20May%202012.pdf>

57. Another issue raised related to the media was the fact that the WPL's clubs at present do not receive any money from games featuring their clubs which are broadcast live. According to Bangor City FC:

"The coverage from Rondo in *Sgorio* is superb. There is no doubt about that. However, where does the funding from that go? We are talking about media coverage, but surely questions must be asked. There is a signed deal between the FAW and S4C, but we as clubs do not see a penny of that."<sup>33</sup>

58. Rondo Media said that this was extremely unsatisfactory:

"I was astounded when I first became aware of that. My understanding is that, with the new contract, that will change. Of course, it is crazy that the clubs receive no recognition that broadcasts are coming from their grounds."<sup>34</sup>

59. In responding to these issues, Jonathan Ford from the FAW referred to the new television deal negotiated with S4C for the WPL from next season onwards:

"I cannot announce all the details, but we have taken a monetary fee for the rights available, which will be invested back into the league and, funnily enough, back into infrastructure: pitches, gantries and so on. We have to work out the formula for how that works. From that, we will have over 20 live matches per season [...]

"We will have 36 live matches per season. If I look back on the deal when I came in and the deal that I inherited, I think that it was down to about six matches per season. I am also pleased to say that the new tv deals from 2012-14 will see a change of the rights that we have available, so we will not just be on terrestrial tv with regards to S4C, there will be another carrier and, as part of that deal, it has agreed to clip rights. So, in weekly round-up shows, there will be coverage of the WPL on a more widely viewed terrestrial tv channel, and I am pleased to say that our coverage will go from strength to strength.

"We still struggle, as you know, and as I mentioned last time, to gain coverage for our league on other media platforms and in the national press. However, we have made significant strides and changed

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<sup>33</sup> Oral Evidence, 9 May 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8009/9%20May%202012.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Oral Evidence, 23 May 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8365/23%20May%202012.pdf>

fundamentally the way in which football is reported in this country across all levels in all the media that we have available to us.”<sup>35</sup>

60. Gwyn Derfel similarly defended the FAW and the WPL’s efforts in this regard:

“We welcome S4C’s involvement and its commitment to the Welsh Premier League. It has been an excellent partner and we are really looking forward to working with S4C over the next two to three years as well. Coming back to Gwyn’s question about other media outlets, it is a shame that they are not so proactive. Our so-called national newspaper has been offered reports free of charge, because its initial argument was that it did not have the manpower to put up reports of games. We offered it reports from every game, free of charge, and it has not taken us up on the offer. It is about its lack of appetite, not a lack of effort on behalf of the Football Association of Wales.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Attendances at matches**

61. Gwyn Derfel said that he did not acknowledge comments that attendance figures were down since the 12-team format for the league was introduced in 2010:

“Since the inception of the Super 12, the past two seasons have been the two most supported seasons since the inception of the Welsh Premier League, with a combined average increase of 26%. That is significant, as crowd levels in Europe are not following the same trend. I accept that certain clubs are down, but the concept of a 26% increase is accurate.”<sup>37</sup>

62. However, he did concede that attendance levels are one of three ‘fundamental challenges facing the future development of the WPL’. In this context, he says that more must be done to attract families to matches:

“Although this season attracted the second highest attendance average since the League was formed – we must accept that the WPL must attract more supporters – especially families. The FAW will introduce stringent directives to our referees to clamp down on swearing at WPL matches next season in an attempt to make our game more family friendly.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Additional information from Gwyn Derfel,

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8220/CELG4-15-12%20-%20Paper%202.pdf>



63. With regard to the league's difficulties in attracting spectators in high numbers, more than one witness called on the FAW and the WPL to draw up a specific strategy in order to address this issue.

### **The competition's 12-team format**

64. Prior to the 2009-10 season, the Welsh Premier League consisted of 18 teams playing each other twice a season within a traditional league format. Following discussions between clubs and the FAW, it was decided to restructure the competition from 2010-11.<sup>39</sup> From August through to January, the teams play each other twice. Following this first phase, the league splits with points already gained carried over, with the top six teams playing each other twice and the bottom six playing each other, with the aim of ensuring that towards the end of the season all teams are either playing for a playoff place or battling relegation, reducing the number of 'meaningless' fixtures sometimes associated with a larger league. It also enables a mid-season break at a time when weather affects playing surfaces. This is only the second season using current format, and no evaluation of its effect has yet been carried out.

65. The WPL season runs from August to April, but there are advocates for a move to a summer season, running from March to October. This is a model retained by a number of the northern European leagues and also, since 2003, by the Irish Premier League. This has seen the Irish league's profile and popularity rise, and would appear to have led to an increase in the competitiveness of Irish teams in European competition. However, it has also led to difficulties as many Irish clubs over-reached financially to remain competitive. Many observers have recommended that the Welsh Premier League should move to summer football on a trial basis in order to weigh up the benefits.<sup>40</sup>

66. Some individuals who submitted evidence welcomed the 12-team format introduced for the WPL in 2010, stating that it has increased interest in the second half of the season with more meaningful fixtures now taking place. According to Gwyn Derfel from the WPL, the 12-team league structure has been beneficial to the competition:

“The bold introduction of the “Super 12” format has led to more meaningful and exciting football and the fact that the average WPL attendances since the new format was introduced show a 26% increase

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<sup>39</sup> BBC News, [Premier clubs pass league changes](#), 13 June 2009 [accessed 12 April 2012]

<sup>40</sup> BBC news, [Welsh Premier League to consider summer switch](#), 22 December 2010 [accessed 12 April 2012]

while the general European trend shows marginal decline seems to vindicate the decision.”<sup>41</sup>

67. He also pointed out that this is the structure that many European nations now favour:

“Look at the UEFA strategy, where 12 is the optimum number for countries of our size. Over the past three years, many countries have gone down from 14 or 16 to 12, and countries with leagues of eight, nine and 10 have gone up to 12. So, it is the optimum number. It is not just a Welsh perspective; it is a European perspective, and I think that we have to take that into consideration.

“The size of the league was discussed at our annual general meeting on Saturday; there were a couple of dissenting voices, but the general consensus from representatives of the 12 clubs was that it was a good thing.”<sup>42</sup>

68. S4C is also currently supportive of the 12-team format, stating that it is ‘appealing to a broadcaster because meaningful fixtures are guaranteed through to the end of the season’.

69. However, most of the clubs which provided evidence to the Committee did not agree that the system was working. Several witnesses have claimed that the amount of times the clubs play each other in a season is too many, leading to lower attendances and a lack of interest. At the outreach event in Llandudno, for example, the new format was called a ‘disaster’ and a ‘complete travesty’. Many were in favour of a league with a minimum of 16 teams, and possibly 18 or 20. They said that this may encourage teams from lower leagues to prepare to bid for a domestic licence in the knowledge that their chances of playing in the WPL would be improved.

70. In response, Gwyn Derfel said that a revamped league cup competition next season could address some of the arguments that the current WPL structure leads to overfamiliarity:

“We accept what the clubs have said about the familiarity argument this year. We have just passed a proposal to revamp the league cup, which will include the feeder-league clubs, and it will be on a one-leg basis. It is

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<sup>41</sup> Additional information from Gwyn Derfel, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8220/CELG4-15-12%20-%20Paper%202.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

something that we are trying to address. We think that this new competition will diminish the familiarity aspect. We will try to engage the feeder-league clubs to aspire to come to the national league.”<sup>43</sup>

71. Another suggestion put forward at the Llandudno outreach event, and which was supported by most of those present, was for the WPL to be split regionally into a north, mid and south league with the top teams coming together to play each other at the end of the season. Jonathan Ford from the FAW responded by explaining that the need for a national league made this proposal unlikely:

“The one thing that drove [the establishment of the WPL] forward in the first place was the necessity, under the regulations, to have a national league, and that would take away a national league. That was the driving force - that we wanted, in this country, a national league.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Summer football**

72. When the FAW first appeared before the Committee, it strongly advocated the idea of trialling a summer league, and many witnesses have agreed that it should be considered. There seems to be agreement that such a move in particular would benefit the clubs that are playing in Europe, especially since most of the opponents that Welsh clubs face in those competitions are in the middle of their seasons when the ties are played. Witnesses have also referred to the success of summer football in the Republic of Ireland and the way in which a switch to the summer helped revitalise rugby league in England when the game was ‘dying on its feet’.

73. However, some clubs are strongly opposed to the idea, citing reasons such as the difficulty of attracting players, summer traffic, and the cost of irrigation systems for the pitches. As the WPL’s main broadcaster, S4C is also opposed to such a move, stating that fewer people watch television during the summer and doubting whether it would raise the league’s profile. There would also be problems in synchronising a summer league with the lower leagues that played in the winter, as statistician Mel Thomas explained:

“I think that perhaps it would be worth trialling for about two or three seasons, but that would cause problems for the lower leagues, those below the national league. As it stands, I think that they would also have to move to playing in the summer because clubs have to be relegated and promoted from the second division so that you do not get stagnation in

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<sup>43</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012,

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

the national league. So, you would have to find a way of locking in the promotion and relegation, if I can put it in those terms.”<sup>45</sup>

74. In responding to these issues, Gwyn Derfel from the WPL stressed that, at present, the development of 3G and 4G pitches should take precedence over any proposals to move to summer football due to the opposition of most clubs:

“At the moment, I would say that most clubs are opposed to summer football, and because that is the feeling of the clubs, that is also my personal opinion. I would like to see the super 12 system being retained for another three years, as Jonathan said. During those three years, other means of developing the league are what is needed. Investment in 3G and 4G pitches is crucial to the development of the Welsh Premier League.”<sup>46</sup>

### **The Welsh clubs playing in the English pyramid**

75. One submission to the inquiry was extremely critical of the fact that the FAW, in establishing the WPL in 1992, allowed six Welsh teams to remain part of the English football pyramid. According to Dic Mortimer (an individual who has submitted evidence to the inquiry), this should have been a main focus for the Committee’s work:

“Any inquiry into the state of the Welsh Premier League (WPL) that does not concentrate on the fundamental flaw at its very heart would not be a genuine or credible inquiry. Therefore unless the CELG Committee confronts the fact that six Welsh football clubs (Cardiff City, Colwyn Bay, Merthyr Town, Newport County, Swansea City and Wrexham) play in the English football pyramid, and treats it as the paramount issue to be dealt with, then, ladies and gentlemen, you are wasting everybody’s time including your own.

“The one and only reason the WPL has, pro-rata, the lowest gates, worst grounds, weakest sponsorship, least media coverage tiniest prize money and oh, oh yes nearly forgot, smallest support from government in all of Europe is because Wales, uniquely in the world, permits six of its clubs to desert it and play in another country’s competition [...] These are not just any clubs: they are, historically, Wales’ five “biggest” [...]

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<sup>45</sup> Oral Evidence, 9 May 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8009/9%20May%202012.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

[...] we need every Welsh football club to play in Wales, and until that happens Wales' flagship national league will remain a laughing stock. Every single WPL your Committee identifies can be traced directly to this question [...] And yet the FAW, incredibly, DOESN'T EVEN HAVE A POLICY on the matter.

"The very first thing that needs to be extracted from the FAW (it will not be easy) is a statement of opinion, intent or just long-term aspiration, about the position of the six clubs – something that they have never done."<sup>47</sup>

76. Tomi Morgan similarly acknowledged that the fact that the presence of teams such as Swansea, Cardiff, Newport and Wrexham in the English league 'destabilises' the WPL. When these issues were raised with the FAW, John Deakin, the outgoing WPL Secretary, said:

"I came in at the start of this, in 1992, and I have to say that I think that it was handled badly at that time. In fact, I ended up in the High Court when we were taken there under a restraint of trade action issued by certain clubs. If I had been running those clubs, I probably would have done the same thing. However, the situation is that we have a standard of football to provide, and while I would love to see Cardiff City and Swansea City in a league in Wales, you have to be realistic about it; it is not going to happen. When you set your goals, they have to be attainable. The goals that were set pre-1992 were unattainable. Basically, the only way we will get clubs to commit to Wales is by improving the product within Wales. That, I think, would be the only strategy, as such."<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusions and Recommendations

77. A central part of the FAW's strategy for the development of the WPL is the principle of the football club as community hub. This is a natural development for a relatively small league, facing the issues that the WPL is facing.

78. The WPL clubs have facilities and infrastructure already in place that could be of great benefit to the community. These include pitches, changing facilities, club houses, conference rooms etc. Clubs also have other things in place that could assist the development of grassroots football in the communities i.e. academies and coaches trained to high levels. The 'community hub' model can be of

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<sup>47</sup> WPL 11, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s7157/Consultation%20Response%20-%20CELG4%20WPL%2011%20Dic%20Mortimer.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Oral Evidence, 24 April 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s7562/25%20April%202012.pdf>

assistance to WPL clubs – by placing itself in the centre of community life, it is hoped that the community will support the club (not only as fans, but to view the club as a community asset).

### ***3G/4G Pitches***

79. While fans and players have strong views about the advantages or disadvantages of playing on artificial pitches, it is clear that there are other benefits for clubs who have access to such facilities. Such pitches are all-weather and can be used throughout the year. This means that the pitches can be made available to other parts of the community. Local authorities have increasingly sought to introduce artificial playing fields because of these benefits.

80. It is also possible that playing on a surface of a consistent quality throughout the year can lead to improvements in playing standards. Of course, not all clubs will wish to use artificial pitches, but the support should be available to those who wish to convert.

81. While the success of the community hub model is not absolutely dependent on having 3/4 G pitches, if a club wants to increase the use of its facilities by the community, for obvious reasons it will need a surface that can sustain that increased use. We received much evidence of the significant benefits that can be delivered by 3/4G pitches more generally, including the obvious advantages to participation and grassroots football.

**Recommendation: The Welsh Government should develop a strategy for developing 3/4G pitches across Wales.**

**Recommendation: The FAW and Local Authorities should explore opportunities for WPL clubs wishing to develop the community hub model to seek financial support for the development of 3/4G pitches.**

### **Media Coverage**

82. In terms of the current arrangements, the evidence we received about the quality of the coverage of WPL matches provided by S4C and Rondo Media was unanimously positive. Both organisations should be praised for this.

83. The FAW was in the process of negotiating a new deal for broadcast rights for the WPL as we were undertaking our inquiry. We hope that this will lead to further improvements in coverage of the WPL, in particular in the use of clips on other channels.

84. There are a number of concerns about the more general issue of coverage of the WPL across media outlets in Wales. We feel that the coverage of Wales' national league is insufficient, and the fact that match reports have been offered to newspapers, but have not been used, is disappointing.

85. As in many other aspects of the WPL, this is a matter of gradual progress in the right direction, and we believe that, if it is successful, the increased coverage arising from the new television contract will inevitably lead to an increase in interest and, consequently, an increase in the enthusiasm of other media outlets to cover the league.

86. As part of our remit, we have a responsibility to consider media and broadcasting in Wales. We will keep under review the coverage of the WPL to ensure that it is achieving appropriate levels of coverage across the media.

### **Attendance at Matches**

87. The evidence we received from the FAW was that attendance at matches was increasing. However, witnesses all agreed that they would like to see further increases. Indeed, this is one of the main challenges facing the WPL (it is also worth noting that this is a problem many smaller leagues face), particularly in relation to ensuring that clubs can be financially sustainable.

88. We think that attendance at matches can be improved in a number of ways, both direct and indirect. In terms of indirect improvements, we think that the development of the community hub model is central. By making a club a central part of the community (and in particular its social and sporting life), it is inevitable that the community will support and value the club.

89. In terms of direct improvements, a number of witnesses suggested that the FAW should develop a specific strategy to attract more spectators (and, in particular, families) to matches. We feel that this should be considered as part of the FAW's work on developing the community hub model.

90. Once that has been established, we feel that joint-working between clubs and local authorities to increase the visibility of clubs as social and sporting centres should be developed.

**Recommendation: As part of the FAW's proposed Community Hub model, the FAW and Local Authorities should work together to ensure that the clubs have assistance to reach all parts of their communities.**

## **The Structure of the League**

91. While it is clearly not a matter for this committee to comment on issues that are a matter for the FAW and the clubs, we feel it would be appropriate for us to comment on certain issues that were raised with us by witnesses in the course of our inquiry.

92. As we have said previously in this report, one of the key points made to us during the evidence gathering process was that the clubs and fans could not see how the FAW was relevant to them in any real way. This particularly came across on issues relating to the league (structure etc), where clubs felt that their views were not being heard. This is a matter of building relationships and improving communication between the FAW and WPL clubs (and fans) – we expect the FAW to address this.

### ***The Competition's 12-team format***

93. During the course of our inquiry, a number of witnesses told us that they had concerns about the structure of the WPL, particularly the number of teams and, consequently, the number of times teams played each other over a season. We note that the FAW has sought to address this particular issue by changing the league cup competition. While it is clearly not a matter for us, we welcome the commitment to keep all of these issues under review.

### ***Summer Football***

94. Again, we received mixed evidence on this issue. Some were in support of at least trialling this approach, while a number of clubs were strongly against the idea. We support the view expressed by Gwyn Derfel of the FAW, that in the face of strong opposition by the clubs, energy should be concentrated on other opportunities to improve the WPL.

95. However, we think that it's important to keep other options under review, particularly if it becomes apparent that it would be of benefit to the WPL.

### ***Welsh Clubs playing in the English pyramid***

96. This is an issue that some witnesses feel very strongly about. However, we do not believe that it would be useful to make any further comment, as we do not believe that we can have any influence on the situation.



## 4. Player and Coach Development

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### Introduction

97. In January 2012, FAW Technical Director Osian Roberts commented on the standard of players and coaches in the WPL, stating:

“I think we can produce these kinds of talents in the Welsh Premier League and produce them regularly, and thus create six-figure transfer sums for our own Clubs. I can think of several players who have really impressed me in the last couple of years and aren't that far away.”<sup>49</sup>

98. Of coaches, he stated: ‘I think we have two or three Managers in our League who are now ready to step up.’<sup>50</sup>

99. During the twenty years of the WPL, many players have gone on to play for English football league clubs, mostly in the lower divisions, and to represent Wales at various levels. Equally, WPL teams have also fielded a number of players who have not succeeded at a higher level. In order to promote the development of younger players, the FAW runs a regional academy competition at various age levels and all WPL clubs are required to run an academy programme to be eligible for league membership and UEFA funding.<sup>51</sup> The academies then provide players to the Wales national development squad at youth level. The current squad contains two players from WPL clubs within the FAW academy system,<sup>52</sup> with the majority of the squad made up of players from Wales’s English football league clubs or English-based clubs, which could be attributed to the more extensive scouting network and resources of the larger clubs.

100. A related issue involves equality angles and how the WPL contributes towards developing players from different backgrounds (socio-economic, ethnic, disability, gender etc). In this context, it should be noted that the Welsh Football Trust is responsible for running programmes to help develop football at grassroots level, including mini-football and football for different groups, including gender, age, disability groups and ethnic minorities.

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<sup>49</sup> Welsh Premier League, News release, [Technical Director Applauds Standard of League](#), 4 January 2012 [accessed 12 April 2012]

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Welsh Premier League, [FAW Academies 2012/13 season](#), [accessed 12 April 2012]

<sup>52</sup> Welsh Premier League, News release, [Two Academy Players named in U16 National Development Squad](#), 4 January 2012 [accessed 12 April 2012]

## The academies

101. As part of the Domestic and UEFA Licensing criteria, all WPL clubs must have an Academy. The clubs receive around £19,000 from UEFA towards this each year. Some witnesses questioned whether the clubs actually spend all this money on their academies. Jonathan Ford himself conceded that he 'would probably suggest that the money that is intended to be spent directly on academies does not necessarily end up being spent 100% on academies'. He also said that for a lot of clubs, academies are 'still considered as a cost as opposed to an investment in the future'.

102. Another issue that was raised was the fact that teams outside the WPL do not receive any funding from the FAW to run academies, and witnesses have questioned the fairness of this. Jonathan Ford called for more funding in this respect:

"I think academies are absolutely fundamental to the success of football going forward [...] We spend an awful lot of money funding those academies, but unfortunately I do not think there is enough money available in football at a local level to fund them even further. We need centres of excellence and greater academy structures; we just do not have the money to do it."<sup>53</sup>

103. Many witnesses praised the work undertaken by the academies at each club, pointing out that representative teams at all levels can hold their own against representative teams from other countries. In its paper, the FAW further said that the academies were 'hugely important in the process of identifying talent for WPL and will become revenue streams for the clubs when players are sold on'.

104. However, others criticised the lack of an active strategy to raise the standard of football at lower levels. They stated that the academy structure needs overhauling both financially and technically, and that at the moment the only reason why the system exists is because it is a UEFA requirement which translates into nothing more than a tick-box exercise. Jonathan Ford responded by stating:

"We are responsible for going around every academy on an annual basis and a proper evaluation procedure is gone through. As I mentioned, if there are certain circumstances in a club where the academy is a separate entity, often the moneys will go to the separate entity as opposed to the club. I hope that it is not a tick-box exercise, because I firmly believe in

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<sup>53</sup> Oral Evidence, 25 April 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s7562/25%20April%202012.pdf>

academies. We need a strong academy system in order to identify players and ensure that the player pathway works, otherwise that conveyor belt will stop. I am pleased about the investments that we have made and the decision to set up the trust and have a dedicated resource for grass-roots football. The total amount of money available to the trust and the grass roots, as a percentage of our total combined income, is about 30%. The amount of money that we put into the grass roots is considerably higher than that of a lot of comparable associations. I firmly believe that we will see the benefits of those decisions, not immediately, of course, but in the 15 to 20 year period when that conveyor belt comes through and we have a greater pool of talent from which to choose, and when more people are playing football and are doing so to a higher standard. I firmly believe that we are making the right decisions to make that happen.”<sup>54</sup>

### **Coach and player development**

105. With regard to coach development, the FAW has previously told the Committee that it invested £400,000 over the last four years in developing coaches at WPL clubs, and most witnesses have praised the general standard of football coaching in Wales. However, some witnesses raised concern about the cost of developing coaches, especially when clubs lose their WPL status and grant funding is then not provided.

106. On player development, Dr Huw Jones from Sport Wales suggested that it was up to the FAW to decide on its priorities in this area:

“Strategic issues relating to football is a matter for the Football Association of Wales. What exactly does it want from the 12 clubs in the leagues—does it want 12 clubs that only play in a league or does it want 12 clubs that are developmental and are community clubs? That is a major question for the association. At the moment, most of the clubs in the league only participate in the league. That is very different from clubs on the continent that have three, four or five teams in play. They are developmental clubs and community clubs. Barcelona and Real Madrid are examples. They do not have just one team. If clubs in the league viewed themselves differently, there would be more opportunities to help them to develop.

“It is only in recent years that we have seen the development of academies within some of the WPL clubs. Historically, that was not the case [...] The vast majority do not have that type of structure. That is a strategic issue

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<sup>54</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

for the FAW to address: what sort of structure it wants, whether it wants these to be real hub clubs or just clubs that play in the WPL?”<sup>55</sup>

107. According to Jonathan Ford, the FAW’s investment in coaches and infrastructure will continue over the next few years:

“I am pleased to say that we will continue our investment in the Welsh Premier League, and we will continue our investment in coaching and in the facilities where we can. I am pleased to say that we have just agreed with the trust a further four years of funding for the coaching programme, at £100,000 a year. We did not have that four years ago, but now it will continue for another four. I am pleased to say that, for next year, Welsh ground improvement has been awarded a grant of about £500,000. We are doing all that we can with the licensing programme to ensure that academies and coaches are up to scratch. However, as I mentioned earlier, we cannot do it alone. We will continue, wherever we can and within the powers that we have, to make the best of what we can, but of course, there are a lot of other factors there, as I have said.”<sup>56</sup>

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### ***Player and Coach Development***

108. One area of concern, shared by witnesses, relates to the financial sustainability of academies. It was accepted that there was not sufficient funding to support academies to the level that was needed, particularly outside the WPL.

109. We feel that the academy system should play a part in grassroots football in Wales. With clubs adopting the ‘community hub’ model, this will be strengthened further. We feel that the FAW and Sports Wales should explore the role that academies, not only at WPL level, but in lower leagues, can play in developing grassroots football and what support can and should be available for clubs who wish to put such arrangements in place.

110. One issue that we would like to see addressed is equality of access for every child who wants to play football, irrespective of whether or not they can afford to travel, purchase kit, etc. We feel that the FAW and local government should do all they can to ensure there is no barrier for those who wish to play. One approach to address this would be to explore the possibility of establishing a fund to support

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<sup>55</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

young people from poorer backgrounds (including support for travel, purchase of kit and equipment etc).

111. We recognise that there has been significant investment in the development of coaches in recent years, and the response to this from people in the game has been largely positive. However, one issue that was raised was that the cost of attaining qualifications was significant, and that financial support was available only to those in the coaching setup in WPL clubs.

112. If the purpose of developing coaches is to improve the standard of play at all levels, then there is an argument that coaches need to be developed at all tiers. We recognise that the financial resources available for this are limited, but we would encourage the FAW to explore all avenues to ensure that clubs beyond the WPL have support to access coach development programmes.

**Recommendation: The FAW and Sport Wales should explore how the academy system can be used to support grassroots football.**

**Recommendation: The FAW and Sport Wales should explore whether additional financial assistance can be put in place to support young people who wish to play football, but who find it difficult to do so because of the financial demands (e.g. purchase of kit, travelling costs etc).**

## 5. Other Issues

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### Local league management structures

113. Peter Gomer from the WLGA expressed concern to the Committee that the local league management structures for football in Wales needed updating:

“[...] you will find that some league management structures are still based on the post-1974 arrangements and some are based on the pre-1974 arrangements. So, you can have three league management structures in one authority alone. Every year without fail, we get members beside themselves because children in their community are denied the opportunity to play with school colleagues because they live on the wrong side of the river in the same town [...] The leagues have never restructured, and, even if they did, I do not think that it would be the answer. There is a clause within the rule book that I used to get quoted to me on an annual basis, which, in my view, clubs used to hide behind, which is that, if they are not resident in their area, a young person must have approval from the league to play outside the league. It might seem a minor point, but it builds up such antagonism within communities that parents can withdraw their children altogether.

“[...] if we are to move forward again in terms of the development of the Welsh Premier League, all football in Wales and for participation in general, we seriously need to look at the league management structures in Wales, and bring them into 2012 rather than them staying in 1974 when they were established.”<sup>57</sup>

114. Jonathan Ford admitted that this could be an issue, but that UEFA and FIFA rules must be considered in this context:

“We do receive letters with some concerns whereby the boundaries for where people can and cannot play are questioned. However, the rationale for that decision in the first place is to stop situations where children have to travel in excess of an hour or two hours to get to their local club. You then end up with difficult parental issues when kids want to play for Liverpool, say, but live in Bangor. That makes things extremely difficult. So, rules are put in place at a UEFA and FIFA level to ensure that the transportation can be managed locally. That does mean that boundaries

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<sup>57</sup> Oral Evidence, 23 May 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8365/23%20May%202012.pdf>

need to be drawn in certain places and there are sometimes places where difficulties arise.”<sup>58</sup>

## Equality issues

115. Diverse Cymru drew attention to several equality issues that it believed needed looking at during this inquiry, including a continuing need to tackle racism and homophobia both on and off the pitch; the fact that women’s football is still regarded as less prestigious than men’s football; and the need for clubs to reach out into a more diverse range of communities and link with groups and organisations that promote the sport to people who may feel excluded, such as BME people, LGB people and women.

116. According to the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, Sport Wales’s funding for the Welsh Football Trust has enabled it to:

“Support major increases in participation with over 8,000 additional players registered with the FAW over the last two years, over 1,000 of these are from BME communities and 750 are those with disabilities. There are now over 100,000 men and boys and over 6,000 women and girls registered as players with teams and these numbers are increasing each year.”<sup>59</sup>

117. In evidence to the Committee, the FAW outlined what it was doing in terms of inclusion and equality:

“Inclusion

“In March 2012 the FAW signed up with Stonewall’s Diversity Champions Project to promote fair treatment for all. Andrew White, director of Stonewall Cymru said that the FAW’s commitment to the project was “a great step forward and signals the kind of leadership we hope to see more of in Welsh sport

“The FAW seeks to promote an environment in which all individuals, regardless of background, are offered a level platform on which to fulfil potential.

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<sup>58</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> WPL 24, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8148/Consultation%20Response%20-%20CELG4%20WPL%2024%20Minister%20for%20Housing%20Regeneration%20and%20Heritage.pdf>

### “BME Football

“At present we have 90,000 registered football players in Wales of which 3% are from BME backgrounds, Through the WFT’s newly launched Strategic Plan for the Development of BME Football in Wales 2012-14 the aim is to increase the number of registered players to 4% [...]

### “Women’s Football

“The FAW now invests 25% of international budgets into Women’s Football and will launch the National Women’s Premier League for the first time in the Autumn. A female representative will also be elected to the FAW Council in the present financial year.

“The FAW also fully endorses the Welsh Football Trust’s Strategic Plan for the Development of Women’s and Girls Football in Wales 2010-2013. Prior to the scheme there were 3,500 registered players in Wales – the achievable aim of a further increase of 40% is the next target by 2014.”<sup>60</sup>

118. However, while acknowledging that the Welsh Football Trust and some staff within the FAW are proactive in addressing racism and homophobia, Bangor City FC was critical of the support provided by the FAW’s councillors in this respect:

“The Welsh Football Trust and certain employees of the FAW are doing some great work in tackling [racism and homophobia] [...] yet as mentioned previously, the 37 councillors show little interest in any of the above. All clubs in the WPL run a two week initiative on ‘Show Racism the Red Card’ along with an annual event in the community [...] again this is supported by the FAW employees, yet no councillors or FAW staff attend any of the matches or event to support the clubs. The FAW councillors once elected should be mandated that part of their responsibility is to support all forms of events that are encouraged by the FAW and WPL.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Wales’s independent status within FIFA**

119. The statistician Mel Thomas expressed grave concerns to the Committee about Wales’s ‘fragile position’ within FIFA, stating that Wales’s membership is a privileged one based on the creation of the International Football Association

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<sup>60</sup> Additional evidence from the Football Association of Wales, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8499/Additional%20Written%20Information%20-%20CELG4%20Football%20Association%20of%20Wales.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid



Board and the four home nations' historic status as the founders of the game. He called on better Welsh Government support in this respect:

“Politically this is becoming less stable. Moves have been made in the past by Asian and African FIFA members to try and overturn this privilege and was one of the reasons the late Alun Evans set up the WPL – to publicise our identity to the world.

“It is important that we maintain this identity at all costs. This has not been made easy of late with the English FA grabbing headlines – and little support – for a challenge on the FIFA Council. Couple this with Scotland’s possible, or even probable, political independence then our position becomes even more precarious.

“It is therefore important that the WAG recognises this and that Welsh football is looking to them to support – without conditions – this independent status and that it does nothing to undermine the status quo.

“The Welsh Government could do a great deal politically to enhance or support our independent status by really bringing it out when Ministers and various others working for the Welsh Government go to other countries. They can emphasise the independence that Wales already has, and not just in football matters. The Government needs to recognise the independence that we have and that we need to cherish it; otherwise, we will lose our national team and become just another area association of the English FA.”<sup>62</sup>

120. Asked whether he had concerns about this, Dr Huw Jones from Sport Wales said:

“Am I concerned about it? We must always have one eye open to the potential for concern. If you think that this institution is political, you should spend a bit of time in my world and you will see that it is equally hugely political. You can layer onto that FIFA and UEFA, and the politics and even the corruption that has taken place over recent years. There are real concerns about how things are done and how deals are made. There is no doubt that there is jealousy about the independent role of the four independent home nations, and there are many countries throughout the world that would like to see one British team taking part, just to reduce

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<sup>62</sup> WPL 21, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s7341/Consultation%20Response%20-%20CELG4%20WPL%2021%20Me1%20ap%20lor%20Thomas.pdf>

numbers. That story has been around for a long time and will continue to be around. We must have one eye on that moving forward. I do not think that it is a major worry at the moment, and I do not think that the situation regarding the GB football team will exacerbate the situation, unless certain politicians continue to keep on pressing about that type of team.”<sup>63</sup>

## **Conclusions**

### ***Equality Issues***

121. This is a key issue for the Committee. We are pleased with the strategies that have been put in place to improve equality. We would encourage the FAW and Welsh Football Trust to continue their good work.

122. One area of concern for us was highlighted in the evidence from Bangor City FC on the engagement of FAW councillors in such initiatives. It is clear that it is not sufficient to have a number of strategies in place, there must also, alongside that, be support for their implementation from all quarters. We hope that the FAW will seek to address this.

### ***Wales' independent status within FIFA***

123. This is an issue that has been around for a number of years. Our view is that Wales should retain its independent status as a nation within FIFA. We do not, however, feel that it is appropriate for us to comment further on this issue.

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<sup>63</sup> Oral Evidence, 13 June 2012, <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s8799/13%20June%202012.pdf>

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/ielssueDetails.aspx?Ild=3280&Opt=3>

### *25 April 2012*

Jonathan Ford,	Chief Executive, Football Association of Wales
John Deakin,	Secretary, Welsh Premier League
Neil Ward	Chief Executive, Welsh Football Trust
Tom Morgan	Ex Welsh Premier League player and former manager

### *9 May 2012*

Mel Thomas	Football Statistician
Gareth O Jones	Chairman, Carmarthen Town A.F.C.
Gwynfor Jones	Club Secretary, Bangor City F.C.
John Loosemore	Independent Chairman of the Licencing Body for Welsh Premier League Clubs

### *23 May 2012*

Gareth Williams	Chief Executive, Rondo Media
Emyr Davies	Executive Producer and Company Director, Rondo Media
Peter Gomer	Interim Policy Adviser (Leisure, Culture, Tourism & Heritage), Welsh Local Government Association
David Phenis	Community Development Manager, Welsh Local Government Association

### *13 June 2012*

Huw Lewis	Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, Welsh Government
Jon Beynon	Sport Policy Branch, Welsh Government
Dr Huw Jones	Chief Executive, Sport Wales
Jonathan Ford	Chief Executive, Football Association of Wales
Gwyn Derfel	Secretary, Welsh Premier League

## List of written evidence

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The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All written evidence can be viewed in full at <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=3280>

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Neil Gibson	WPL 01
Liam Griffiths	WPL 02
Matthew Davies	WPL 03
Philip Lloyd	WPL 04
Matthew Jones	WPL 05
Gareth Jones	WPL 06
Anthony Oldfield	WPL 07
David Collins	WPL 08
Gareth Williams	WPL 09
Robin Evans	WPL 10
Dic Mortimer	WPL 11
Football Association of Wales	WPL 12
Anonymous	WPL 13
Diverse Cymru	WPL14
S4C	WPL 15
Russell Todd	WPL 16
Jeff Michael	WPL 17
Kevin McNab	WPL 18
Welsh Football Trust	WPL 19
Tom Morgan	WPL 20
Mel ap Ior Thomas	WPL 21
Rondo Media	WPL 22
Welsh Local Government Association	WPL 23
Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage	WPL 24
BBC	WPL 25

Jim Kerr	WPL 26
ITV Wales	WPL 27
Gwilym Boore	WPL 28
Anthony Delaney	WPL 29

*Additional written information was received from the following organisations:*

Carmarthen Town AFC

Football Association of Wales

Bangor City FC

Welsh Local Government Association

Gwyn Derfel