



THE FUTURE OF ELITE RUGBY IN WALES DYFODOL RYGBI ELÎT YNG NGHYMURU

**A GAME-WIDE CONSULTATION
YMGHYNGHORIAD EANG AR DRAWS Y GÊM
SEPTEMBER | MIS MEDI 2025**

CONTENTS

Section	Page
Consultation Process	4
Scope of Consultation	5
The Need for Change	6
Summary	9
The Proposed Optimal System	11
Other Models Being Considered	42
How Did We Get Here?	69
Supporting Information	74
Glossary	88





INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF THE CONSULTATION

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Due to the challenges currently facing Welsh rugby and the sport globally, the WRU Board needs to make a decision as to what the future of Welsh rugby should look like. The WRU Executive has considered various options in this regard and has presented a “proposed optimal system” to the WRU Board, which contains five interconnected elements which are designed to create systemic transformation across Welsh elite rugby.

Ahead of making its decision at the end of October 2025, the WRU Board wishes to carry out a consultation process to obtain views from all our stakeholders on the proposed optimal system and any alternative approaches that should be considered. The WRU is committed to a constructive consultation and is open to exploring all options, including radical departures from current practice, to arrive at the best possible outcome for Welsh rugby in the long-term. Constructive critique of the proposed optimal system as well as of the analysis undertaken of other models is welcome, as are suggestions for alternative approaches which have not been addressed here.

Throughout the consultation, the WRU will formally consult with key stakeholders directly impacted by any potential change to the current structure.

This includes the four professional men’s clubs, the Professional Rugby Board, the Welsh Rugby Players Association, players (both senior men’s and women’s) and the Joint Supporters Group associated with the four professional clubs, the WRU Council, the Women's Rugby Committee, as well as WRU member clubs and representatives of the United Rugby Championship.

A wide-ranging engagement programme will also run in tandem to the formal consultation to seek views from the entire rugby community from fans to partners and sponsors, related institutions and governing bodies.

The WRU Board is mindful of its public responsibilities as regulator of the game in Wales and wants to ensure that everyone impacted by these changes has the opportunity to make their views heard so the WRU Board can take them into account in making its decision in October 2025.

SCOPE OF CONSULTATION

This consultation focuses on elite rugby in Wales which covers the following areas:

- Men's and Women's National Teams at all ages
- Men's Professional Teams and Women's Professional Teams
- Men's Academies and Women's development centres

Additionally, given the importance of pathway playing opportunities to elite performance, consideration is also given to men's teams currently playing in Super Rygbi Cymru (SRC) and the introduction of a similar level in the women's game.

Whilst acknowledging its importance to the success of the levels above it, this consultation does not cover the community game or schools rugby. It does, however, consider opportunities to ensure educational continuity in the elite rugby pathway experience of elite players.

The women's game is a major focus in the One Wales Strategy and a significant level of consultation has already been completed in support of its future direction.

This consultation does not repeat that work, however, it reinforces our commitment to a successful future for women's rugby through the recommendations made in relevant areas of the rugby ecosystem.

The work done so far by the WRU in defining the models presented in this document has been extensive, but not exhaustive. As a result of the consultation process, further detailed work will be required to understand the operational detail required to deliver any chosen option.

The aim is that the level of information provided in this document will enable stakeholders to understand the options being considered and by doing so, allow stakeholders to highlight potential issues, propose alternatives and make amendments which can be carefully considered by the WRU Executive and the WRU Board.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Globally, rugby is facing challenging headwinds across finances, player participation and fan engagement (see the Supporting Analysis section). These have been felt acutely in Wales, particularly in our professional clubs with no obvious path towards common goals of on-field success and profitability.

It's clear that the Welsh elite rugby system is no longer achieving its aims. Despite the huge passion and enthusiasm for the game in Wales, and the enduring commitment at grass roots level, challenges remain at the elite level.

In the last two years the finances of the WRU have been significantly improved and we are now in a place of making decisions about where we invest for the longer-term future. Over the last couple of years we have made some significant new investments into our pathways including SRC and the Women's game.

However, the performance of the Men's and Women's senior teams and professional clubs has been poor and the gap to our peers is widening. As you will see from this consultation document, including the Supporting Analysis section, there are many reasons for this and significantly improving our performance will require significant changes and a multi-faceted approach.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

In summary:

- Our professional clubs are not funded at a level where the men's teams can compete and we need to form new competitive women's teams.
- Our male playing talent is spread out over too many clubs so our key players do not play together enough at the right competitive levels.
- There is too large a gap between the standard of the SRC and our professional men's teams and there is no women's equivalent to the SRC.
- The current structure between the WRU and the men's professional clubs does not deliver an aligned approach to rugby which is essential for the performance of the men's national team.
- The current PRA style arrangements are not conducive to a cohesive and collaborative structure.
- Significant investment is needed in facilities, development centres, support services and coaching to improve the inputs to our elite teams.
- In a nation where proximity should be a strength and the professional game has a structure that requires teamwork, it is clear that we have collectively failed to collaborate.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

The game in Wales is at a crossroads and we now need to make decisions to ensure the entire system is organised to make success inevitable, not just in the short-term, but for the foreseeable future.

Our response to the challenges we face could take one of two broad forms:

1. Incremental Structural Change: If we believe our system is fundamentally sound, we may choose to make small changes in key areas to improve efficiency and competitiveness. This was the approach taken in the professional pillar of the One Wales Strategy.
2. Transformational Systemic Change: If we believe our system has some serious challenges and needs to be significantly better connected to improve performances, we may choose a more radical transformation to create the opportunity for a step-change in our fortunes.

This consultation process is designed to elicit your feedback on the work we have done to evaluate options in a range between these two approaches.

SUMMARY

As part of the conversation, the consultation will explore the high-performance benefits, financial sustainability, and feasibility of investing substantially in the rugby ecosystem in Wales and changes required to the four-professional club model. As a part of this, the future professional club model will be viewed through the lens of needing to secure on-field success and the long-term financial sustainability of the whole game in Wales. The models being presented and considered, as set out later in this consultation document, are:

- Model A, Four Professional clubs with unequal funding
- Model B, Three Professional clubs with equal funding
- Model C, Three Professional clubs with unequal funding
- Model D, Two Professional clubs with equal funding

Current analysis and evidence suggests – subject to the consultation – that the optimal system will likely be best based on Model D, which focusses playing talent and resources into two professional clubs, each in turn running two professional teams - one men's and one women's side. The proposed system would have the single goal of creating a 'winning-Wales' across the game.

We therefore address such a possibility in the proposed optimal system, on which we seek stakeholders' input. However, this is subject to this consultation and to stakeholders' input on the other models as well, and we recognise that there are alternatives including investing less in some of the wider systems changes which would then make choosing other models appropriate.

If the two-club model is chosen it would release significant investment and reduce commercial risk and dependency on private investment/funding which together with the substantial improvement in the WRU's financial position over the last two years, would be used to enhance the existing semi-professional Super Rygbi Cymru league, narrowing the gap between Wales' leading heritage clubs in the SRC and the elite professional game. Crucially, it would also provide funding to accelerate the growth of the women's game whilst also boosting the academy structure and player pathways feeding into the professional teams.

SUMMARY

In addition, the creation of a national campus is a central element of the proposed optimal system. This would be an aspirational, world-class environment, designed for innovation and collaboration, becoming the training base for national teams, national academies and the two professional clubs.

Key features of The Proposed Optimal System:

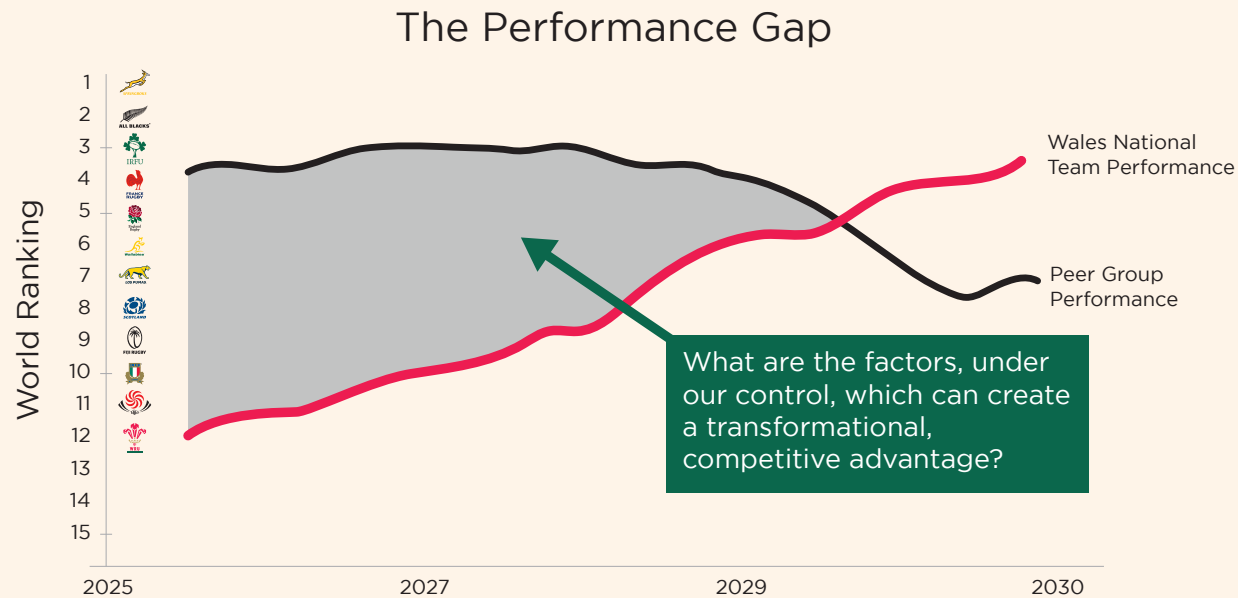
- **Two Clubs ; Four Professional Teams:** Each club hosting a professional men's and a professional women's team (locations and names to be determined), set-up and funded for excellence and to win at the highest level
- **Aligned Rugby Systems & Leadership:** A departure from Professional Rugby Agreement arrangements to a unified structure of management, contracting and decision-making to eliminate friction and accelerate a focus on rugby performance. Predominantly WQPs, higher standard NWQPs and greater incentives for WQPs to play in Wales
- **An Inspirational National Campus to Supercharge Collaboration & Alignment:** A world-class facility for all elite teams and staff designed to create sustainable competitive advantage through proximity and shared excellence
- **A New Approach to Funding:** WRU would fund all or most of the rugby operations with private investors owning the clubs and delivering profitable commercial club operations through medium and long-term operating licences
- **Enhanced Pathways, Competitions, Academies and Coach Development:** Investments to enhance Super Rygbi Cymru, a new domestic women's competition, national academies and expanded Player Development Centres. A significant additional focus on the development of elite coaches and staff to create a robust pipeline of future talent



THE PROPOSED OPTIMAL SYSTEM

WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER AND DIFFERENTLY TO MAKE SUCCESS INEVITABLE?

LONG TERM SUCCESS OCCURS IN A DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT WHICH WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE AND RESPOND TO



- To fulfil our ambitions, we cannot solely focus on our own improvement, we must also 'out-improve' our competitors who are also trying to get better
- If we simply copy other systems, we may see short term improvements, but we are unlikely to create the transformational change in performance we crave
- Exceptional performance often results from the considered and bold embrace of the opportunity to do things differently, and, in pursuit of audacious goals, seeking to lead the game

THE PROPOSED OPTIMAL SYSTEM: TRANSFORMATIONAL SYSTEMIC CHANGE

In response to an evolving landscape surrounding Welsh rugby and extensive evaluation of current challenges and global benchmarks; we propose a radical and systemic change.

The proposed optimal system focuses on the interconnected nature of Welsh rugby and the opportunity to drive a step-change in the fortunes of both the men's and women's games over the medium to long term. It brings together a set of mutually reinforcing elements, tailored specifically to the Welsh context and deployed in a balanced way to maximise performance across the whole system. This new approach will:

- Deliver a step-change in elite rugby performance to enable teams to win consistently at international and club level which in turn will inspire fans, future players and the nation
- Be uniquely and proudly Welsh, leveraging the advantages of our passion for rugby and small nation geography to outperform our capacity
- Include the entire men's and women's rugby ecosystem, addressing deficiencies and amplifying strengths to create long-term, sustainable and defensible competitive advantage
- Enable Wales to become the world's leading rugby talent development system, creating the highest quality players, coaches and staff to support long term success

THE PROPOSED OPTIMAL SYSTEM WOULD STRATEGICALLY ALLOCATE WRU FUNDING ACROSS THE WHOLE ELITE RUGBY SYSTEM TO DRIVE AND SUSTAIN SUCCESS

A model of two professional men's clubs, both funded for excellence, would enable the release of significant levels of funding over five years to deliver the elements in the proposed optimal system. The ambition of the proposed optimal system is to deliver systemic transformational change for Welsh rugby and enable performance expectations to be raised as follows:

- **From last place in the Men's and Women's Six Nations, to winning**
- **From low ranked teams to genuine 'wild card' World Cup winners**
- **Our men's and women's professional clubs being recognised as amongst the elite and competing at the very highest level for domestic and European titles**
- **The Welsh system becoming world leading in talent development**

ELEMENTS IN THE PROPOSED OPTIMAL SYSTEM

The proposed optimal system for Welsh elite rugby, contains five interdependent elements which work together to improve performance at the top of the game, and create the pipeline and pathways for emerging talent to thrive. The elements below are explained in the following pages:

- A. Two Clubs – each made up of one Professional Men's team and one Professional Women's team**
- B. Aligned Rugby Systems & Leadership**
- C. An Inspirational National Campus to Supercharge Collaboration and Alignment**
- D. A New Approach to Funding**
- E. Enhanced Pathways, Competitions, Academies and Coach Development**

THE PROPOSED OPTIMAL SYSTEM WOULD ENABLE SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONAL ANNUAL INVESTMENT IN FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS OF A RUGBY ECOSYSTEM DESIGNED FOR LONG TERM COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

WORLD CLASS NATIONAL TEAMS



NATIONAL ACADEMIES



WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL CLUBS



NATIONAL CAMPUS



ENHANCED SRC & WOMEN'S COMPETITIONS



ENHANCED PATHWAYS & PLAYER DEVELOPMENT



COACH DEVELOPMENT





**A. TWO CLUBS – EACH MADE UP
OF ONE PROFESSIONAL MEN'S
TEAM AND ONE PROFESSIONAL
WOMEN'S TEAM**

TWO CLUBS, FOUR ELITE TEAMS, SET UP FOR EXCELLENCE TO WIN AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL

At its heart, the proposed optimal system is designed to create success at the highest levels of competition through a combination of thoughtful investment into key elements within a connected system which realises more than the sum of its individual parts.

In this system, we propose two professional clubs, each hosting a men's and women's professional team.

These clubs and teams will be funded to attract and retain the best available talent both on and off the field. Through the combination of talent, funding and rugby ecosystem design, it will enable teams to outperform their inherent capacity compared to other nations.

The proposed optimal system for these teams will enable squad composition to be redefined in favour of Welsh talent and create truly elite daily training environments which accelerate player development at all ages. In this system, we propose only the highest standard of non-Welsh qualified players and a progressive reconsideration of player eligibility criteria which acknowledges the balance between a newly attractive and elite Welsh system and specific development opportunities overseas at key moments.

The ambitions of this system are for Welsh teams to win domestic and senior European titles, and by competing and excelling in the latter stages of elite competitions, provide an enduring virtuous player development environment which supports the ambitions of national teams.

TWO MEN'S PROFESSIONAL CLUBS SET UP TO WIN AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL

The proposed optimal model significantly elevates funding to the two men's professional clubs, facilitating a radically different profile of talent and support. However, the club investments themselves are only one element of the wider system which is designed to allow Welsh teams to spend relatively less yet perform better than any other rugby system.

Element	Men's Teams
Squad size	50 Senior Squad + Senior National Academy players
Squad Budget	Circa. £7.8m enabling attraction and retention of top Welsh talent
Profile of talent	Predominately Welsh qualified talent. Only highest standard NWQP
Support staff	Best quality coaching & support staff benchmarked against top European leagues and further enabled by other elements of the optimal model
Daily Training Environment	High challenge and high support – enhanced competitiveness drives faster development of technical and tactical competency
Academies & Pathway	The teams will be fed by the Men's National Academy (with no club academies) supported by local Player Development centres (14 – 18) aligned to SRC clubs

To see the evaluation of other Men's club models please go to slide 47

TWO WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL CLUBS SET UP TO WIN AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL

The proposed optimal model aligns strongly to the previously developed strategy for women's professional rugby but further elevates funding to the two women's professional clubs. In common with the philosophy of the proposed optimal system, the club investments themselves are one element of a more deeply interconnected system which is designed to allow Welsh Women's teams to outperform their peers in other rugby systems

Element	Women's Teams
Squad size	40 (as currently set by the Celtic Challenge Rules & Regulations)
Squad Budget	Benchmarked to compete with clubs in England (considered to be best current women's League)
Profile of talent	Predominately Welsh qualified talent. Only highest standard NWQP if regulations allow
Support staff	Best quality coaching & support staff benchmarked to top English league
Daily Training Environment	High challenge and high support – enhanced competitiveness drives faster development of technical and tactical competency
Academy & Pathway	Teams will be supported by the National Academy and PDC Network.



B. ALIGNED RUGBY SYSTEMS AND LEADERSHIP

THE CURRENT CONTRACTING ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL CLUBS AND WRU ARE INEFFICIENT AND CREATE MISALIGNMENT AND FRICTION

Although a range of options are available to facilitate the management of players and support staff within the context of club and country needs, our belief, supported by experience tells us that PRA style arrangements are a particularly challenging choice due to an inherent misalignment between stakeholder objectives. Such agreements require detailed, often onerous, regulation to address practical manifestations of misalignment in key performance decisions around issues such as selection, injury management and player development.

The operationalisation and management of these agreements involves significant stakeholder resources and goodwill, creates bureaucracy, slowing decision-making and advocates compromise over optimisation. Whilst on the surface trivial, the cumulative effects of the inherent friction in these arrangements is a significant competitive disadvantage compared to more integrated systems.

The apparent success of systems where such agreements are in place, is often obfuscated by the volume of available talent which masks much of the negative effects. The commentary and daily experience of key staff in such systems reflects the persistence of issues in communication, decision-making and alignment.

In small nation systems, the frictional effects of inefficient processes and decision-making between stakeholders are much more acutely felt, draining resources from all parties and distracting focus from performance. Recognition of this effect has led to the development of highly integrated models such as that in Ireland and to a lesser extent, New Zealand, which have been highly effective.

THE PROPOSED OPTIMAL SYSTEM HAS ALIGNED RUGBY LEADERSHIP & DECISION-MAKING AT ITS HEART

In the proposed optimal system, rugby leadership and decision-making at international, professional club, semi-professional and pathway levels are designed to remove friction, promote alignment of objectives and maximise the efficient deployment of resources.

The key enabling features of this proposed system are:

- A single, aligned strategy and operational plan across all elite rugby
- Unified management and contracting of all rugby and performance support staff to align philosophy and approach and promote teamwork under a single Welsh rugby DNA
- Unified management of contracting of all elite players (professional men's and women's teams, national team, and national academy) to align decisions on selection and talent development with players and clubs
- A central unit with oversight of elite talent identification and development

**Men's & Women's
National Teams**

**Men's & Women's
Elite Clubs**

**Men's & Women's
National Academies**

**Pathway investments
competitions, staff,
development centres,
educational collaborations**



C. AN INSPIRATIONAL NATIONAL CAMPUS TO SUPERCHARGE COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT

OUT-PERFORMANCE THROUGH COLLABORATION AND PROXIMITY BY DESIGN

Despite the geographical advantages of proximity between professional clubs and significant efforts by all stakeholders over the years, true collaboration in elite rugby strategy and operations in Wales has been elusive. The failure to optimise collaboration represents a missed opportunity for Welsh rugby, requiring a small nation to operate more like a larger one such as England, without the mitigating advantages of large volumes of player talent.

Several of the other elements of the proposed optimal system, such as aligned rugby strategy and leadership replicate approaches used by other nations and whilst adopting them is an important step forwards, they do not provide any distinct competitive advantage for Welsh rugby.

In order to amplify the advantages of proximity and to make collaboration between elite stakeholders a true competitive advantage, we propose to build a unique national campus as an essential component in creating a step-change in capability through compounding advantages present in other elements of the proposal.

The national campus would create an aspirational world class environment for rugby providing unrivalled access to elite facilities and people in a purposefully collaborative place designed to outperform its separate elements. It would be a uniquely Welsh environmental accelerator that other top-tier nations would find difficult to replicate, creating sustainable competitive advantage.

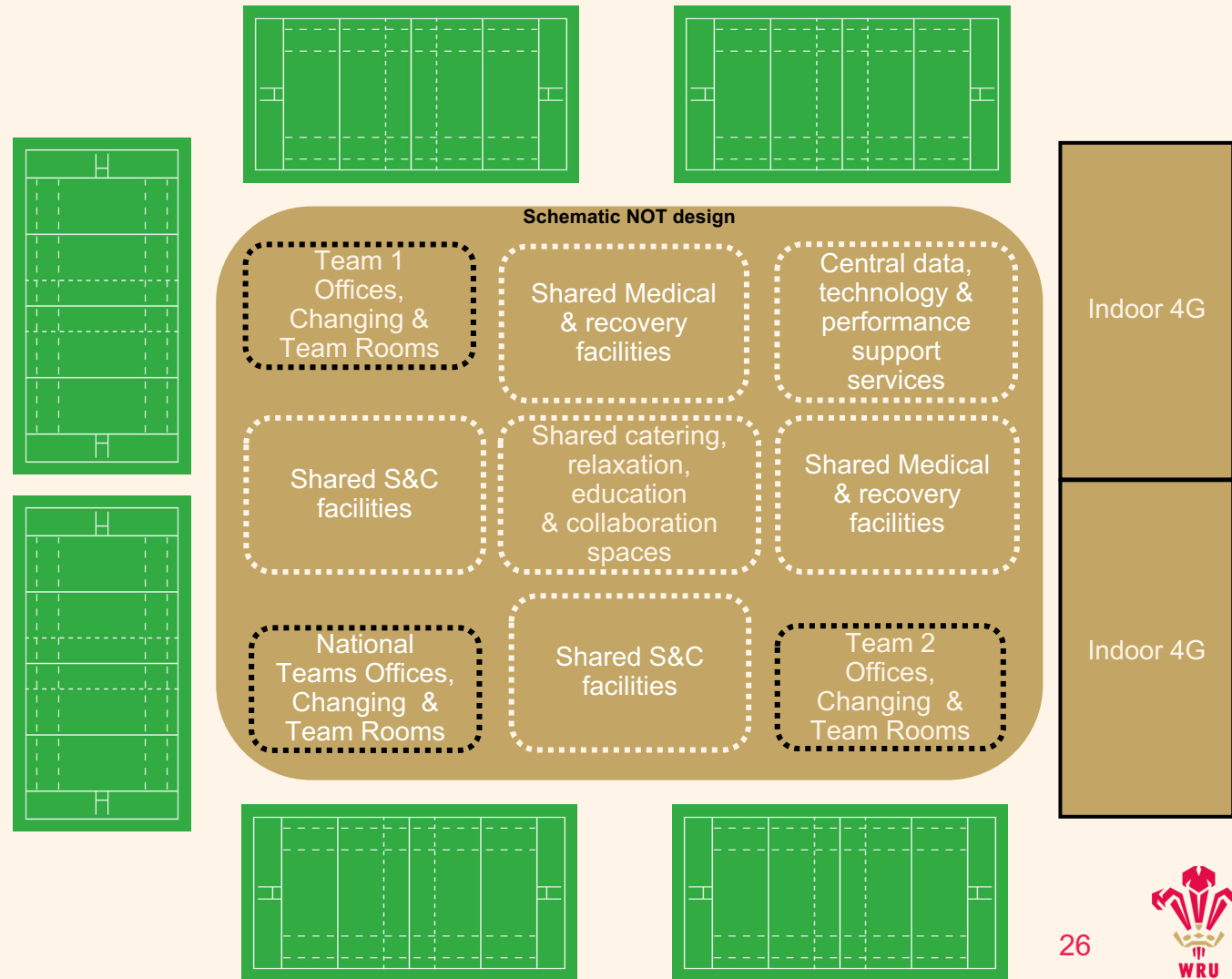
AN INSPIRATIONAL ENVIRONMENT TO SUPERCHARGE COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT

The national campus would be a generational investment in a home for Welsh rugby which would provide a future competitive advantage.

Its world-class facilities and design would satisfy the operational and identity requirements of its individual user groups through a combination of separate and shared spaces and resources which exceed those possible in disparate locations.

As well as an inspiring physical place, its purpose is to act as the vehicle through which a new supercharged culture of aligned connection and deep collaboration in pursuit of mutually understood and interdependent excellence in performance is achieved.

As an iconic focal point for Welsh rugby, and a clear statement of intention to create a successful future, the national campus is expected to be highly attractive to commercial partners who we intend to engage directly with in the pursuit of collaborative performance opportunities.

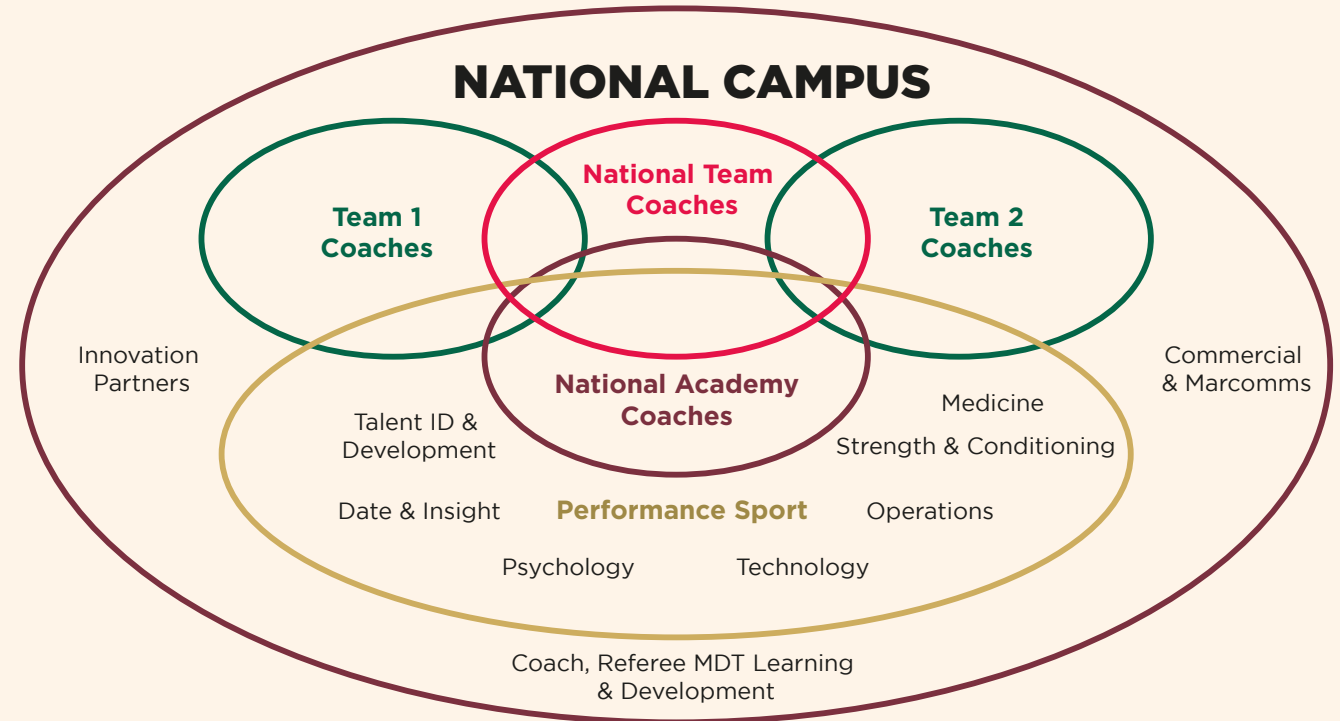


OUT-PERFORMANCE THROUGH COLLABORATION AND PROXIMITY BY DESIGN

The vision for the national campus would bring together a thriving community of up to 400 players and staff in an aspirational place with world-class facilities, purposefully designed for collaboration and innovation. The national campus would represent a focal point for excellence in Welsh sport and be a physical manifestation of both strategic intent and the importance of rugby in Wales.

The campus would be home to:

- Men's and Women's national teams and staff
- Men's and Women's professional clubs and staff
- Men's and Women's national academies
- Talent identification and development covering all elite teams and pathways
- World-class performance support services
- Player education programmes
- A rugby performance innovation centre in collaboration with industry partners
- Coach, referee, and MDT staff learning & development activities and programmes





D. A NEW APPROACH TO FUNDING

ENHANCED RUGBY PERFORMANCE WILL ENABLE PROFITABLE PRIVATE INVESTMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF CLUB COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS AND CREATE IMPROVED SPONSOR AND FAN EXPERIENCE

Despite significant investment of resources and capital by private investors and the WRU over a prolonged period of time, professional men's club rugby in Wales has failed to demonstrate a path to sustained profitability alongside on-field success. A difficult commercial landscape, a legacy of debts, increasing pressure from player costs to meet performance and wider global headwinds require revised future thinking to avoid further losses and increased reliance on investor funding.

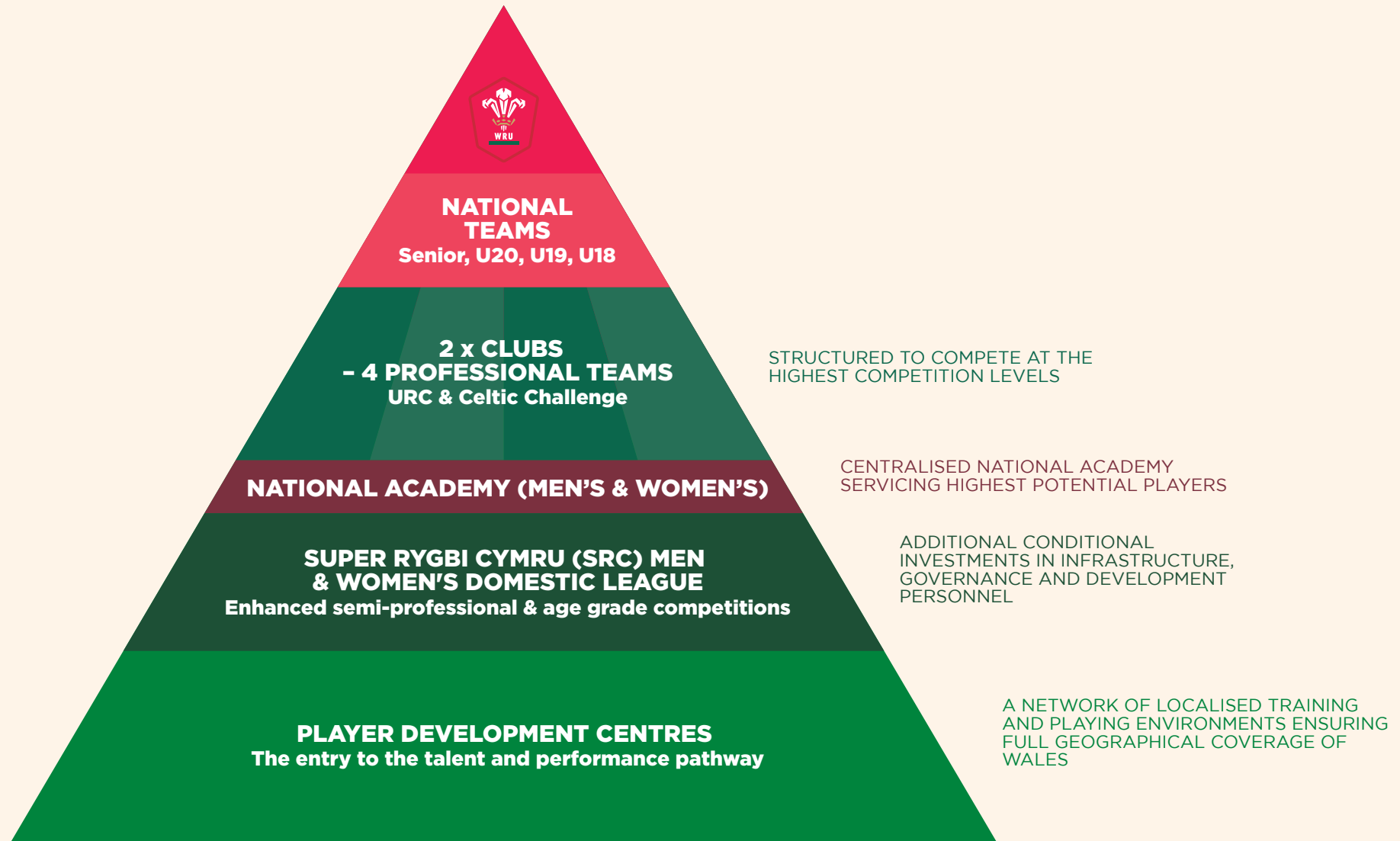
The aim of the proposed optimal model is to create an attractive, commercially investable proposition for professional clubs. The current thinking is as follows:

- WRU would directly fund all rugby costs in the two professional clubs (and four teams) making the concept of increased alignment of rugby operations easier to achieve
- Professional clubs would be operated under a licence from the WRU giving private investors full responsibility for all commercial operations
- Initial projections demonstrate each club licence should be profitable from the beginning with the potential for significant increases in tandem with on-field success enabled by other elements of the proposed optimal system
- The consultation welcomes proposals that balance unified rugby decision-making with involvement of private investors in the rugby operations



E. ENHANCED PATHWAYS, COMPETITIONS, ACADEMIES AND COACH DEVELOPMENT

A REVISED PATHWAY AND COMPETITION STRATEGY



ACCELERATED TALENT DEVELOPMENT ENABLED BY BEST-IN-CLASS COACHING AND SUPPORT SERVICES IN CENTRALISED NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Wales will aim to establish the world's most connected rugby talent development environment through centralised national academies that concentrate elite coaching expertise and comprehensive player support in facilities designed to accelerate the progression of future international and professional players.

The men's and women's national academies will operate as high-performance talent accelerators, bringing together Wales' most promising players in daily training environments that exceed competing nations' standards. By centralising resources previously dispersed across four regional academies, we propose to create concentrated excellence that maximises every player's developmental trajectory while seamlessly integrating with the broader pathway ecosystem.

Elite Programme Delivery: Year-round, periodised training utilising world-class facilities at the national campus, creating synergies with professional clubs and national teams through shared resources and collaborative environments

Optimised Daily Coaching Environment: Best-in-class coaching talent and philosophy with age-specific expertise to optimise technical and tactical development

Integrated Performance Support: Dedicated performance support teams, including specific investment in people, culture and psychologically supported and informed development with age specific expertise

Holistic Player Development: Life skills development including financial literacy, media training, and career planning. Educational pathways designed with leading academic institutions, ensuring intellectual development alongside rugby excellence

Enhanced Talent Identification and Development: Earlier and more effective talent identification and more optimal progression through the combination of a more aligned rugby ecosystem, a consistent philosophy and methodology of assessment and the proximity benefits enabled by the national campus. A consistent and connected player loans programme to match developmental needs of talent

More Seamless Pathway Integration: Direct connection to player development centres (14 -18 years) to connect talent identification and initial development before national academy entry

KEY FEATURES OF PROPOSED MEN'S AND WOMEN'S NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Element	Men's National Academy	Women's National Academy
Age range	Part Time: 16 – 18 Full Time: 18 - 23	Full Time: 18 - 23
Number of Players	c.70 - 80	c.20 - 25
Contracting	Pre-18: Educational Scholarships & Bursaries Post 18: Competitive market leading standard contract values for Y1, Y2, and Y3 supported by tertiary educational scholarships	Aligned to Women's National Contracting Model
Operational Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralised delivery at the national campus (with semi-centralised engagement with playing environments on an individualised basis managed in collaboration with partners) Full time participants will participate in a weekly training environment, while part time participants will engage in a programme aligned to secondary education commitments and calendars 	
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dual career coupled with rugby 'in education' (i.e. BUCS Super Rugby & WSC Rugby) opportunities Secondary, further, and higher education including the provision of (where appropriate) educational scholarships working with a network of education providers Adaptable programme scheduling integrated with education 	
Competition	WSC Rugby, BUCS Super Rugby, Super Rygbi Cymru, URC	WSC Rugby, BUCS Super Rugby W, new Women's League, Celtic Challenge
National Playing Opportunities	U18, U19, U20, and Senior	U18, U21, and Senior

AN ENHANCED SUPER RYGBI CYMRU TO DEEPEN COMPETITION OPPORTUNITIES AND CONNECT COMMUNITIES

The semi-professional SRC exists to provide a vital platform for developing elite talent, offering meaningful game time for emerging talent and professional players on the path to recovery, reintegration, or transition. It has proven to be an invaluable addition to the men's rugby ecosystem.

The heritage of these clubs is intrinsically linked to the future success of the game, fostering deeper connections with passionate local communities, increasing interest, profile, and potential growth opportunities on and off the field.

To underpin two professional men's clubs and enable clear progression from the SRC to the professional clubs, and beyond, additional investment released as part of our proposed model will be used to enhance the SRC. This will drive the quality of the competition and the player and fan experience in this vital domestic rugby product. To achieve this, additional investment will be utilised to:

- **Invest in rugby personnel** and enhance the access to and quality of coaching and support services
- **Increase the salary cap** to retain more professional standard players in the SRC
- **Continue to develop rugby infrastructure** and facilities
- **Increase the profile and presence** of the competition as our primary domestic rugby product
- **Review and optimise the competition structure** for emerging age-grade players
- **Create alignment with a network of Player Development Centres**, foster stronger links with SRC clubs, wider local clubs, schools and colleges, surrounding districts, and the wider rugby community

CREATION OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

– MEN'S AND BOY'S GAME

Building on learning and success in the women and girls' pathway development, we propose to establish a **national network of localised Player Development Centres** providing consistent and regular high quality player development for boys aged 14 – 18 as they prepare to enter the professional adult game. This initiative will see an uplift in provision with junior academy style delivery reaching wider but delivered more locally, providing an inclusive and accessible pathway.

- **Location:** Location and distribution of centres would ensure full geographical coverage for Wales, and supported by an appropriate competition structure that includes schools, colleges and clubs
- **SRC Club aligned:** To integrate the rugby ecosystem, we propose aligning these centres to our SRC clubs supported by plans to upgrade facilities and resources alongside working with additional facility partners enabling clear progression to not only the SRC but the National Academy, professional clubs and beyond
- **Dedicated Workforce:** Sites would see dedicated, full-time staff supporting technical rugby coaching, physical development, and player health
- **Pathway entry:** The Emerging Player Programme (ages 14 – 16; including the Dewar Shield) will continue to serve as the critical entry point to the performance pathway, however, the current structure and governance will be reviewed and aligned to SRC clubs (with additional sites created where geography dictates)
- **Impact:** Through this we intend to support approximately 2,000 players annually through the Emerging Player Programme and a further c.300 players at ages 16 – 18 in high quality, dedicated but localised and accessible development environments that feed Wales U18, the Men's National Academy, and the SRC

ESTABLISH A WOMEN'S LEAGUE COMPETITION TO PROVIDE ENHANCED PLAYING PATHWAY OPPORTUNITIES

The current lack of high-quality, domestic club rugby in Wales below the Celtic Challenge significantly hinders the women's rugby ecosystem. To address this, we propose building upon the early success of the SRC by establishing a senior women's domestic competition.

This competition would aim to provide a high-quality, club-based competition that better reflects the demands and goals of elite women's rugby. By aligning the season structure with the professional women's game, it will deliver more high-quality competitive matches for PDC and National Academy players, create aspiration for emerging and top community players, and strengthen links with clubs, hubs and the wider rugby community.

In establishing this level of competition, the option exists, subject to further analysis, for women's teams to be based at and linked to existing men's SRC clubs. The selection of partner clubs will consider the following factors:

- Number of clubs in relation to the size of available talent pool
- Facilities (both rugby and wider club)
- Club infrastructure

In this approach, successful clubs would receive further investment to resource their women's team, including coaching, support staff, and operations to enable them to meet operational expectations.

EXPANSION OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

– WOMEN & GIRLS' GAME

With the women and girls' pathway already having an established but growing Player Development Centre (PDC) network of three hub sites (at Colwyn Bay, Cardiff Metropolitan University, and Swansea University) supporting players aged 16 to 22, this network will be expanded to feature a series of satellites aligned to one of the three central PDCs. Expansion will include:

- **Location:** Up to six further delivery sites ensuring no girl in Wales is more than 60 minutes travel from high quality rugby development
- **Dedicated Workforce:** Sites would see an expanded workforce of staff in paid and dedicated roles supporting technical rugby coaching, physical development, and player health and wellbeing
- **Pathway Entry:** The Emerging Player Programme (ages 14 – 16) will serve as the critical entry point to the women and girls' performance pathway, however, an optimal competition structure for this cohort that integrates and aligns with the wider community game will be reviewed and considered
- **Scope:** Expansion would focus specifically on players aged 14 – 18
- **Impact:** Through this we intend to support approximately 250 players annually through the Emerging Player Programme and a further c.90 players at ages 16 – 18 in high quality, dedicated but localised and accessible development environments, feeding Wales U18, the Women's National Academy and the Celtic Challenge

INVESTING IN COACHING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT TO CREATE A PIPELINE OF WORLD-CLASS TALENT AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SYSTEM

Coach and staff development is a critical long-term investment in the sustainability of pathways and elite performance systems. Welsh rugby should over-invest in this element compared to its competitors to create a pipeline of talent to strengthen pathways and underpin the future growth of the game. In the proposed optimal system, Wales will become the global leader in rugby coaching development, establishing comprehensive programmes that attract, develop, and retain world-class rugby coaches, match officials and support staff through innovative learning opportunities and inspirational professional environments at the national campus.

Elite Coach Acceleration: The concentration of talent at the national campus will facilitate the development of advanced coach development programmes which combine in-situ mentoring and support with an individual programmes of practical and theoretical learning and study leave opportunities. Peer group learning opportunities will be dramatically accelerated by the proximity afforded by the national campus.

A Hub for Welsh Coach Development: The national campus will serve as an inspirational focus for coach development across Wales, providing facilities for the wider coach development programme for the SRC, community clubs and schools. Collaboration with academic institutions and technology partners to advance rugby coaching methodologies, develop innovative training techniques, and establish evidence-based practices

Multi-disciplinary Staff Development : Centralisation of staff development will enable the more optimal development of match officials and other coaching adjacent disciplines such as analysis and data science in a collaborative environment, which will enable more optimal inter-disciplinary experiences.

Professional Pathways: Clear progression routes from community coaching to international level, with a centralised system of coach talent identification and placement across the Welsh rugby ecosystem and beyond to optimise professional progression



F. PHASED TRANSITION TOWARDS A PROPOSED OPTIMAL SYSTEM

IF THERE WAS A TRANSITION TO THE PROPOSED OPTIMAL SYSTEM IT WOULD TAKE PLACE OVER AT LEAST TWO PHASES



PHASE 1: ALIGNED RUGBY LEADERSHIP

1 BUILDING NEW FOUNDATIONS

- Moving to a two club, four elite team structure operating at two sites
- Transition to aligned rugby leadership and contracting of players and staff
- Central National Academies



PHASE 2: COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

2 OUT-PERFORMING OUR RESOURCES

- Transition to national campus operations
- Competitive advantage and out performance through best in the world collaboration and alignment
- Realisation of resource efficiencies through centralisation

PHASE 1

PHASE 2





OTHER MODELS BEING CONSIDERED

WE HAVE IDENTIFIED FOUR MODELS FOR CONSIDERATION

As part of the strategic consultation into elite rugby in Wales, four potential club models have been developed and analysed for consideration. All four models explore variations to the men's professional club structure whilst maintaining the current strategy for two professional women's clubs.

Each model has been analysed using a three-part framework:

- Financial Viability: Long-term cost structures and funding sustainability
- Commercial Opportunity: Revenue generation potential and market growth
- Feasibility: Operational, structural, and stakeholder alignment

Each model also:

- Explores development of player pathways and academies
- Potential opportunities for sustainable growth
- Projects estimated reinvestment funds that could be directed back into Welsh rugby.

The following slides will explore each of the four models in detail, highlighting the defining characteristics and implications for the future of elite rugby in Wales.

THE NUMBER OF CLUBS IS NOT THE SOLE DETERMINANT OF PLAYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WELSH TALENT

At a simplistic level, any reduction in the number of men's professional teams will result in a reduction in top level (URC) playing opportunities for Welsh talent.

However, deeper analysis reveals a more nuanced picture illustrated by the following observations:

- The current four club model only sustains 164 of 176 potential senior player spots
- 33 Non-Welsh Qualified players (NWQP) in 2024-25 (average five per game)
- Lower than ideal competition standards and barriers to entry into professional rugby mean the current talent pool is further diluted
- High proportions of Welsh qualified exile players at all age group levels of the men's international pathway (~25 - 30% each season) highlighting the lack of attraction of the current structure for top talent

These and other observations reveal a landscape with high variability in the quality of talent, coaching and infrastructure across Welsh professional rugby contributing to sub-optimal daily training environments supporting teams who have been serially uncompetitive at both club and international level.

This analysis strongly suggests that a simple reduction in the number of clubs, with a commensurate reinvestment of WRU funds released into the remainder would be unlikely to solve the deficiencies apparent across the current rugby ecosystem.

PLAYING OPPORTUNITIES NEED TO BE SEEN AS PART OF A WIDER CONTEXT OF FACTORS

From a playing opportunity perspective, the following elements are fundamental to systemic transformation, mitigating reductions in top-tier playing opportunities, and increasing competitiveness:

- **Talent Concentration:** Concentrate talent into fewer teams
- **Welsh Qualified Players (WQP):** Predominantly WQPs, and only highest standard NWQPs, to create playing spots for Welsh talent.
- **Development Pathway:** An integrated and aligned development pathway supported by quality competitions.
- **Playing Opportunities:** Invest in and enhance the SRC and other appropriate development competitions to provide high quality domestic rugby and significantly enhanced playing opportunities
- **Facilities:** Improved facilities to provide geographically spread Player Development Centres
- **Academies:** Consolidate academies to provide an enhanced 'best-with-best' environment
- **Player Allocation:** Implement a consolidated and aligned allocation process to place players in the best environments for each stage of their development

Ultimately, any reduction in clubs must create circumstances for Welsh club teams to thrive at the top level, competing for domestic, European and global titles. This will expose players to critical elite development moments in high-pressure games and provide a greater volume of games for Welsh talent.

REDUCING THE NUMBER OF PROFESSIONAL CLUBS CAN INCREASE AVAILABLE PLAYING MINUTES FOR WELSH TALENT IF OTHER VARIABLES SUCH AS NWQP ARE ADJUSTED

	4 Club Option	3 Club Option	2 Club Option
Number of active Senior players	164 (41/club)	135 (45/club)	90 (45/club)
Non-Welsh Qualified Players (NWQP)*	32	6	4
Senior Welsh Qualified Players (WQP)	132	129	86
Typically Injured & Unavailable (Senior WQP)	26 (20%)	27 (20%)	18 (20%)
Total Welsh Players available (ex. injured, NWQP)	106	102	68
Matches / season (in URC / Europe)	22**	26***	26***
Total Number of matchday spots per season	1584 (Av. 5 NWQP / MD 23)	1716 (Av. 1 NWQP / MD 23)	1144 (Av. 1 NWQP / MD 23)
Maximum Matchday spots available /season / Welsh player	14.6	16.8	16.8
Maximum Matchday mins available /season / Welsh player	1168	1344	1344

* The numbers in this row are based on assumed modelling and the actual position remains to be decided

** Assumes no play offs (18 URC & 4 EPCR)

*** Assumes URC Semi-Final and European progression



MEN'S PROFESSIONAL CLUB MODELS

FOUR POTENTIAL STRUCTURAL MODELS FOR MEN'S PROFESSIONAL CLUB RUGBY HAVE BEEN ASSESSED

Model A: 4 clubs, unequal funding (2 + 2 model)



Model C: 3 clubs, unequal funding (2 + 1)




Model B: 3 clubs, equal funding




Model D: 2 clubs, equal funding



Key:

 Club receiving higher level of funding ('Elite' club)

 Club receiving lower level of funding ('Development club')


Assumptions for all models in this assessment:

- Funding is provided through a combination of WRU and private investment
- A PRA style model of management of interests between clubs and national teams continues to exist
- The WRU 5 year plan and strategy is assumed to continue as now
- A commitment to fund four professional clubs through to FY27

Note: Prior to this assessment, the WRU Board concluded that the current model of 4 equally funded clubs was no longer a viable model.

A THREE ELEMENT FRAMEWORK HAS BEEN USED TO ASSESS DIFFERENT MODELS

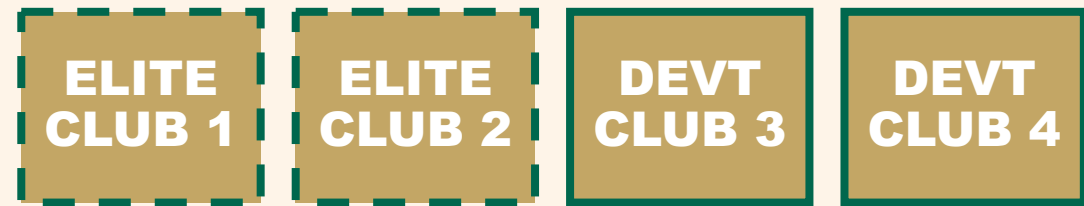
ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

 High Performance	 Commercial	 Feasibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Quality and competitiveness of squads and daily training environments2. Recruitment, retention and cohesion of top Welsh players3. Quality and competitiveness of staff, support services and infrastructure4. Quality of emerging talent identification, development and competition opportunities5. Collaboration, alignment and impact on national team performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Financial sustainability of WRU to provide required funding2. Financial sustainability of club private investors to provide required funding3. Servicing of existing WRU and club debt4. Attractiveness to new and existing commercial partners5. Attractiveness to fans and supporters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Speed, cost and complexity of transition to new model2. Ability to operate new model through changes in key personnel3. Sustainability of High Performance and Commercial success after initial change

The numbered factors in each element of the framework above correspond to the same numbers in the following assessment evaluation slides

MODEL A:

4 CLUBS, UNEQUAL FUNDING (2 + 2 MODEL)



Prioritised allocation of funding

4 PROFESSIONAL CLUBS UNEQUALLY FUNDED, CONSISTING OF 4 MEN'S TEAMS COMPETING IN THE URC AND EUROPEAN COMPETITIONS

Rugby

- 45 senior squad players per club
- 20 male academy players per club

Finance

- Elite clubs would have squad budgets of £6.7m (FY25 regional average was £4.6m)
- Development clubs would have squad budgets of £5.2m (FY25 regional average was £4.6m)
- Academy budget of £800k per club (FY25 regional average was £773k)
- Coaching & backroom staff budget of £1.9m per club (FY25 regional average was £1.4m)
- Private investors funding of £25m required over 5 years
- WRU investment of £120m into 4 professional men's clubs over 5 years

Note: Model shows estimated squad makeup based on budget and required squad numbers

MODEL B:

3 CLUBS, EQUAL FUNDING

ELITE
CLUB 1

ELITE
CLUB 2

ELITE
CLUB 3

3 PROFESSIONAL CLUBS, CONSISTING OF 3 MEN'S TEAMS COMPETING IN THE URC AND EUROPEAN COMPETITIONS

Rugby

- 45 senior squad players per club
- 20 male academy players per club

Finance

- All clubs would have squad budgets of £6.9m (FY25 regional average was £4.6m)
- Academy budget of £800k per club (FY25 regional average was £773k)
- Coaching & backroom staff budget of £2m per club (FY25 regional average was £1.4m)
- Private investors funding of £21m required over 5 years
- Average annual WRU investment of £8.1m per team
- WRU investment of £121m into 3 professional men's clubs over 5 years

Note: Model shows estimated squad makeup based on budget and required squad numbers

MODEL C:

3 CLUBS, UNEQUAL FUNDING (2 + 1 OR 1 + 2)

**ELITE
CLUB 1**

**ELITE
CLUB 2**

**DEVT
CLUB 3**

Prioritised allocation of funding

3 PROFESSIONAL CLUBS UNEQUALLY FUNDED, CONSISTING OF 3 MEN'S TEAMS COMPETING IN THE URC AND EUROPEAN COMPETITIONS

Rugby

- 45 senior squad players per club
- 20 male academy players per club

Finance

- Elite clubs would have squad budgets of £6.9m (FY25 regional average was £4.6m)
- Development clubs would have squad budgets of £5.4m (FY25 regional average was £4.6m)
- Academy budget of £800k per club (FY25 average was £773k)
- All clubs would have a coaching & backroom staff budget of £2m (FY25 average was £1.4m)
- Private investors funding of £21m required over 5 years
- WRU investment of £116m into 3 professional men's clubs over 5 years

Note: Model shows estimated squad makeup based on budget and required squad numbers

MODEL D:

2 CLUBS, EQUAL FUNDING

ELITE
CLUB 1

ELITE
CLUB 2

2 PROFESSIONAL CLUBS, CONSISTING OF 2 MEN'S TEAMS COMPETING IN THE URC AND EUROPEAN COMPETITIONS

Rugby

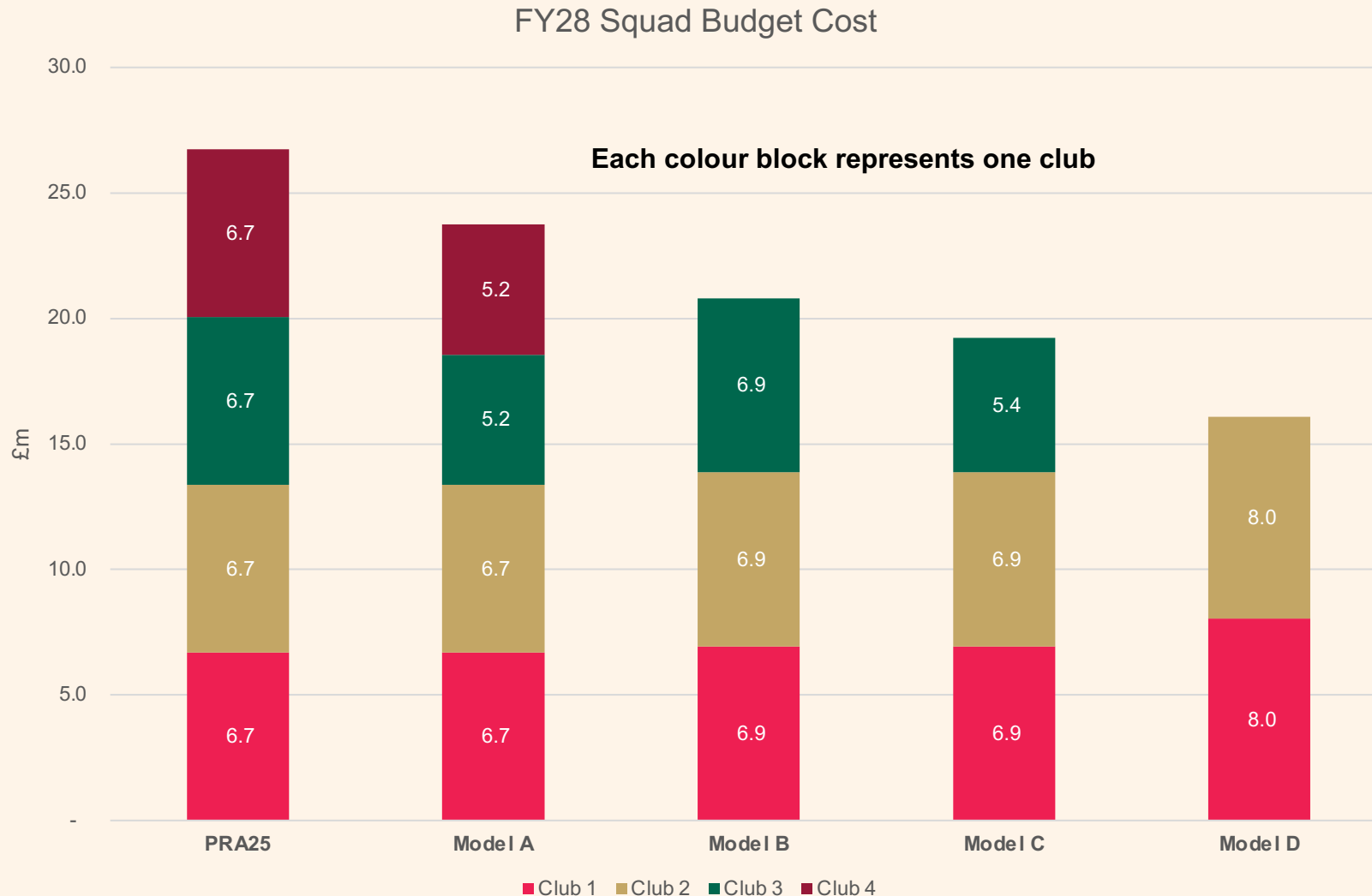
- 45 senior squad players per club
- 20 male academy players per club

Finance

- All clubs would have squad budgets of £8.0m (FY25 regional average was £4.6m)
- Academy budget of £800k per club (FY25 average was £773k)
- All clubs would have a coaching & backroom staff budget of £2.1m (FY25 average was £1.4m)
- Private investors funding of £17m required over 5 years
- WRU investment of £94m into 2 professional men's clubs over 5 years

Note: Model shows estimated squad makeup based on budget and required squad numbers

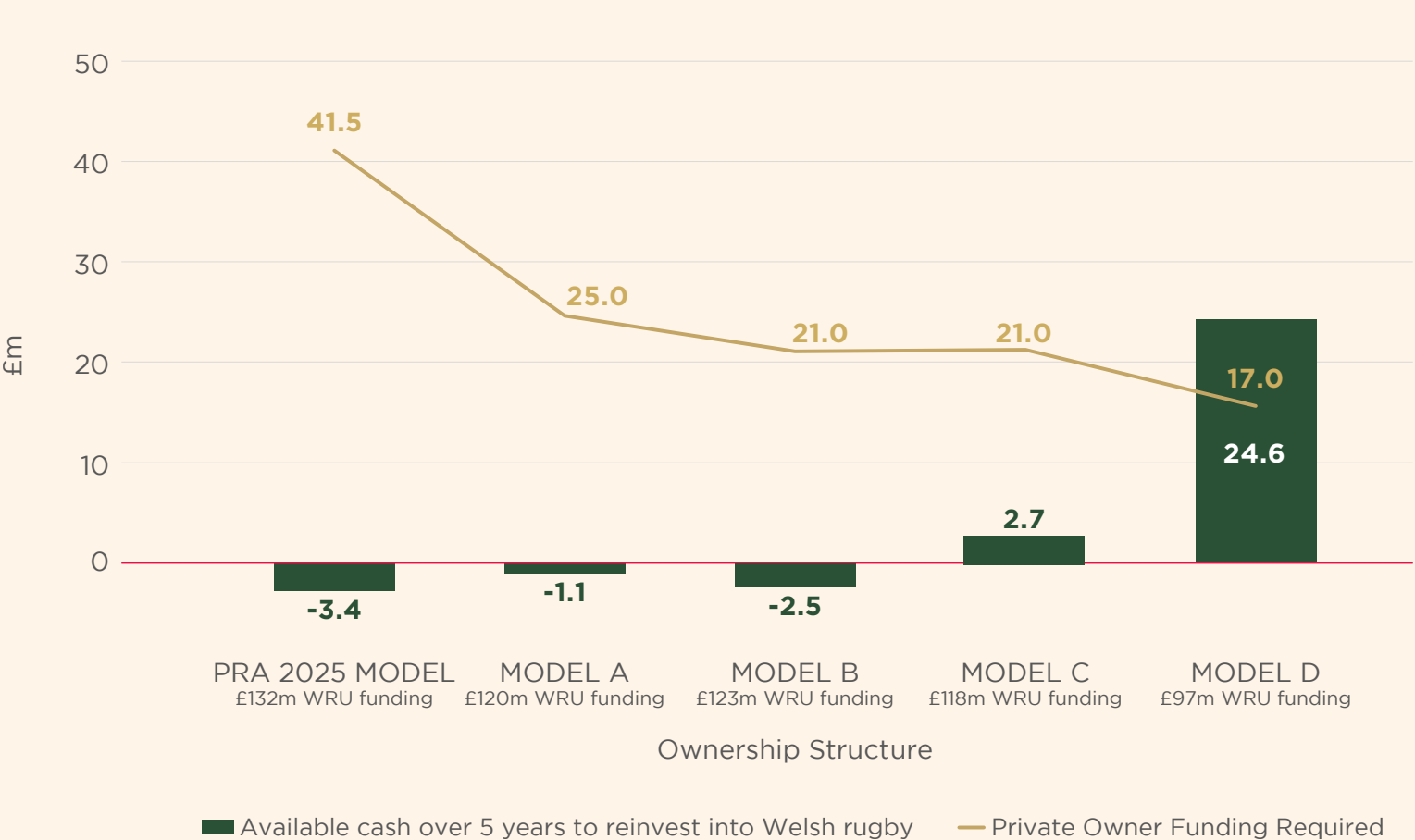
MODEL D SQUAD BUDGETS WOULD BE COMPETITIVE WITH PRL & TOP 14 CLUBS



- Model D concentrates talent into two elite clubs, positioning them to compete at the highest level in European rugby
- Model D squad budgets (£8.0m) are competitive to PRL & Top 14 squad budgets
- 25/26 PRL salary cap is £7.8m plus one marquee player
- 25/26 Top 14 salary cap is £9.2m. Toulouse spend £10.3m on players annually




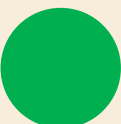
MODEL D ENABLES ADDITIONAL FUNDING TO BE RELEASED FOR SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT WHICH COULD SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER FINANCIAL RISK WITH LESS RELIANCE ON FUNDING FROM PRIVATE INVESTORS




Owner Funding & Combined Investment Headroom







- Model D is the only option which would enable significant additional investment (£25m over 5 years) into the men’s and women’s elite rugby ecosystem (such as national academies, pathways, facilities).
- This model would reduce the reliance on private investor funding in an increasingly uncertain and volatile environment.




FOR A HIGH PERFORMANCE SYSTEM, MODEL D IS THE OPTIMAL OPTION

Models	High Performance	Rationale
Model A: 4 clubs; unequal funding (2+2 model)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Moderate increase in squad quality in two clubs, but insufficient to compete with peers and align to winning ambitions 2. Recruitment & retention challenges remain as wages remain uncompetitive for top talent 3. 25% increase in support staff budgets can offset some squad deficiencies but unlikely to be sufficient to overcome salary deficiencies 4. Talent ID and development similar to now, lower funded clubs give more emerging talent opportunities but in uncompetitive teams 5. Talent spread across 4 teams and exiles, low national team cohesion as now, lack of developmental exposure to play-offs, no additional funding for national teams or pathways, collaboration compromised, wider system management issues across 4 teams persist
Model B: 3 clubs; equal funding		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Higher salary budget provides better potential for competitive squads and daily training environment 2. Greater potential to recruit and retain talent, slightly better potential cohesion if Welsh talent can be attracted across 3 teams 3. 25% increase in support staff budgets enables greater output from increased salaries and squad quality 4. Talent ID, development and playing opportunities slightly reduced from now, but at higher quality teams if other factors such as NWQP adjusted 5. Potential for higher level players and opportunities if Welsh talent is attracted and played, slightly easier management across 3 teams, no additional funding for national teams or pathways, collaboration still compromised, higher likelihood of stagnation of success against other nations through lack of differentiation
Model C: 3 clubs; unequal funding (2+1 model)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Higher budget provides better potential for competitive squads and daily training environment and better chance for development team 2. Greater potential to recruit and retain talent, slightly better potential cohesion if Welsh talent can be attracted across 3 teams 3. 25% increase in support staff budgets enables greater output from increased salaries and squad quality 4. Talent ID, development and playing opportunities slightly reduced from now, but at higher quality teams if other factors such as NWQP adjusted. Development club can be used for emerging talent, 5. Potential for higher level players and opportunities if Welsh talent is attracted and played, slightly easier management across 3 teams, no additional funding for national teams or pathways, collaboration compromised, slightly easier management & alignment across 3 teams, higher likelihood of stagnation of success against other nations
Model D: 2 clubs; equal funding		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Highly competitive budgets enable elite squad quality, designed to win at highest levels, concentration of talent enables truly elite daily training environment 2. High potential to recruit and retain top Welsh talent into extremely competitive teams, reducing dependence on NWQP 3. Best combination of playing talent and support staff budget maximises performance output 4. Fewer playing spots unless adjustments to other factors, but high playing and training quality, concentration of academy talent focuses output, but requires other factors to enable competitive opportunities 5. Higher league quality and competitiveness of teams gives better elite developmental opportunities, higher squad cohesion and reduced effect of exiles, easier management & alignment across two teams, collaboration not optimal but improved





Key:  = strong performance  = moderate performance  = poor performance



COMMERCIALLY, MODEL D PROVIDES THE OPTIMAL OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCCESS

Models	Commercial	Rationale
Model A: 4 clubs; unequal funding (2+2 model)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High pressure on WRU funding but better than PRA 2025, minimal residual funding for wider rugby ecosystem to support elite levels in longer term 2. Same pressure as currently on existing and or new investors to underpin losses and support elite team performance 3. Debt servicing challenges as result of compromised commercial model 4. Likely less attractive than current model due to split level teams and lack of winning capability 5. Overall, less attractive to fans as a result of demotion of status of two clubs and likely lack change of performance success
Model B: 3 clubs; equal funding		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High pressure on WRU funding, marginally better than PRA 2025, no residual funding for wider rugby ecosystem to support long term system health 2. Reduced pressure on existing and or new investors through greater WRU support across 3 clubs 3. Potential for better debt servicing capability through more attractive teams and commercial success 4. Overall, potentially more attractive to partners as a result of the potential for greater on-field success 5. Potential for greater success is more attractive to fans and supporters, but damage to fanbase by loss of one club
Model C: 3 clubs; unequal funding (2+1 model)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Slightly reduced pressure on WRU compared to model B, but insufficient residual funding for wider rugby ecosystem to support long term system health 2. Private investor (owner funding) pressure as for Model B 3. Overall worse debt servicing capability as one club is compromised in performance and commercial terms, two elite clubs in a better position 4. Elite clubs more attractive as in Model B but development clubs may struggle to attract interest, risking longer term decline 5. Overall, less attractive to fans than model B due to likely lack of success of Development club, potential for further decline. Loss of one club's fans and frictional effect of change
Model D: 2 clubs; equal funding		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lowest pressure on WRU funding, with significant residual funding for wider rugby ecosystem to support long term system health and competitive advantage 2. Least pressure on investors and greatest chance of profitability 3. Best level of debt servicing potential as a result of performance and commercial success 4. Much more attractive to partners as result of elite status of clubs and likelihood of competitive success 5. Highly attractive to fans (depending on locations and brands) as a result of success, although frictional effect of loss of 2 elite clubs










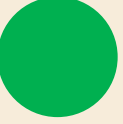


Key:  = strong performance  = moderate performance  = poor performance




ALL OPTIONS WILL FACE FEASIBILITY ISSUES WITH MODELS A AND D LEAST FRICTIONAL FOR DIFFERENT REASONS

Models	Feasibility	Rationale
Model A: 4 clubs; unequal funding (2+2 model)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Easier and less expensive to transition to 4 unequally funded clubs, although still player and staff consequences. Club ownership resistance to development club status and funding reduction may be significant 2. Although easiest to transition to given similarities to current model, still significant challenges and risk of redundancies and exit of talent 3. Poor prospects for commercial and high performance make sustainability difficult and long-term decline more inevitable, investor fatigue highly likely across all clubs
Model B: 3 clubs; equal funding		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenging transition as a result of loss of one elite club creating staff, player and fanbase difficulties. Loss of some players from elite level inevitable 2. Loss of staff and players from one club a significant challenge, other clubs likely to transition relatively easily and may offset some losses through increased staff and player budgets 3. Sustainability potentially compromised in long term by lack of pathway investments but on-field success may mitigate this if academies are productive
Model C: 3 clubs; unequal funding (2+1 model)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenging transition as a result of loss of one elite club and transition of another creating staff, player and fanbase difficulties. Loss of some players from elite level inevitable. Club ownership resistance to changes highly likely 2. Loss of staff and players from one club a significant challenge, elite clubs likely to transition relatively easily. Development club may offset some staff losses due to budget but will face some difficulties in establishing operations 3. Sustainability for elite clubs more favourable due to funding levels, development club more viable than in Model A but still very challenging commercially as a result of performance constraints. Academies potentially more sustainable through greater concentration of talent
Model D: 2 clubs; equal funding		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very challenging transition as a result of loss of two elite clubs and loss of players and staff from elite level inevitable. Significant need to build current owner buy-in for change, damage to fanbases as a result of loss of two clubs 2. Elite clubs transition still challenging whether merger or new, some benefit from concentration of staff and players to provide more optimal staffing models 3. Favourable sustainability for elite clubs due to funding levels driving performance and commercial success. Concentration of academy talent may offset losses of academy places from two clubs

Key:  = strong performance  = moderate performance  = poor performance

IN OVERALL TERMS, MODEL D OFFERS THE MOST OPTIMAL COMBINATION OF ELEMENTS

Models	High Performance	Commercial	Feasibility
Model A: 4 clubs; unequal funding (2+2 model)			
Model B: 3 clubs; equal funding			
Model C: 3 clubs; unequal funding (2+1 model)			
Model D: 2 clubs; equal funding			

Key:  = strong  = moderate  = poor





WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL GAME

THE WOMEN'S ELITE GAME: OVERVIEW

- The men's and women's professional game are in different stages of growth globally. Reforming the structure of Welsh rugby creates an opportunity to accelerate growth and success in the women's game in Wales through significant investment.
- The WRU currently runs two teams in the Celtic Challenge: Gwalia Lightning and Brython Thunder, who finished 3rd & 4th respectively last year. The recent tender process attracted expressions of interest from all four Professional Clubs demonstrating a keenness for professional women's club rugby in Wales and the potential for teams to be aligned.
- The Celtic Challenge continues to evolve as an elite level competition with play-offs introduced for the first time in the 2025/26 season.
- The Wales Women's Senior Team will run a full-time programme for the 2025/26 season, similar to that run by Irealnd, with contracted players training at the NCE three days a week. This access to national coaches will be used to encourage our players back from the PWR where the majority are on voluntary contracts and getting limited game minutes.
- The 2025 Rugby World Cup will be a pivotal moment for the women's game showcasing the sport like never before.

SENIOR WOMEN PLAYING IN THE PWR (2024-25) ARE NOT GETTING ENOUGH GAME TIME

CLUB	PLAYERS	MEAN GAME MINS
Bristol	9	582
Ealing	1	0
Gloucester	12	512
Harlequins	5	826
Leicester	2	164
Sale	2	381
Saracens	2	272
Total	33	391

- In season 2024-25, 33 Welsh senior players were involved with PWR clubs
- The PWR is currently the highest level of club competition available in the women’s game. The average game time in the PWR for those players was 391 minutes
- This equates to 4.9 full game exposures, which is insufficient to prepare players to compete and perform at their best in international competition
- Almost all Welsh senior players are on 'voluntary' contracts and are not receiving direct financial remuneration for participating in the PWR



THE WRU HAS SIGNIFICANTLY EXPANDED ITS WOMEN'S PLAYER DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES SINCE 2023.

- **Expansion of the girl's community hub programme:** from 40 to 50 for the 2025-26 season
- **Girls' Welsh Schools and Colleges (WSC Rugby):** A pilot of the Girls' WSC Rugby programme began in 2023 with nine schools. This expanded in 2024 to a full competition programme with six partner schools and colleges across Wales. This will continue to grow into the 25/25 season
- **Player Development Centres (PDC Network):** The women and girls' PDC Network was established in 2024, with the WRU investing in three hub sites to provide a daily training environment for c.75 high potential, future international players aged 17 to 23. From July 2025, through further investment including support from the National Lottery and Sport Wales, the PDC Network will expand to support a further c.90 players (aged 16 – 18), and c.250 players (aged 14 – 16) providing full geographic coverage of Wales
- **National Pathway Programmes:** 2024 saw the establishment of season-long Wales U18 and U20/1s programmes, including competition programmes led by the Six Nations, international friendlies and festivals
- **Wales Pathway Player Scheme:** Scheduled for launch in September 2025, this scheme will target 25 of the highest potential players
- **Celtic Challenge:** Working in partnership with Scotland and Ireland, and with support from World Rugby, the cross-border Celtic Challenge competition was launched in 2023 to provide a high-quality performance club competition. The league expanded in 2024 and 2025 will include play-offs and a destination final in 2026. Currently the two Welsh teams are the WRU owned and operated Gwalia Lightning and Brython Thunder *(delivered with infrastructure support from Dragons RFC and Scarlets)*
- **Domestic Senior Club Rugby:** As we continue to evolve the women and girls' game there is still a gap to be filled below the Celtic Challenge which needs to be addressed.

OUR WOMEN & GIRLS' PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CENTRES ARE SHOWING POSITIVE PROGRESS IN UNDERPINNING OUR AMBITIONS

PDC	U18	U20	Celtic Challenge	Wales Training Squad	Wales
EAST	10	12	19	10	5
WEST	8	15	18	8	1
NORTH	15	9	10	3	2
TOTAL	33	36	47	21	8

- Success of PDCs are evident with 76% of PDC players playing representative or performance rugby across the last two years.
- Creating opportunity for individuals and dedicated workforce of coaches and science and medicine staff in women and girls' talent and performance rugby.
- Eight new senior caps and twenty-one training with the senior squad in the first two seasons of the PDCs.
- Opportunity for continued growth - with a focus on embedding, consistency, and sustainability.

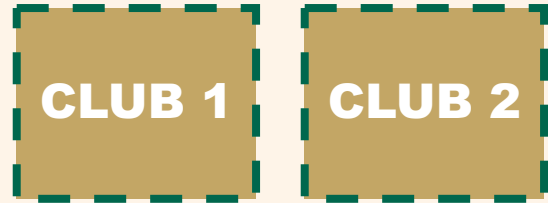
PREVIOUS ANALYSIS SUPPORTS A TWO CLUB, FOUR TEAM MODEL TO INCLUDE THE WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL GAME

- **Talent Pool & Competition:** Two professional women's teams will capitalise on the size of our talent pool and current/future competition models
- **Player Access:** This structure would provide national coaches with approximately 80 domestic players, in addition to those in England (primarily senior national team players who are regular starters for PWR clubs)
- **Retention & Repatriation:** Incentive for young talent to remain in Wales, increasing contact points for national team coaches and allowing greater control over individual development as well as attracting players currently in the PWR
- **Quality of Daily Training Environments:** A more robust training environment with regular interaction and collaboration with national squad coaching staff will ensure high-quality programmes and high-performance environments
- **Contracting Model:** Potential to provide greater flexibility than current model with nationally contracted players potentially required to play for one of the professional teams
- **Commercial Opportunities:** Having the best Welsh players in two professional Welsh teams will concentrate performance and therefore enhance commercial appeal and matchday attendances
- **Performance Campus Support:** This model would also support the concept of a national campus, where national squad players, age-grade squads, and elite team players could access programme support
- **Continued Performance Enhancement:** Two women's teams as part of two integrated professional clubs will elevate performance standards, foster collaboration and create competitive teams with increased game time

ALIGNMENT OF WOMEN'S & MEN'S PROFESSIONAL TEAMS

MODEL A: 4 clubs, unequal funding (2 + 2 model)

- The 2 elite clubs host 2 professional women's teams playing in the Celtic Challenge
- 40 senior squad players per club
- PDC players feed into professional club squads



Model B: 3 clubs, equal funding

- Tender process to host 2 professional women's teams playing in the Celtic Challenge
- 40 senior squad players per club
- PDC players feed into professional club squads



Model C: 3 clubs, unequal funding (2 + 1)

- The 2 elite clubs host 2 professional women's teams playing in the Celtic Challenge
- 40 senior squad players per club
- PDC players feed into professional club squads

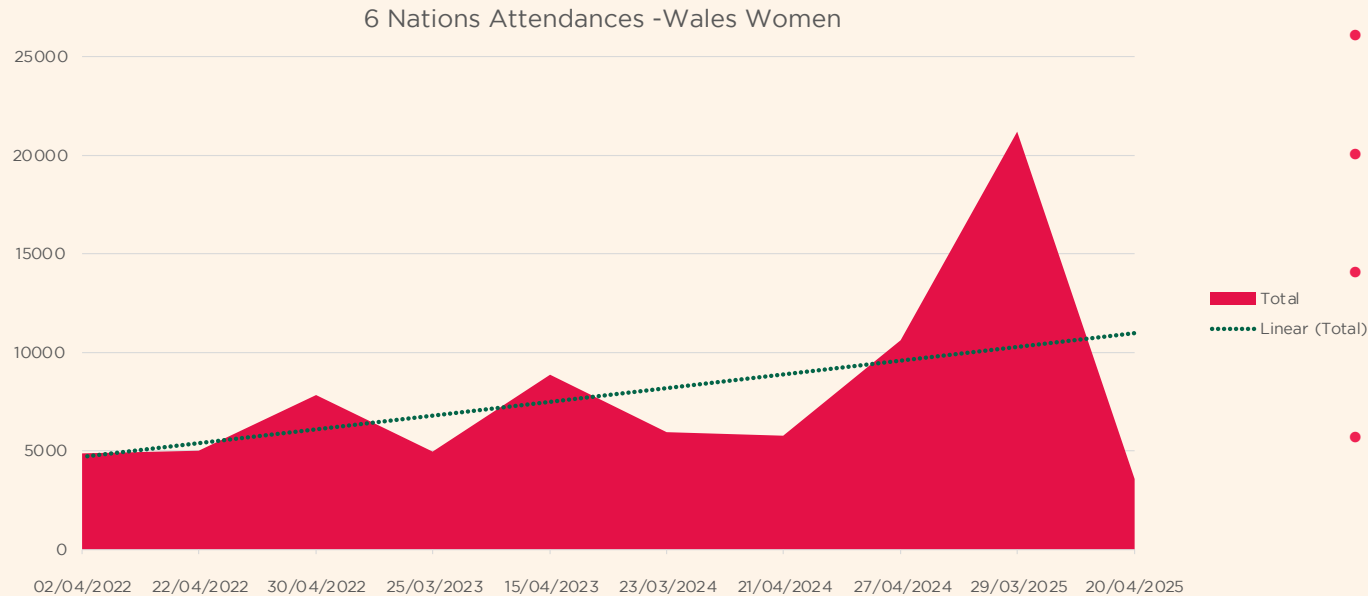


Model D: 2 clubs, equal funding

- Both clubs to host a professional women's team playing in the Celtic Challenge
- 40 senior squad players per club
- PDC players feed into National Academy which underpins the professional club squads



ATTENDANCE AT WOMEN'S SIX NATIONS HIGHLIGHTS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH ACROSS THE WHOLE OF THE WOMEN'S GAME

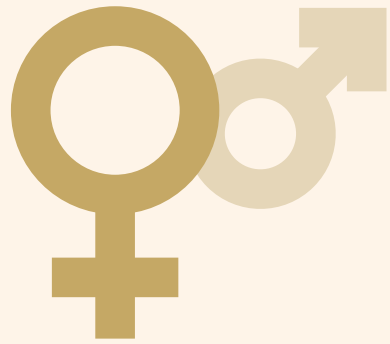


- There has been a steady increase in attendance figures at Wales Women's Six Nations since 2022
- 2023 - record for Wales women's Six Nations match **4,962 fans** (Wales v Ireland, Cardiff Arms Park)
- 2023 – sell-out record crowd Six Nations match **8,862 fans** (Wales v England, Cardiff Arms Park)
- 2024 – new record crowd for Wales women's Six Nations match **10,592 fans** (Wales v Italy, Principality Stadium)
- 2025 – record crowd for Welsh women's sporting event in Wales and Six Nations match **21,186 fans** (Wales v England, Principality Stadium)
- 2026 – ‘Fortress Cardiff’ with Wales v Scotland to be held at the Principality Stadium and both matches against France and Italy at Cardiff Arms Park allowing ticket bundling opportunities

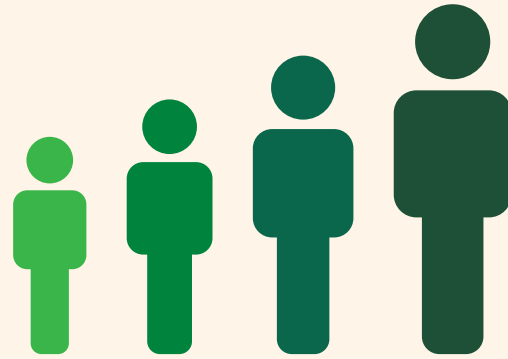
WOMEN'S RUGBY REACHES NEW AUDIENCES

The fan profile of women's rugby is considerably different to that of the men's game, from ticket purchasers to how they consume the game across a variety of media platforms. There is a clear opportunity to grow and diversify our Welsh rugby audience through women's rugby.

In comparison with the men's matches, the attendee demographic at women's matches are:



MORE FEMALE



YOUNGER



MORE AFFLUENT



MORE ENGAGED



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Confidential

THE CURRENT APPROACH TO ELITE RUGBY IS NO LONGER VIABLE DUE TO INCREASING GLOBAL AND NATIONAL CHALLENGES

- After analysing the increasing global and national headwinds affecting both financial and performance outcomes (and in light of the new PRA having not been signed by all professional clubs), on the 13th May 2025 the WRU Board agreed that the strategy to equally fund four men's professional clubs as part of the One Wales strategy was no longer viable
- The WRU Executive was asked to conduct an initial assessment of options for an improved professional rugby structure and look at the wider implications of changes which might be made on the future of the Welsh elite rugby ecosystem
- While drawing on a significant body of analysis, the WRU Board requested that further details be provided on all options and that a comprehensive consultation process with key stakeholders be formulated

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS ARE TO:



Identify the optimum structure for professional club rugby in Wales that best enables the WRU to achieve the goals outlined in the One Wales strategy



Identify system-wide changes that will best support the success of Elite Club Rugby



In doing so, identify opportunities to significantly improve the success of rugby in Wales

THE ONE WALES STRATEGY REMAINS OUR FUTURE FOCUS

VISION

"Uniting people and inspiring passion in our Welsh Rugby Nation."

MISSION

"Working together to create exceptional experiences and opportunities for everyone through our game"

2029 GOALS

Men's and women's national teams consistently ranked in the Top 5

Club teams challenging in the play-offs of URC / Celtic Challenge

Retain and grow the number of active participants

Financial sustainability at all levels of the game

Increase the percentage of the Welsh public positive about Welsh rugby

PILLARS



Develop competitive, inspirational clubs and national teams



Foster a thriving and sustainable community game



Accelerate development of the women and girls' rugby ecosystem



Engage and grow our Welsh rugby nation through positive brands and narratives

ENABLERS



Create growth from a sustainable financial foundation



Provide inclusive, collaborative and action-oriented governance and culture



Become a "smart" data and insight-driven rugby nation



Build and nurture diverse, high-performing and engaged teams and people across Welsh rugby

THE LACK OF SUCCESS IN WELSH ELITE RUGBY DEMANDS A BOLD AND TRANSFORMATIVE DEPARTURE FROM OUR CURRENT APPROACH



ONE WALES STRATEGY: PROFESSIONAL GAME PRIORITIES



DEVELOP INSPIRING, COMPETITIVE CLUBS AND NATIONAL TEAMS

- Both national teams consistently ranked in the Top 5 world rankings
- National teams capable of competing for honours annually in the Six Nations, the semi-finals and finals of RWC 2027 & 2029
- Consistently competitive clubs that challenge in the play-offs of their competitions
- More and better players for the professional game and for Wales

FINDINGS FROM WRU INTERNAL INTERVIEWS

- Creating an ecosystem for the whole game is our priority. Balancing men's and women's national and professional teams is vital for future success
- Our objectives are correct, but there is potential to improve both medium and long-term performance
- Objectives cannot be achieved by 2029 unless there is radical change to the whole system

EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Significant changes to the current system are urgently required
- Review and update timelines to ensure they are realistic for Wales to achieve
- Consider medium and long-term goals to align stakeholders towards a clear ambition

WE SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER HOW CHANGES TO THE MEN'S PROFESSIONAL GAME WILL CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW WOMEN'S RUGBY IN WALES



ONE WALES STRATEGY: WOMEN AND GIRLS' PRIORITIES

Accelerate the development of the women and girls' rugby ecosystem

- Equitable investment into the men and boys' game and women and girls' community game
- Increase the number of women and girls who would recommend their club to friends / family
- Further development of two Welsh performance clubs underpinned by a sustainable, competitive domestic competition
- Create a clearly identified pathway to increase the number of women coaches and match officials

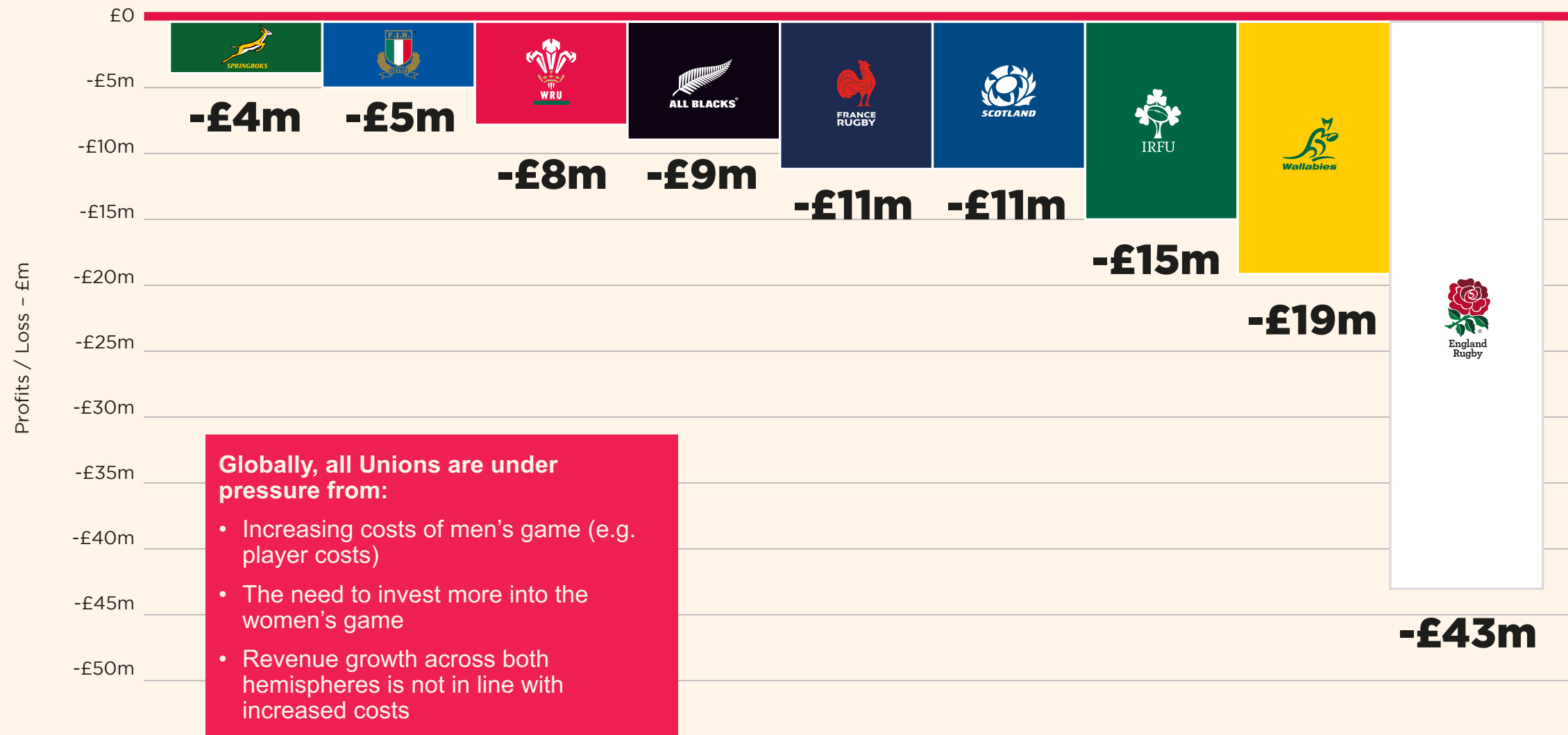
FINDINGS FROM WRU INTERNAL INTERVIEWS

- Changes to the structure of men's professional club rugby could create significant opportunities for the women's game by aligning team structures and driving greater investment



SUPPORTING INFORMATION

GLOBALLY, RUGBY IS FACING A SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL CHALLENGE



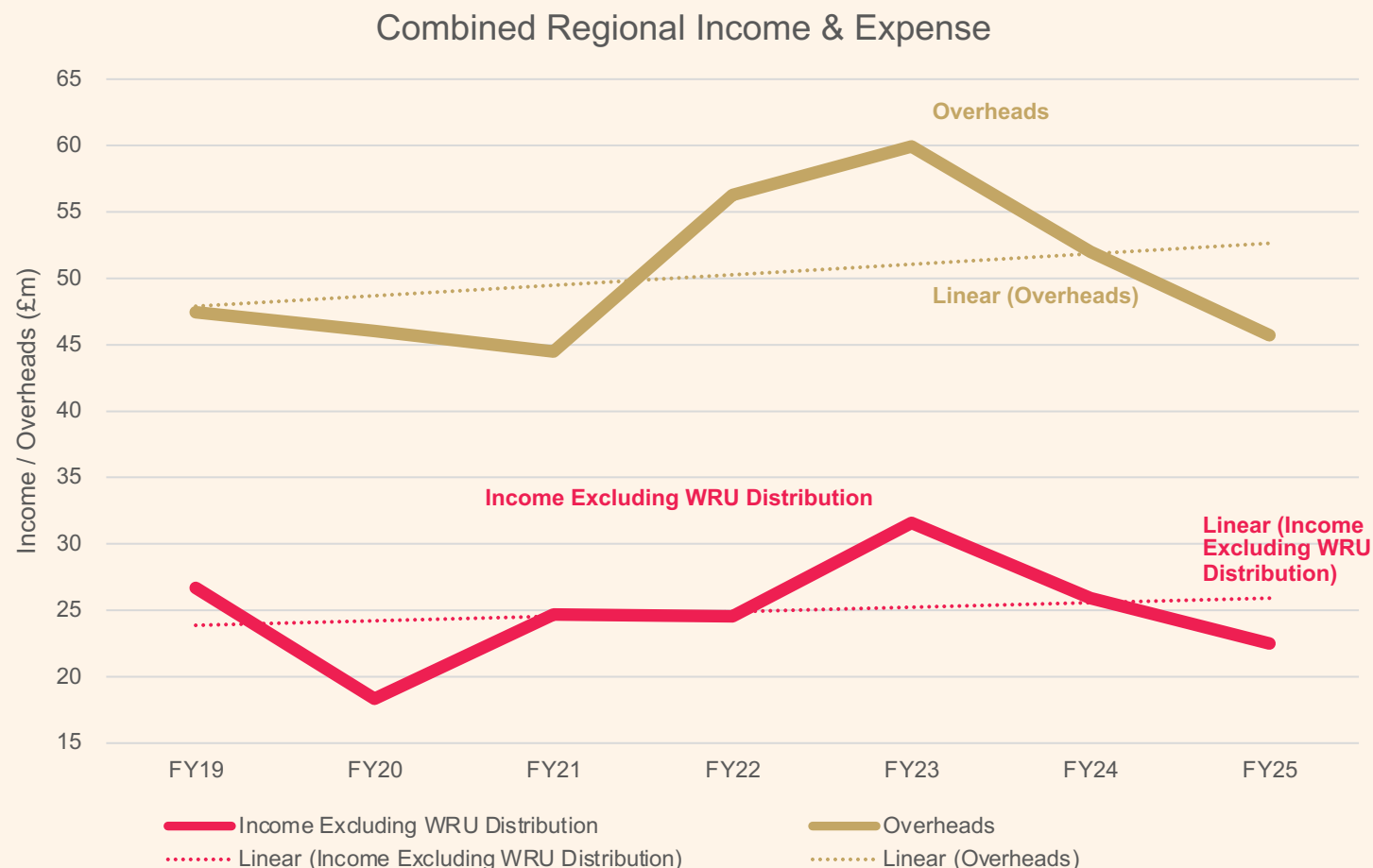
Note: 1. Converted to GBP based on relevant year exchange rate
 Source: FY24 annual reports on Union websites

Confidential – subject to further comment

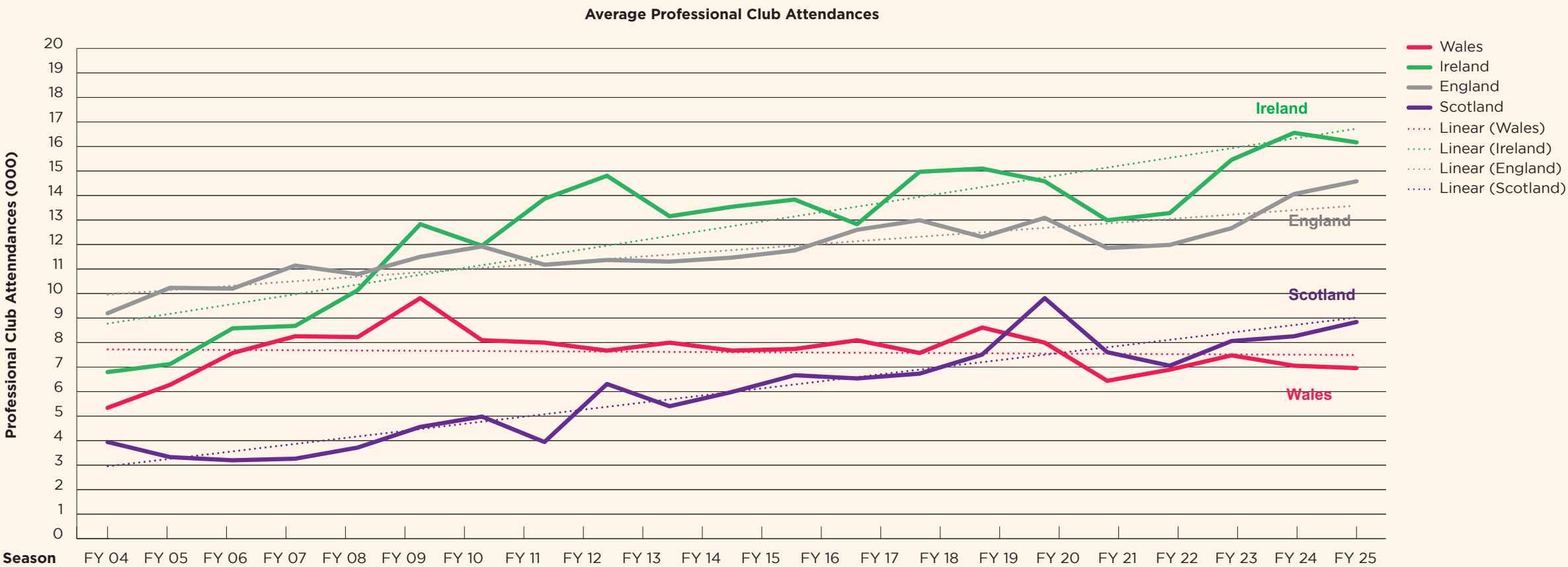


THE CURRENT FINANCIAL MODEL OF OUR MEN'S PROFESSIONAL CLUBS IS NOT SUSTAINABLE

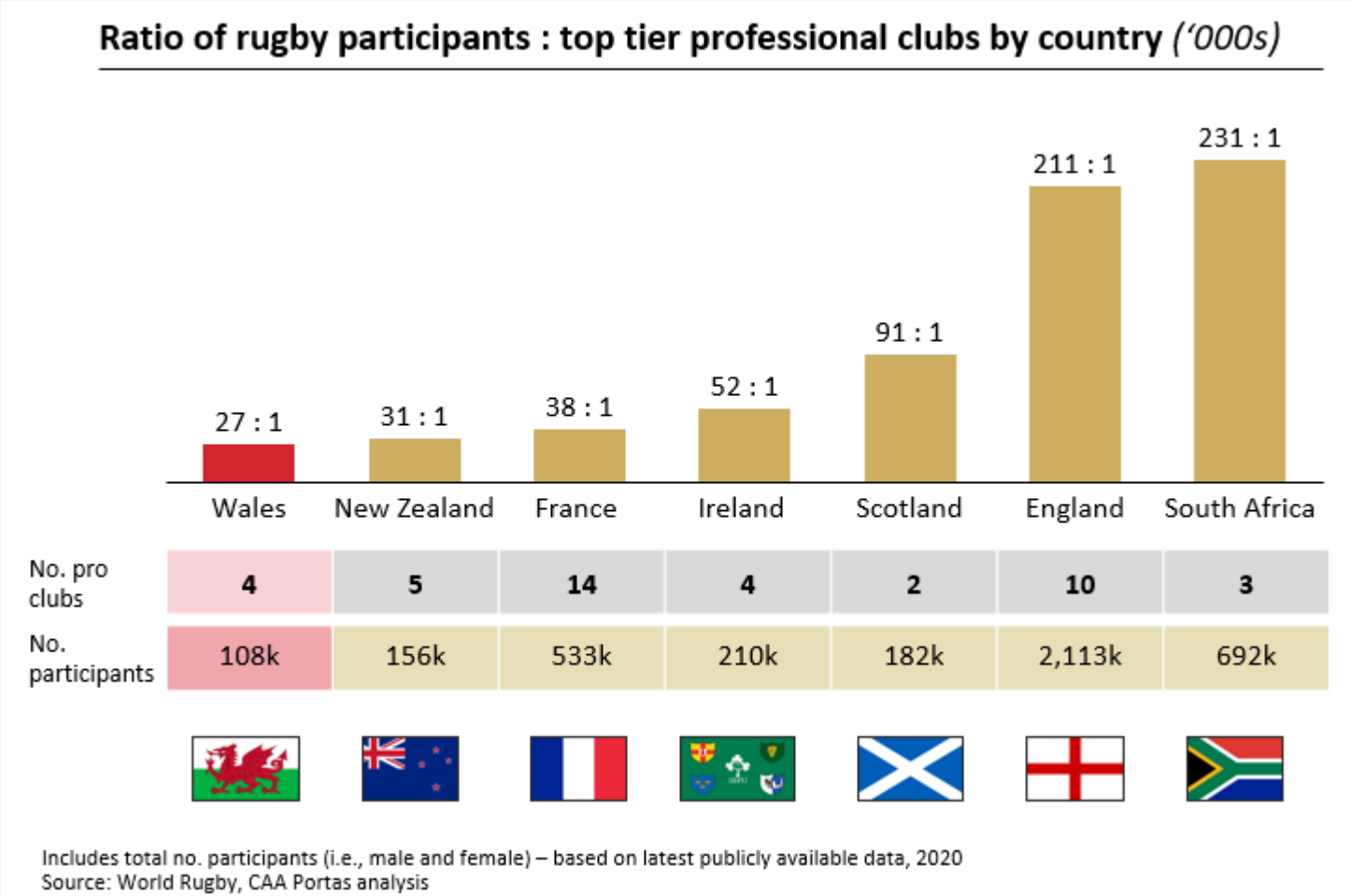
- Combined professional club overheads have increased at a greater rate than professional club revenue (excluding WRU and club owner funding) since FY19
- Without WRU and club owner funding, professional clubs are not viable businesses, with commercial and competition income only covering approximately 50% of costs
- Urgent action is needed to develop a more sustainable operating model with financially resilient professional clubs



MEN'S PROFESSIONAL CLUB GAME ATTENDANCE HAS DECLINED OVER THE LONG TERM WITH MINIMAL POSITIVE IMPACT OF NATIONAL TEAM SUCCESS



WALES HAS MORE MEN'S PROFESSIONAL CLUBS RELATIVE TO ITS RUGBY PLAYING POPULATION THAN OTHER RUGBY NATIONS



Wales has the lowest ratio of players to professional clubs of all benchmarks

Wales has the same number of professional clubs as Ireland, despite having lower total participation levels

Wales have 2 times more professional rugby clubs than Scotland, however Scotland's total participation is 68% higher

RELATIVELY HIGH USE OF NWQPs REDUCES BOTH THE INVESTMENT AND THE OPPORTUNITIES WE CAN PROVIDE FOR WELSH TALENT

CLUB SPEND ON SENIOR NWQPS (2024-25 SEASON)

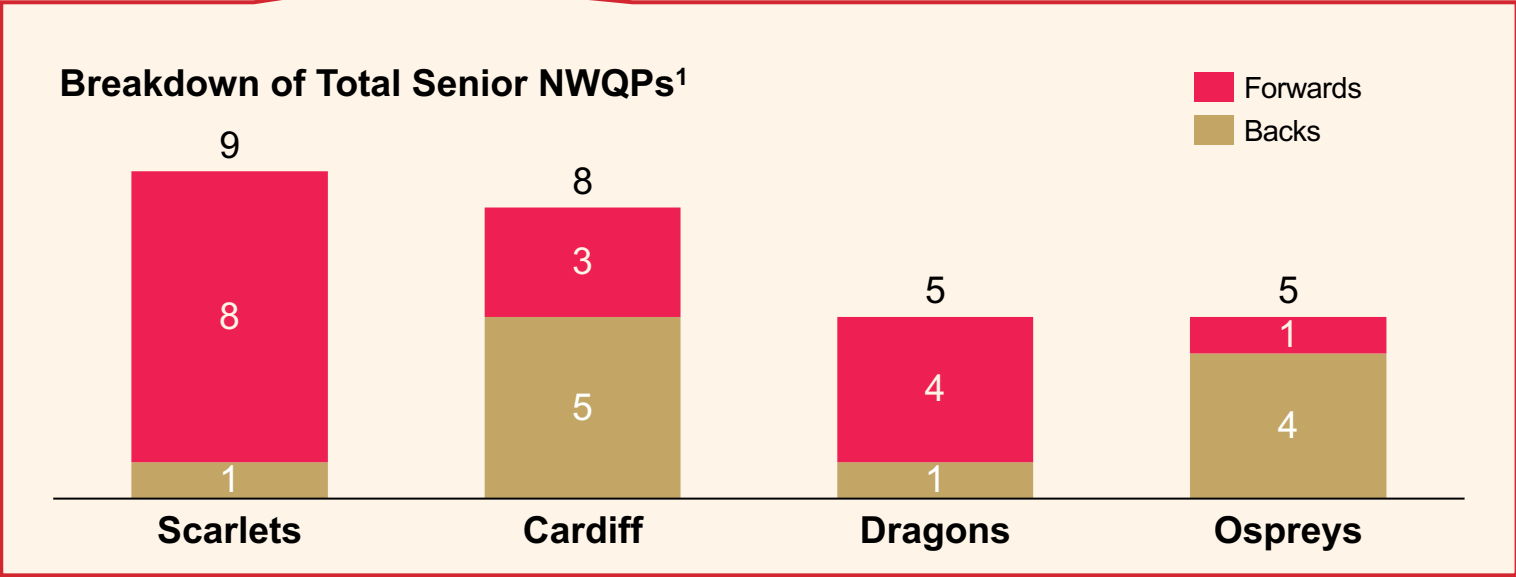
27
Total Senior NWQPs

x

~£140k
Average salary of
Senior NWQPs

=

~£3.8m¹
Total spend on
Senior NWQPs
(across four clubs)



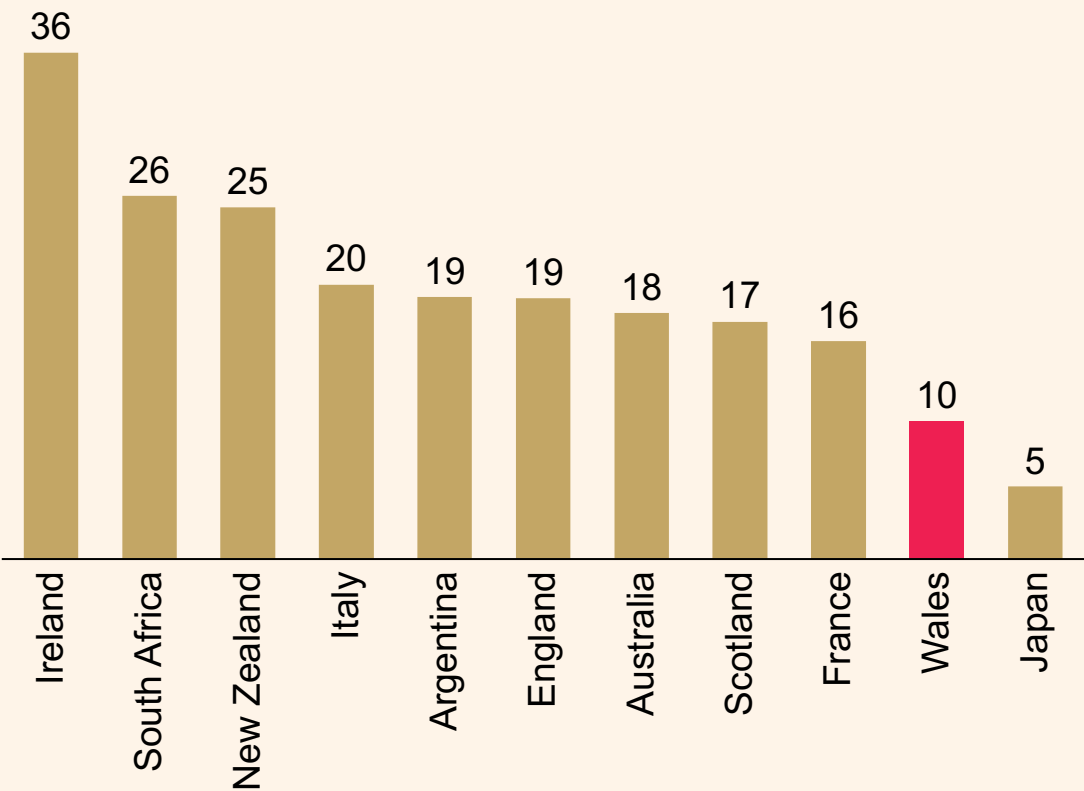
- Current spend on NWQPs is high (~£3.8m) with 27 senior players across the four clubs
- The current WRU NWQP squad cap is also regarded as high (max. 20% of club squads)

Note 1: Costs associated with NWQPs are based on the total costs to the business.

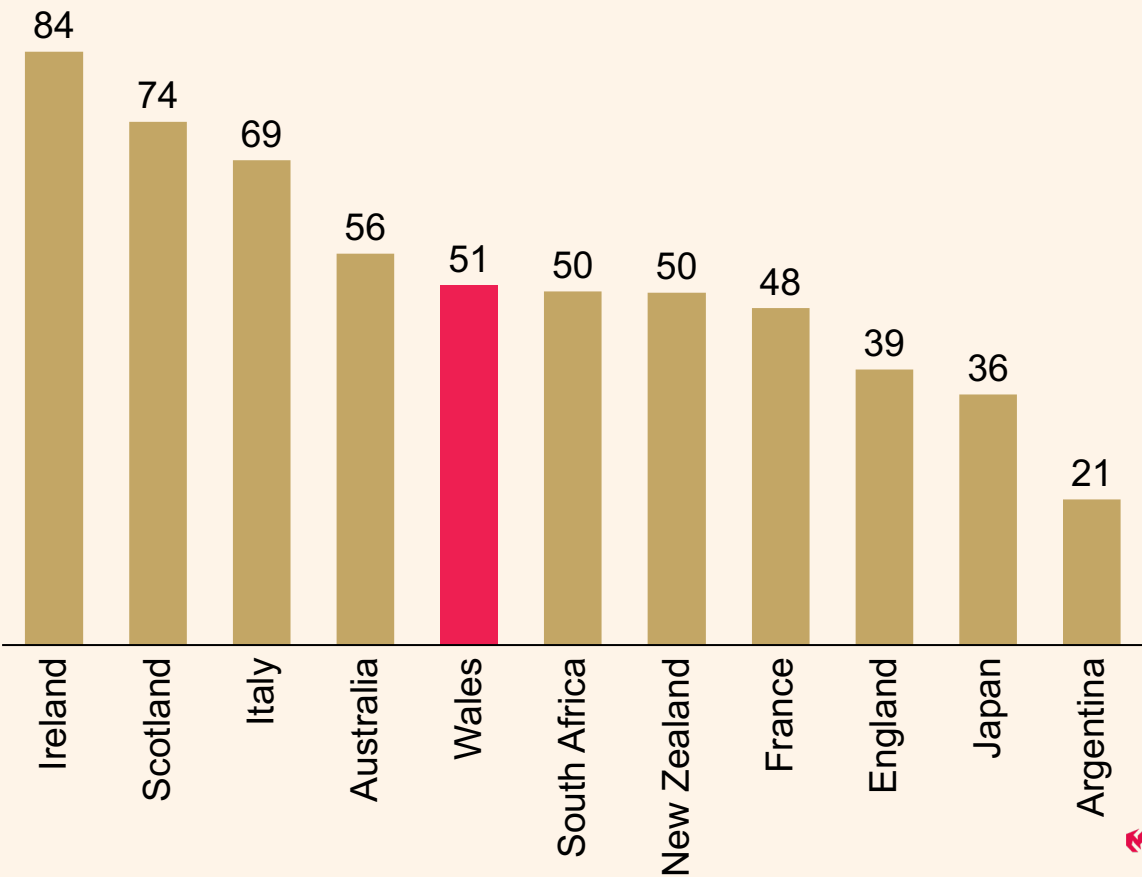
WALES NATIONAL TEAM COHESION IS LOW RELATIVE TO OTHER NATIONAL TEAMS HIGHLIGHTING THE GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF TALENT INSIDE AND OUTSIDE WALES IN KEY POSITIONS

Team cohesion index (2024)

Team cohesion evaluates the frequency of player pairings playing regularly together. Given the intermittent nature of national team training and match play, team cohesion can be an important metric and as a proxy for geographical player spread.



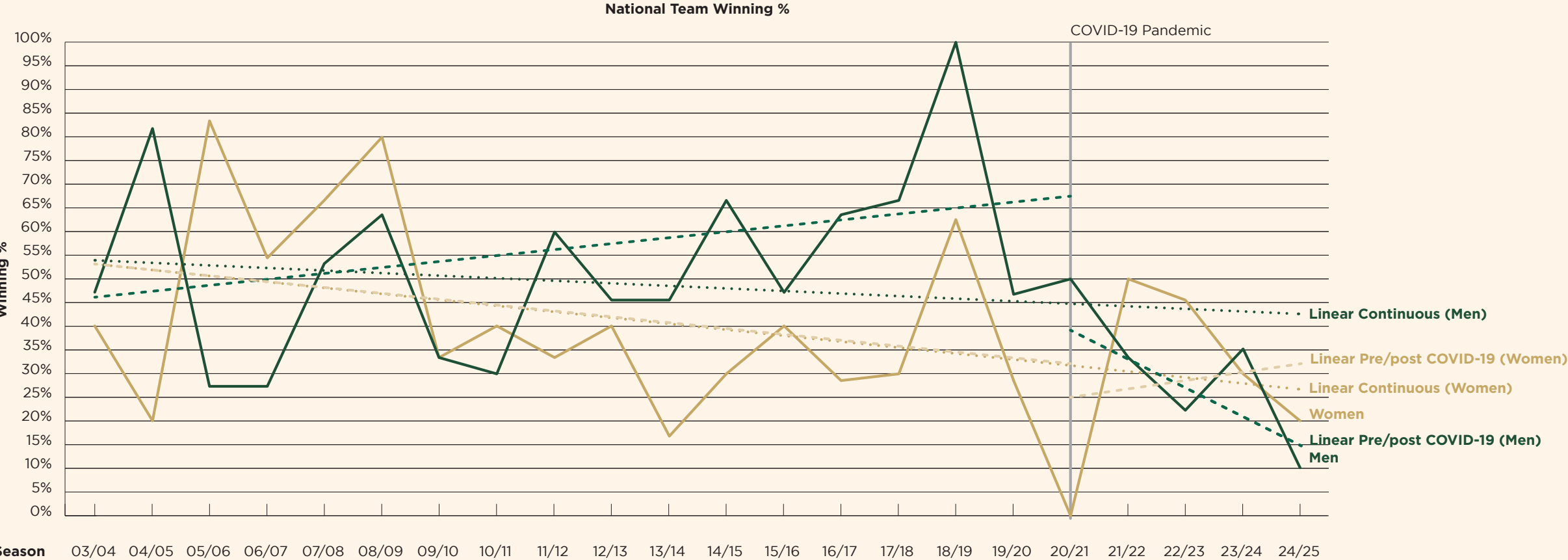
% of players from two most common clubs¹



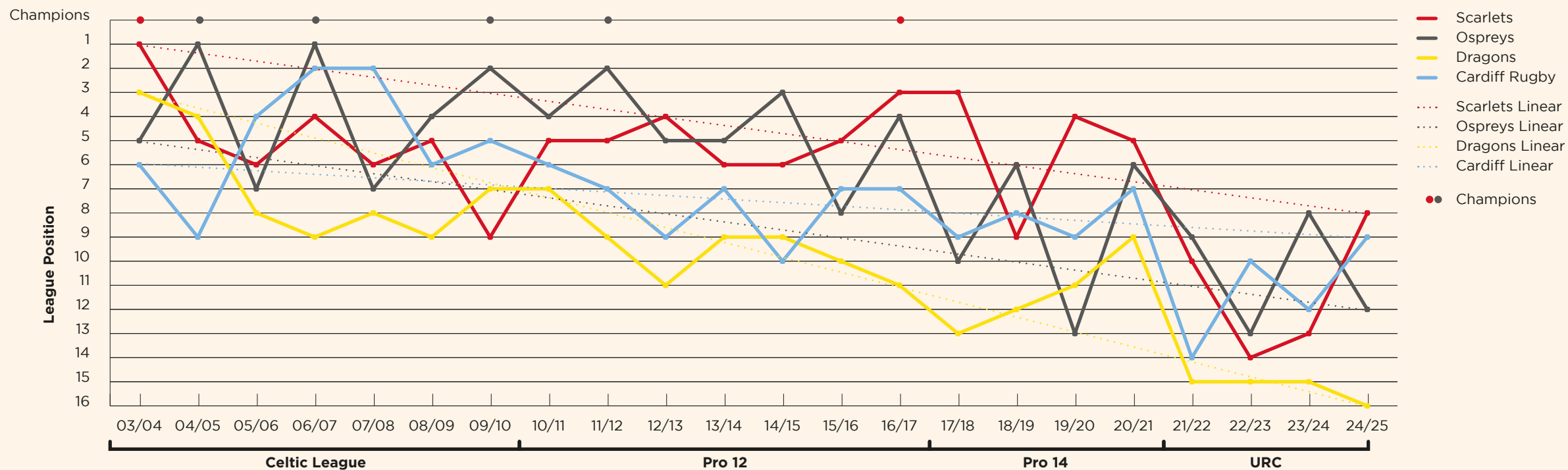
Note 1: Average share of players from two most common clubs taken from matchday squads



NATIONAL TEAM PERFORMANCE HAS BEEN IN A CHALLENGING DECLINE WITH RESULTS IN THE MEN'S GAME SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTED SINCE COVID

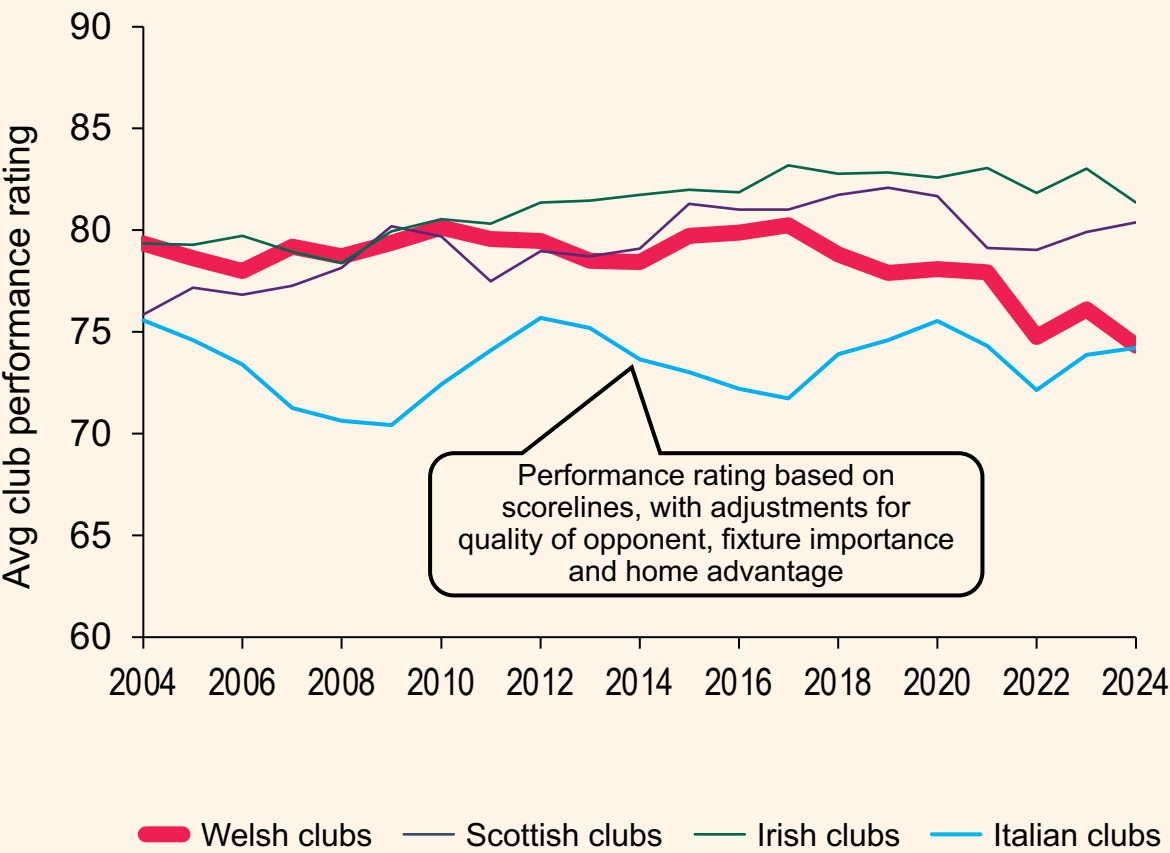


HISTORIC LEAGUE POSITIONS OF WELSH PROFESSIONAL CLUBS (MEN'S) HAVE ALSO SEEN A DECLINING TREND

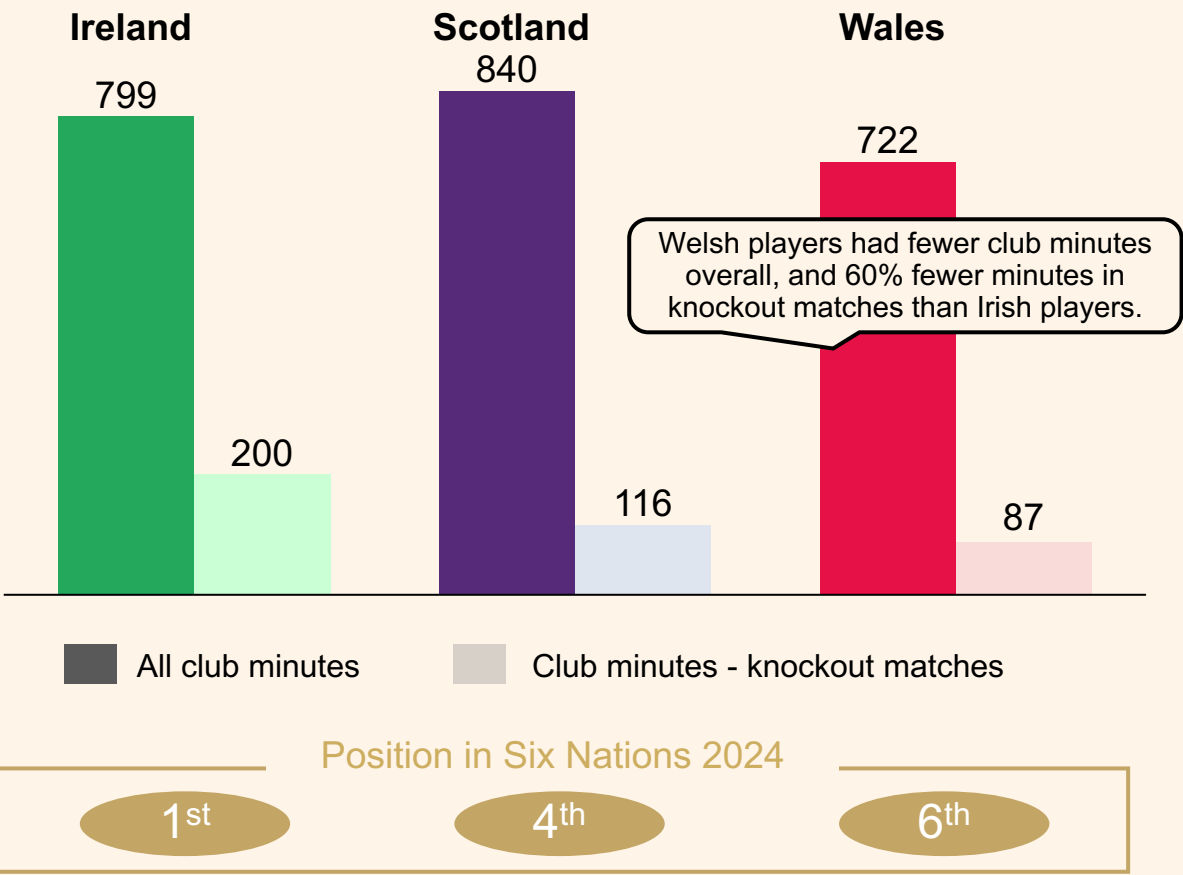


DECLINING CLUB PERFORMANCE DECREASES BOTH THE NUMBER AND QUALITY OF PLAYING OPPORTUNITIES

AVERAGE MEN'S PROFESSIONAL CLUB PERFORMANCE, BY COUNTRY



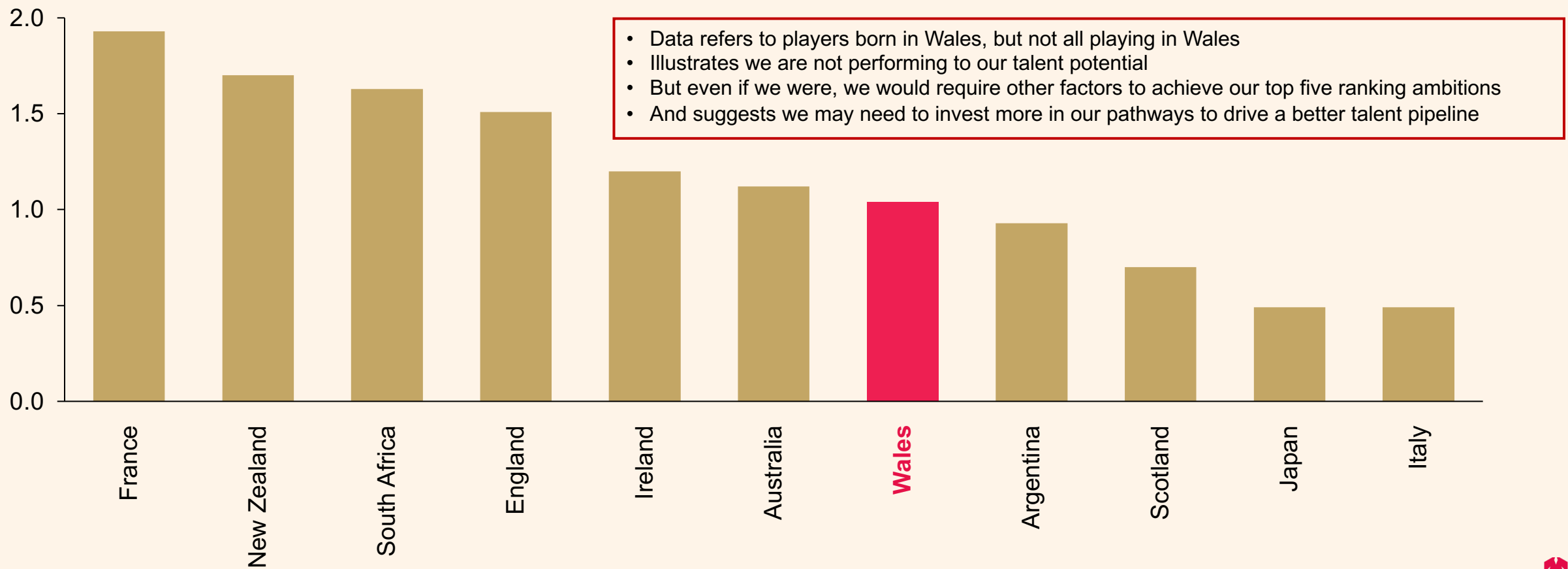
AVERAGE CLUB MINUTES PER MALE PLAYER, SIX NATIONS 2024 SQUADS



OUR TALENT POOL STANDS 7TH IN THE WORLD BUT THIS IS NOT REFLECTED IN OUR OVERALL WORLD RANKING

AVERAGE PLAYER RATING (XP) OF TOP 30 PLAYERS BORN IN COUNTRY (INCLUDING PLAYERS CURRENTLY PLAYING OUTSIDE HOME COUNTRY)

Estimates player skill through calculating the impact of every on-ball action (e.g., carry, pass, tackle) in a match on the team's probability of scoring next

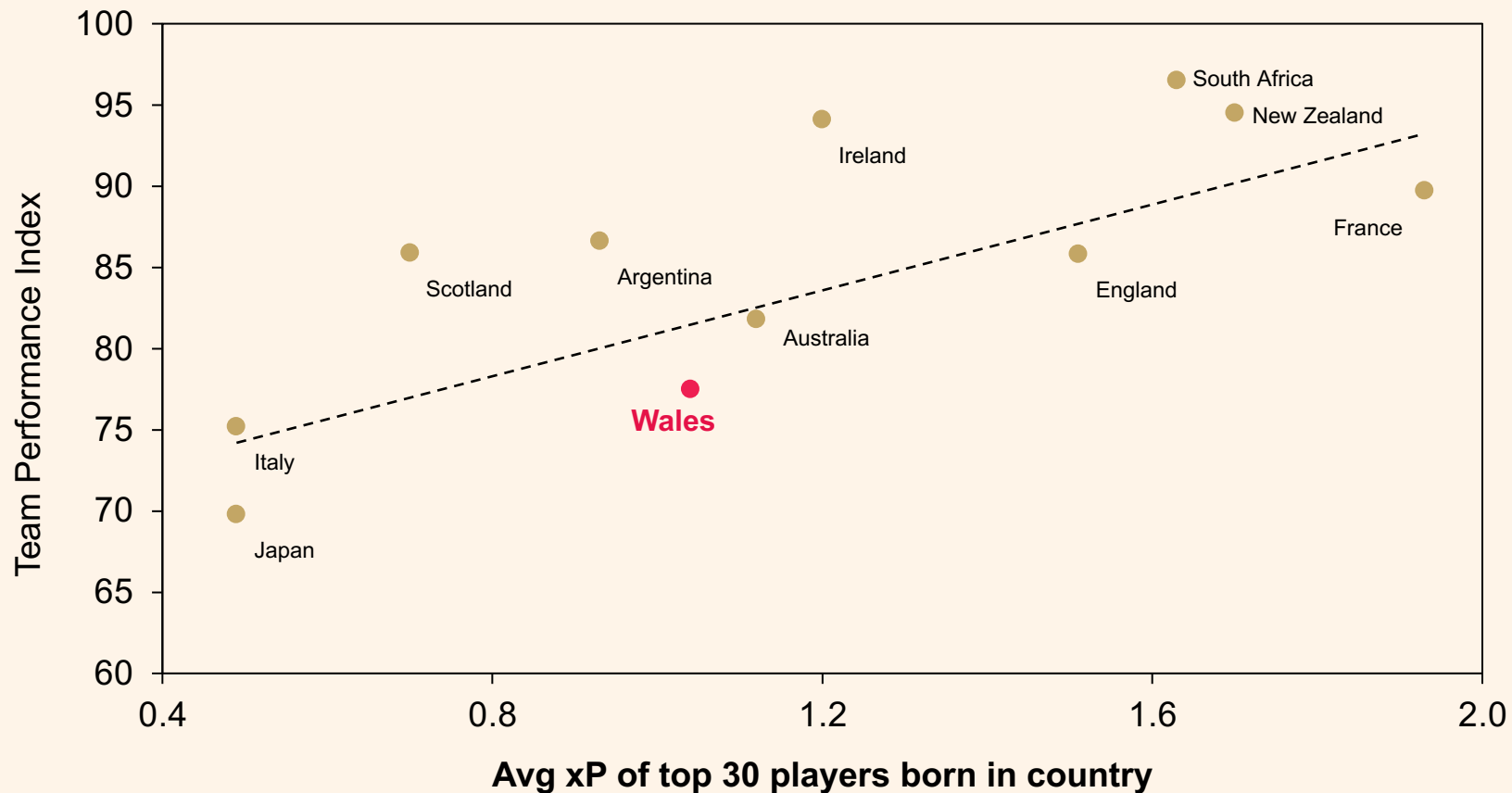


Source: Oval Report for WRU Autumn Nations Series
2024 review



MEN'S NATIONAL TEAM HAS UNDERPERFORMED RELATIVE TO THE QUALITY OF ITS ELITE TALENT POOL

TEAM PERFORMANCE INDEX AGAINST AVERAGE PLAYER RATING (XP) OF TOP 30 PLAYERS BORN IN COUNTRY



- There is a correlation between the average quality of a country's top players and its national team's performance rating
- Wales is performing below the level expected given the quality of elite players available
- South Africa, Ireland and Scotland are currently overachieving given their elite talent pool





DIOLCH



9. GLOSSARY

**A GLOSSARY OF TERMINOLOGY USED IN
THIS CONSULTATION PACK**

GLOSSARY

BUCS	British Universities and Colleges Sport
FY	Financial year
MDT	Multi-disciplinary-teams; typically referring to the group of coaches and support staff around a team or players
NCE	National Centre for Excellence
NWQPs	Non-Welsh Qualified Players
One Wales Strategy	The WRU's five-year strategy for 2024 – 2029. Launched in June 2024 which can be found here (English) and here (Welsh)
Pathways	Structured programme to develop young rugby players from grassroots to elite level to create more skilled and athletic players
PDC	Player Development Centre
PRA	Professional Rugby Agreement. The agreement between the WRU and professional clubs which sets out the club's eligibility for WRU funding
Professional club	Cardiff Rugby, Dragons RFC, Ospreys and Scarlets
PRB	Professional Rugby Board – The board comprises of representatives from each of the five professional entities in Welsh Rugby: Cardiff Rugby, Dragons, Ospreys, Scarlets and the WRU

GLOSSARY

PRL	Gallagher PREM Rugby, formerly known as Premiership Rugby
PWR	Premiership Women's Rugby
Revenue	The amount of money brought in by a company operation over a set period of time before subtracting any expenses
Rugby ecosystem	The totality of the rugby systems, encompassing all levels and participation from grassroots to national teams
RWC	Rugby World Cup
SRC	Super Rygbi Cymru
URC	United Rugby Championship
WQP	Welsh Qualified Player
WRU Board	The WRU Board of Directors govern the WRU. It is made up of appointed Directors, the Chair and CEO
WRU Executive	The executive leadership team of the WRU
WSC Rugby	Welsh Schools and Colleges Rugby