

WRU Consultation on the Future of Elite Rugby in Wales

Meeting with: CF10 Rugby Trust

12th September 2025

Attendees

Lynn Glaister: Chair, CF10 Rugby Trust

David Allen: Former Chair, CF10 Rugby Trust

Andrew Collins: Founding Member, CF10 Rugby Trust

Sarah Kirk: Board Member, CF10 Rugby Trust

Steve Coombs, Board Member, CF10 Rugby Trust

Dave Reddin: Director of Rugby, WRU

Phil Morgan: Group Finance Director, WRU

Kieran Morgan: Project Manager, WRU

Claire Donovan: Board Member, WRU

Overview

- The WRU representatives outlined the consultation's structure, including timelines (decision by the end of October), the role of the board, and the importance of stakeholder feedback and emphasised that no decisions had been made and that the process was genuinely open, aiming to clarify proposals and listen to stakeholder views.
- The Trust representatives appreciated the opportunity for independent input and stressed the need for transparency and genuine engagement. They outlined the club's history, achievements, and the importance of retaining Cardiff's identity. Concerns were raised about previous rebranding efforts and the risk of repeating past mistakes by losing heritage and alienating supporters.
- The Trust had conducted a survey with 311 responses (approx. 30% of membership), revealing significant distrust of the WRU (only 28% trust the WRU to act in the game's best interests). Supporters expressed frustration, anger, and anxiety about the future, with many fearing the loss of the club and its traditions.
- The meeting was constructive, with both sides acknowledging the complexity and emotional weight of the decisions ahead. Supporters urged the WRU to prioritise heritage, community, and sustainable growth, while WRU representatives committed to considering all feedback and maintaining open lines of communication throughout the process.

Concerns re Structural Change

- The group questioned the financial viability of proposed budgets, the effectiveness of centralisation, and the impact on club competitiveness and supporter engagement. There were detailed discussions of funding challenges, commercial income, stadium redevelopment, and the need for a sustainable business model. They highlighted support for change and improved funding, but not at the expense of club identity or supporter engagement.
- There was strong Recognition of Cardiff's unique position as the capital city and its potential for growth if its heritage is preserved.

- Concerns were raised about the emotional impact of potential changes on supporters and staff, and suggestions were made for WRU to consider mental health support during transitions.
- There were questions about timelines, redundancy processes, competitive tendering for club selection, and the publication of consultation findings. The WRU confirmed ongoing analysis by external consultants and a commitment to transparent communication following board decisions.

Feedback on the Optimal Model

- The Two Team model was described as “major, major surgery” for Welsh rugby, with significant concerns about its impact on competitiveness, supporter engagement, and heritage. There was a strong sense that such a drastic reduction would be highly contentious and potentially damaging to the sport’s ecosystem in Wales.
- On competitiveness, the proposed playing budgets (around £8 million per team) were seen as insufficient to make the remaining teams competitive, especially in the URC. There was anxiety that the teams would become “good losers” rather than genuine contenders, and that immediate success would be required to justify the upheaval.
- The group warned that removing Cardiff’s name and identity would be “cultural vandalism” and commercially counterintuitive, given the club’s history and location in the capital. Survey data showed only 26% of current supporters would support a new hybrid team, and only 9% would support a team that didn’t play at Cardiff Arms Park or in Cardiff colours. The group argued that expecting fans to simply switch allegiance to a new or merged team was unrealistic and “arrogant”.
- Retention of the Cardiff name and heritage was also likely to be crucial to the ability to obtain a new long-term lease at and the redevelopment of Cardiff Arms Park. With an increased ability to better support events at the Principality, the latter had the potential to benefit all of Welsh Rugby.
- Around 30% of survey respondents each supported retaining four teams on equal funding (though it was recognised that this was not an option under the consultation), a 2+2 model, or reducing to two teams.
- The group argued that all four clubs should be retained if possible, but accepted that financial realities might make this difficult.
- The loss of historic brands and identities was seen as a commercial risk, potentially alienating sponsors and undermining the clubs’ financial bases.
- There was disappointment that the two-team model did not include a move to the English Premiership, which was seen as more attractive than remaining in the URC. The URC was criticised for its structure, limited home fixtures, and lack of travelling fans, making it hard to run a profitable club.
- Concerns were raised that two teams with large squads would not provide enough game time for players, leading to an exodus of talent to England or elsewhere.
- There was a preference for retaining three teams rather than reducing to two. While not the group’s ideal, a reduction to three teams was seen as preferable to two, as it would better preserve rivalries, supporter bases, and player pathways. The group acknowledged that the optimal number of teams might depend on which league Welsh clubs play in (URC vs. English Premiership).
- There was strong opposition to “hybrid” teams or “probables vs possibles B” models, which were seen as lacking identity and unlikely to attract supporter loyalty or commercial interest. Shared Rugby Leadership

Ownership, Investment, and Commercial Viability

- Cardiff Rugby is currently owned by the WRU, which places it in a unique position compared to other clubs. Supporters expressed a desire for the club to return to private ownership as soon as possible, highlighting the vulnerability and limitations of WRU ownership.
- The WRU’s proposals suggested a model where rugby operations (playing side) would be centrally controlled, while off-field operations (commercial, ticketing, bars, merchandise) could be privately managed. Supporters found this unattractive to genuine investors, arguing that most would want a stake in the rugby side, not just the commercial aspects.
- The fragility of benefactor funding was discussed, with examples given of how sudden changes in investor interest can destabilise clubs. The WRU acknowledged this risk and emphasised the need for financial stability to foster collaboration and long-term planning.

- Supporters strongly advocated for continued supporter representation on club boards, citing positive experiences at Cardiff and Scarlets. They argued that having a supporter director improves trust, transparency, and decision-making, and offered to share policy documents on how this could be implemented.
- There was scepticism about the WRU's ability to manage clubs effectively if ownership and control were centralised, given past governance issues and reputational damage. Supporters stressed that any move towards central control must address these concerns and rebuild trust.
- The group favoured a governance model that balances financial stability, supporter engagement, and club autonomy. They warned that excessive centralisation could undermine club identity, commercial success, and supporter loyalty.

Academy and Pathway Development

- The group agreed that better alignment between the national team, professional clubs, and academies is needed. They highlighted that past poor relationships between national and club coaches had harmed player development, but recent improvements (such as the new head coach engaging with club coaches) were welcomed.
- The WRU's proposal for a centralised national campus/academy was met with scepticism. Supporters felt that Welsh rugby's tribal and regional rivalries are a strength, and centralising all elite development risked creating a "soulless" environment and eroding club identity.
- The group advocated for investment in club-based facilities and pathways, citing Cardiff's successful gym partnership as a cost-effective example. They suggested that regular collaborative sessions between clubs could foster alignment without full centralisation.
- The group referenced the successful national elite coaching system introduced in 2005, which complemented club academies and produced a "golden generation" of players. They noted that scrapping this system for cost reasons a decade ago was a turning point, and that some of its alumni are now returning as coaches.
- Cardiff's pathway was praised for bringing back talented players and providing a strong foundation for age-grade rugby. 88% of survey respondents wanted to keep the current relationship between Cardiff RFC and Cardiff Rugby, seeing it as vital for player development.
- Concerns included the risk of losing local identity, the potential for players to leave Wales for better opportunities, and the lack of detail and transparency around the costs and benefits of a centralised academy.
- The group argued that clear standards and targeted funding for each professional club's facilities would be more effective than a single central campus. They emphasised the need for investment in pathways, coach development, and player retention.

National Centre for Elite Rugby

- The group was sceptical about the effectiveness of a centralised academy, preferring investment in club-based facilities and pathways that have proven successful at Cardiff. They argued that centralisation risks losing the tribalism and rivalry that make Welsh rugby unique. Centralising elite development risked creating a "soulless" environment, eroding club identity, and diminishing the sense of rivalry that energises the sport and its supporters.
- The group questioned whether a single national centre would deliver better outcomes than investing in club-based facilities. They pointed to Cardiff's own cost-effective gym partnership as an example of how targeted investment at the club level can deliver high value.
- There was concern that a central campus would make the experience of earning a first Welsh cap less special, as it would simply be "turning down a different corridor" rather than arriving at a new, prestigious venue. They also worried that centralisation could lead to players leaving Wales for better opportunities elsewhere.
- The group noted a lack of detail about the costs and benefits of the proposed centre, expressing concern that it could become an expensive capital project that diverts funds away from professional clubs. This concern was heightened by the WRU's recent history of investing in capital projects. This concern was heightened by the WRU's recent history of investing in capital projects.

- They suggested that regular collaborative sessions between clubs could foster alignment and knowledge-sharing without the need for full centralisation. They also advocated for clear standards and targeted funding for each club's facilities, rather than a single national campus.
- The group referenced the success of the now-defunct national elite coaching system, which complemented club academies and produced a "golden generation" of players, arguing that such layered approaches had proven effective in the past.

Women's Rugby

- The group expressed strong support for establishing a Cardiff women's team, with 79% of survey respondents in favour. They emphasised that it is unacceptable for professional clubs in Wales not to have women's teams and that women's rugby should be fully integrated into the rugby family, rather than treated as a separate entity.
- The group highlighted the potential to increase visibility and support for women's rugby by aligning it with the men's game and leveraging existing supporter bases. They suggested clever scheduling (e.g., alternating match weeks) to maximise attendance and engagement, especially when men's teams are playing away.
- Cardiff's history in women's rugby was celebrated, including references to the earliest known photograph of a women's rugby team in the UK (1917, Cardiff Rugby) and the achievements of players like Nadine Griffiths. Cardiff's legacy in women's rugby was highlighted as a source of pride and a foundation for future growth. The group argued that a women's team under the Cardiff banner should be an essential part of the club's continued existence.
- The group cautioned against women's rugby becoming a scapegoat for cuts to the men's game, especially if resources are reallocated during restructuring. They stressed the need for clear communication about funding and investment to avoid this perception.
- There was criticism of the branding and identity of current women's teams (e.g., Gwalia Lightning), with feedback that such names lack local resonance and recognition.
- The group advocated for collaboration with universities and other outside bodies to enhance women's rugby development and player pathways.
- They noted that Cardiff's existing structure, where Cardiff RFC matches are included in season tickets, could be expanded to include women's fixtures, increasing regularity and engagement for supporters.