

Y Strategaeth Amgen v2.2

The Alternative Strategy for Welsh Rugby

Foreword

This plan did not begin as an attempt to produce the perfect answer to every problem in Welsh rugby.

It began with something much simpler: a belief that Welsh rugby deserved a credible alternative built on evidence, honesty and practicality, not on narrative, haste or managed decline. The starting point was straightforward. If there are serious problems in finance, performance, pathways, governance and trust, then those problems should be set out clearly, tested properly and solved in the open. Nothing more complicated than that.

What brought people behind this work was not blind agreement on every detail. It was the opposite. People came to it because they recognised that the starting principles were sound. Be honest about what is known and what is not. Protect what matters in Welsh rugby while being hard-headed about what must change. Separate facts from assumptions. Publish the problem clearly enough that others can challenge it. Build a route forward that is strong enough to survive scrutiny, and flexible enough to improve through debate.

That is why this plan matters. It does not ask anyone to accept a conclusion on trust. It asks people to engage with a framework that is trying to do the right things in the right order: tell the truth about the current position, preserve what is worth preserving, confront what is failing, and create a system that earns its future through better standards, stronger pathways, clearer accountability and more disciplined use of money.

Many people involved in and around Welsh rugby have been frustrated for years, not just by outcomes, but by the sense that important decisions are too often presented as inevitable before the evidence has been properly examined. This work was worth backing because it refused to start there. Instead, it started with a simple proposition: Welsh rugby should not be forced into irreversible choices until the alternatives have been properly tested and the consequences properly understood.

That simple proposition created something larger. It gave people from different perspectives a basis to contribute. Not because everyone saw the game in exactly the same way, but because they shared the view that Welsh rugby needs more than argument, slogan or sentiment. It needs a practical route forward that is ambitious enough to matter and disciplined enough to be credible.

This document is the result of that approach. It is not presented as the last word. It is presented as a serious attempt to set out a better path, one that people can interrogate, improve and, if the evidence supports it, build behind together.

Contents

Foreword	2
Part I: Campaign and Delegate Pack	7
Part II: Core Strategy and Decision Framework	13
1 Elite Performance and Player Welfare	16
1.1 Centralised player management and welfare standards	16
1.2 Selection policy and overseas-based players	16
1.3 Player welfare and support	17
1.4 Shared performance principles	17
1.5 Definition of centralised within a four-region model	18
1.6 Summary	18
1.7 Cross-reference: funding models and constraints	18
1.8 Pillar summary	18
1.9 Key enhancements	18
2 Player Pathways and Academies for a Stronger Pipeline	20
2.1 Rebuilding the Talent Pathway	20
2.1.1 The Post-16 Choke Point and Retention Problem	20
2.1.2 Professional Opportunities and the Funnel Width	21
2.1.3 Pathway output as the primary system test	22
2.1.4 National Academy plus Regional Centres, with Enhancements	22
2.1.5 Bridging Competitions: Academy to Club to SRC to Pro	23
2.1.6 Pathways That Support Exports, Without Losing Players	23
2.1.7 Investment Logic and Women’s Pathway Integration	24
2.2 Pillar Summary (Delegate-Ready)	24
2.3 Key enhancements	24
3 Smart Financial Governance and Contracting	25
3.1 Damage Since the 2023 Professional Rugby Agreement - Governance and Funding Issues	25
3.2 Refinancing Reality Check - What the £55 to 60m Facility Actually Means	26
3.2.1 Funding perimeter and category discipline	29

3.2.2	Conditional four-region stabilisation period	29
3.2.3	Professional and community game separation	30
3.3	Funding models and what they imply	31
3.3.1	Model A: Four clubs, unequal funding (2 + 2)	31
3.3.2	Model B: Three clubs, equal funding	32
3.3.3	Model C: Three clubs, unequal funding (2 + 1)	32
3.3.4	Model D: Two clubs, equal funding	32
3.3.5	Key Features of the Proposed Optimal System	32
3.4	Real finance: budgets, sustainability and investment	32
3.4.1	10-Year financial model summary (technical reference)	32
3.4.2	Detailed 10-Year Financial Model	33
3.4.3	The Three-Team Budget vs PRA and Other Nations	34
3.4.4	Investment Allocation and Transparency	34
3.4.5	Growth engine participation and funding model (v2)	35
3.4.6	Financial guardrails and failure logic	35
3.4.7	V2.2 finance note	36
3.5	Financial frustrations and credibility	36
3.6	Licensing, ownership and deal mechanics in fan debate	36
3.6.1	From models to mechanics	36
3.6.2	Deal mechanics: share and amplification	36
3.7	V2.2 recommendation: Equal and sustainable funding	37
3.8	V2.2 finance recommendations (detail)	37
3.9	Pillar summary	37
4	Grassroots Revival and Coach Education	39
4.1	Women's rugby as a standalone growth engine	39
4.2	National coaching and schools reset	40
4.3	Women's Participation per Capita	41
4.4	Pillar summary	41
4.5	Key enhancements	41
5	Commercial Growth and Fan Engagement	42
5.1	Fan Engagement and Revenue per Capita	43
5.2	Illustrative matchday-economics sensitivity note	43
5.3	Consultation process: WRU plan and fan perspectives	43

5.4	Fan Sentiment: What Supporters Actually Discussed	44
5.4.1	Team-Count Preferences	44
5.4.2	Governance and Trust	44
5.4.3	Identity and Affinity	45
5.5	Post-consultation sentiment and emerging crises	45
5.5.1	Time window definition	45
5.5.2	Scale and segmentation	45
5.5.3	The post-consultation narrative stack (Lens B)	45
5.5.4	Explicit criticism rate and impact	46
5.5.5	Shift toward mechanics	46
5.5.6	Deal mechanics people fixate on	46
5.5.7	Contraction stance (counted and engagement-weighted)	46
5.5.8	Weekly dynamics	46
5.5.9	Bottom line	47
5.6	Fan reactions to implementation and governance events	47
5.6.1	Player departures and competitive decline	47
5.6.2	The evidence submission vs. fan reaction	47
5.6.3	Summary of post-consultation sentiment	47
5.7	Alignment matrix: counter-proposal vs fan priorities	48
5.8	V2.2 recommendations: trust, identity, governance and communication	48
5.8.1	Publish the data and survey instrument	48
5.8.2	Protect regional identities	48
5.8.3	Community and stakeholder governance	49
5.8.4	Clear communication	49
5.9	Pillar summary	49
5.10	Key enhancements	49
5.11	Fan economics before speculative upside	49
6	Phased Implementation with Milestones	51
6.1	Phase 0: Stabilisation (0 to 6 months)	51
6.2	Phase 1: Short-Term (Years 1 to 3)	51
6.3	Phase 2: Medium-Term (Years 4 to 5)	52
6.4	Phase 3: Long-Term (Years 6 to 10)	53
6.5	V2.2 recommendation: phased implementation	53

6.6	Pillar summary	53
6.7	Recommendations index	54
7	Learning from Tier-1 Models	55
7.1	Pillar summary	56
7.2	2026 update	56
7.3	Closing synthesis	56
8	Analysis of WRU Plan vs Fan Sentiment	57
8.1	Consultation models and decision context	57
8.2	Survey design and legitimacy concerns	57
8.3	Fan sentiment and identity	57
8.4	Post-consultation escalation and 2026 context	57
8.5	V2.2 implications	58
9	Governance, Legal and Independent Oversight Board	59
9.1	Independent Oversight Board (IOB)	59
9.2	Legal framework and process limits	60
9.3	Stakeholder coalition and communication	60
10	Full Risk Register and Scenario Planning	62
11	Conclusion	65
12	A Constructive Path Forward for the WRU Board	66
Part III: Technical Annex and External Validation References		69

Part I

Campaign and Delegate Pack

What This Pack Is For

This pack is an independent **four-region alternative framework** to the WRU's current three-club direction.^{E003} It is intended to support debate, amendment, validation, or rejection. It is both a **campaign tool** and a **serious decision-support paper**: practical enough for delegates and stakeholders to use, but narrow enough to preserve evidence status, disclosure gaps, and process limits.

It is **not** a final legal instrument. It does **not** pretend that ownership, investor, debt, legal, or funding issues are already settled. It does **not** assume that every element can be adopted immediately at an EGM or any other single meeting. It is also **not** a single-club rescue paper.

For publication use, this pack does three jobs:

- present a structured alternative strategy for Welsh professional rugby;
- support club, Council, Board, and wider stakeholder decision-making with clearer separation between evidence, assumptions, targets, and open issues; and
- identify which items are strategic direction only, which are draft implementation mechanisms, and which require later legal, contractual, ownership, regulatory, or constitutional process.

Status and Evidence Posture

Claim status convention

In this document:

FACT = confirmed in published WRU or official documents.

REPORTED = reported in reputable media or stakeholder submissions, but not yet independently validated here.

ASSUMPTION = used for modelling and scenario testing.

TARGET = an intended outcome, not a current state.

OPEN ISSUE = a material point that still needs evidence, user input, or external verification before publication.

Context and status	Status	Source
WRU direction: three men's professional clubs, licences if required, and squad-budget path from £6.4m to £7.8m	FACT	WRU direction and consultation materials. ^{E003E005}

Cardiff Rugby administration and WRU acquisition occurred in April 2025; this paper does not assert an equivalent administration event in 2023	FACT	WRU and Cardiff Rugby official announcements. ^{E061}
Named player departures (Jac Morgan, Dewi Lake, Aaron Wainwright)	FACT	Confirmed stakeholder and media reporting, cross-referenced with WRU statements. ^{E063}
Legal injunction reference (Swansea Council vs Y11/Cardiff deal)	REPORTED	Public reporting
Debt refinancing (£55m to £60m with Goldman Sachs and HSBC)	REPORTED	Media reporting
EGM requisition and expected timing (late March or early April 2026)	REPORTED	Stakeholder motion / meeting notice
Benefactor roles, final ownership structures, CVC-related constraints, and EGM/AGM admissibility	OPEN ISSUE	Requires disclosed transaction terms and/or legal or constitutional verification before publication

Problem Statement

Problem	What needs fixing	How V2.2 responds
Financial and commercial resilience	Welsh professional rugby faces funding pressure, refinancing risk, uneven confidence in affordability, and weak trust in unpublished financial workings. ^{E067E246}	Separate verified figures from assumptions, narrow the affordability claim to a modelled scenario, and require independent validation before irreversible decisions.
Performance and player welfare	Wales needs stronger alignment, better player management, and clearer performance standards without assuming that structural contraction is the only route to improvement. ^{E082}	Retain four regions while proposing tighter central standards for load management, contracting logic, and pathway alignment.
Pathway and participation	The post-16 drop-off, school-team decline, and weak bridge from pathway to professional rugby are structural risks. ^{E038E039E041}	Strengthen the academy-to-pro bridge, protect opportunity volume, and ring-fence pathway measures as audited delivery items rather than slogans.
Governance and trust	Stakeholder confidence has been damaged by opaque decision-making, ownership uncertainty, and weak visibility of assumptions. ^{E136E146}	Replace advocacy-heavy language with a narrower oversight design, clearer reserved matters, and a published evidence process.
Process and decision clarity	Clubs need to know what can be endorsed in principle, what requires later drafting, and what cannot be asserted without constitutional or legal confirmation.	Add a decision-route note and stop overstating EGM or constitutional certainty.

Value Proposition

V2.2 argues that Wales can pursue systemic reform **without assuming that contraction is the only credible option**. The value proposition is:

- preserve four regional identities while adopting tighter national standards;
- improve decision quality by publishing assumptions, limitations, and evidence gaps openly;
- shift the document from manifesto language to a comparative decision framework;
- make the financial case more usable by separating verified figures, modelling assumptions, and stretch outcomes; and
- give clubs and stakeholders a clearer basis for debate, amendment, validation, or rejection.

Seven Pillars at a Glance

1. Elite performance and player welfare
2. Player pathways and academies
3. Smart financial governance and contracting
4. Grassroots revival and coach education
5. Commercial growth and fan engagement
6. Phased implementation with milestones
7. Comparative lessons from Tier-1 systems

Quick Read for Decision-Makers

- Frames the pack as an independent alternative and decision framework, not as a final legal package.
- States the core position openly: retain four regions, but tighten central alignment, governance, and reporting.
- Separates **FACT**, **REPORTED**, **ASSUMPTION**, **TARGET**, and **OPEN ISSUE** items near the front of the document.
- Recasts the finance case as a **modelled affordability path**, not a guaranteed outcome; the key model remains subject to independent validation.
- Narrows the oversight model to reserved-matters scrutiny and disclosure rights rather than a second operating bureaucracy.
- Adds clearer decision-route guidance on what can be endorsed now and what would require later contractual, ownership, legal, or constitutional process.

Bottom line

V2.2 is intended to help clubs and stakeholders decide whether the four-region alternative is credible enough to merit comparative validation and negotiation alongside the WRU plan. It asks for comparative validation, not blind adoption.

Publication blockers

Four publication-critical items remain:

- **Ownership and capital disclosure gap.** Final ownership paths, investor terms, benefactor roles, and related-party protections are not yet evidenced to publication standard in the source base.
- **Constitutional and procedural route.** This paper separates strategic endorsement from formal legal adoption and does not assert EGM, AGM, or Articles admissibility without independent advice.
- **Model validation.** The affordability case remains a transparent counter-model and must be tested against the WRU model on the same perimeter, assumptions dictionary, and disclosure standard.
- **Debt and covenant constraints.** The consultation materials do not publish covenant definitions, headroom, security package, or lender-consent mechanics. These may materially affect available options.

These blockers do not settle the strategic debate. They define the minimum evidence threshold before any irreversible structural decision.

Decision Route and Process Note

This paper now separates **what may be endorsed in principle** from **what requires later process**. It does not make unsupported claims about WRU constitutional mechanics.

Category	Examples in this document	Intended route
Strategic direction	Four-region continuity, central alignment, stronger transparency, pathway investment	Can be debated and supported in principle by clubs, Council members, and stakeholders.
Draft implementation mechanisms	Oversight design, KPI framework, pathway hubs, contracting architecture, commercial levers	Require later drafting, negotiation, costing, and operational ownership before implementation.
Commercial and ownership matters	Benefactor roles, Cardiff/Ospreys ownership, investor terms, related-party risks	Cannot be settled here without disclosed transaction terms and agreement from the relevant parties.
Constitutional or legal process	EGM admissibility, AGM-only matters, Articles changes, enforceability of motions	Not asserted here; requires independent legal and constitutional confirmation.

Delegate and Stakeholder Guide

This section is the practical front-end guide for delegates, councillors, and other stakeholders. It is not legal advice and it does not assert procedural admissibility. Its purpose is to make the immediate decision issues, the V2.2 response, and the optional action wording easy to scan.

Key Decision Issues and the V2.2 Response

Key issue	Why it matters now	How V2.2 responds
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Irreversible structural action before validation	Contraction, merger, licensing, or final PRA decisions taken before disclosure and validation would harden risk before the evidence is tested.	Phase 0 pauses irreversible structural steps until validation, disclosure review, and reserved-matters discipline are in place (Section 6.1).
Model visibility, ownership, and debt disclosure	Clubs and stakeholders still do not have publication-standard clarity on ownership paths, capital structure, covenant constraints, or the full finance perimeter.	The paper keeps these gaps visible, narrows the request to decision-critical disclosures, and treats the four-region case as conditional on validation rather than as a settled right (Section 3 and Section 9).
Savings and reinvestment credibility	Savings claims are only defensible if they are auditable, ring-fenced, and tied to pathway, grassroots, women's development, and system resilience.	V2.2 treats savings as operating discipline, not theatre, and links reinvestment to explicit reporting and delivery measures (Sections 3 to 6).

Indicative Club or Delegate Action

Indicative action statement: support the strategic principles of Y Strategaeth Amgen V2.2, require comparative validation of the WRU and counter-proposal models, and separate immediate strategic direction from later legal, contractual, and constitutional process.

Optional illustrative wording only - subject to procedural confirmation

Clubs and Council members may wish to request that the WRU Board and Council:

- treat Y Strategaeth Amgen V2.2 as a structured strategic alternative to the current three-club direction;
- commission independent comparative validation of the WRU and Y Strategaeth Amgen models and assumptions within a defined period; and
- identify which elements can proceed as immediate strategic direction and which require later PRA, ownership, contractual, regulatory, or constitutional process before any irreversible structural decision.

This wording is illustrative only. It is not presented as procedurally settled or legally vetted.

English Delegate Note

- Pause irreversible structural action until Phase 0 validation and disclosure work is complete (Section 6.1).
- Judge the four-region case on disclosed finance, governance, pathway, and delivery evidence rather than on private briefings alone (Sections 2, 3, 9, and 10).
- Back savings and reinvestment only where they are published, auditable, and tied to pathways, grassroots, women's development, and system resilience (Sections 3 to 6).

Nodyn Cryno yn Gymraeg

- Oedi camau strwythurol anwrthdroadwy nes bod gwaith dilysu a datgelu Cam 0 wedi'i gwblhau (Adran 6.1).
- Barnu'r achos dros bedair rhanbarth ar sail tystiolaeth ariannol, lywodraethu, llwybrau a chyflawni sydd wedi'i datgelu, nid ar sail briffiau preifat yn unig (Adrannau 2, 3, 9, a 10).
- Cefnogi arbedion ac ailfuddsoddi dim ond pan fo'r rhain wedi'u cyhoeddi, eu harchwilio, ac wedi'u cysylltu â llwybrau, y gwreiddiau, datblygiad menywod, a gwynnwch y system (Adrannau 3 i 6).

How to Use This Pack Depending on Your Role

Audience	Start here	Read next
Club delegates / councillors	Part I front-end sections, especially publication blockers and the decision-route note	Executive Summary, Sections 3, 9, 10, 11, and 12
Board / executive readers	Executive Summary and the decision framework in Part II	Sections 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, and the Part III reference note
Media / public-interest readers	What This Pack Is For, the quick read, and the delegate guide	Executive Summary, Sections 5, 8, 11, and the short method note in Part III
Investor / sponsor / commercial readers	Quick Read, publication blockers, and Executive Summary	Sections 3, 5, 6, 10, and the spreadsheet reference in Part III
Pathway / grassroots / coaching stakeholders	Problem statement, value proposition, and Executive Summary	Sections 2, 4, 6, 10, and the performance-evidence reference in Part III

Part II

Core Strategy and Decision Framework

Executive Summary

Welsh rugby stands at a decision point in which governance quality, financial credibility, and process clarity matter as much as structural preference. This paper presents a four-region, centrally aligned alternative for clubs, Council members, the WRU Board, and other stakeholders. It does not ask for blind adoption. It asks for comparative validation before any irreversible structural decision.

The core case rests on four linked propositions. First, alignment, player-management discipline, and national standards do not automatically require the loss of a region. Second, pathway output is the primary system test of any structure, not a secondary benefit. Third, the financial case must be judged on disclosed assumptions, operating categories, and failure logic rather than on headline assertions. Fourth, four-region continuity should be conditional on visible delivery, including governance transparency, reporting cadence, pathway yield, and commercial conversion.

The strategic test is therefore not only whether Wales can afford four regions in theory. It is whether Welsh rugby can build a system with enough financial discipline, pathway output, governance transparency, and commercial conversion to earn the right to keep four regions in practice.

Planning targets, not guarantees

- Year 3 TARGET: lower average game load for core internationals, improved pathway retention visibility, and no emergency funding shocks outside agreed controls.
- Year 5 TARGET: stronger playoff competitiveness, clearer progress in participation and pathway output, and measurable growth in digital and matchday engagement.
- Year 10 TARGET: four regions operating on a more resilient footing, with fewer opaque bailouts and better visibility of what the professional game is returning to the wider Welsh system.

Document dating note (9 March 2026)

Unless a section states otherwise, factual references are current to 9 March 2026. The Board-options section later in the document retains its own dated context where relevant.

Decision Framework: Four-Region Alternative vs WRU Current Direction (March 2026)

Issue	WRU current direction (3-licence model)	Y Strategaeth Amgen (4 regions with central alignment)	Assessment and caveat
Men's professional footprint	3 men's pro clubs (Cardiff, East, West) with licences if required. ^{E003}	4 protected regions (Cardiff, Dragons, Ospreys, Scarlets) with central alignment.	Clear strategic choice: the WRU direction concentrates footprint; the alternative preserves all four identities.
Funding clarity	Published squad-budget path from £6.4m rising to £7.8m. ^{E005}	Published counter-model, but affordability depends on assumptions that still require validation.	WRU advantage on immediate clarity; the alternative must prove its affordability path through independent validation.
Women's elite footprint	2 women's elite teams reported alongside the men's restructure. ^{E006}	Emphasises pathway, shared services, and system alignment rather than expanding women's pro-team count within this paper.	Incomplete comparison: legal and commercial constraints, including competition agreements, are not fully assessed here.
Alignment and contracting	WRU-driven centralisation is the implied direction. ^{E007}	Central contracting logic, pathway standards, and shared services without deleting a region.	Similar direction of travel on alignment; the real difference is whether alignment requires contraction.
High-performance model	WRU consultation logic emphasised "proximity by design" and a national campus as a collaboration engine. ^{E008}	Shared high-performance capability and data standards across four regions, with distributed delivery.	Different operating models rather than a binary right-or-wrong choice.
Pathway architecture	Consultation sets out PDCs, National Academies, and a stronger SRC bridge. ^{E009}	Accepts most of that architecture but keeps four destinations at the top and stages North Wales expansion.	Alternative advantage on opportunity volume, but the delivery cost still needs evidencing.
Governance and trust	Licence model concentrates leverage at WRU level; permanent independent oversight is not embedded in the published consultation design. ^{E010}	Proposes a narrower reserved-matters oversight mechanism with published reporting and audit rights.	Alternative offers stronger checks, but only if the oversight mechanism remains compact and workable.
Transition and feasibility risk	WRU analysis of "3 clubs" options flags fanbase damage risk and transition friction. ^{E011}	No deletion or merger required; change is mainly operational.	Alternative advantage on transition risk; WRU advantage would have to come from demonstrably better affordability or performance evidence.
Savings and reinvestment	WRU case for fewer clubs is to concentrate resources and release headroom. ^{E012}	Ring-fenced savings and reinvestment rules are proposed, but not yet independently proven.	Unresolved: the alternative's saving case is still a model, not a verified realised saving.
Fan growth plan	Three-club direction is framed mainly around competitiveness and sustainability. ^{E013}	Adds explicit attendance, digital, and fan-platform targets. ^{E014}	Alternative is more explicit on fan-growth levers, but those targets are planning assumptions rather than evidence.
Performance evidence	WRU logic is that talent is spread too thin. ^{E015}	Alternative argues that alignment and standards matter at least as much as team count.	Unresolved: both positions need stronger published comparative evidence than is currently available.

Table 7: Four-region alternative vs WRU current direction decision framework (March 2026)

Bottom line

The WRU consultation does not argue for minor tweaks. It frames the answer as transformational, systemic change, including "radical and systemic change" and a "step-change" in performance, delivered through tighter alignment, unified leadership and more efficient deployment of resources.^{E082}

The delegate decision is therefore not "change vs no change". It is which form of systemic change carries the lowest risk and the widest chance of success.

What the WRU says must change

In the consultation pack, the WRU identifies a set of connected issues that require systemic change, includ-

ing funding levels, talent spread, the gap between SRC and the pro game, and the lack of an aligned approach between the WRU and the professional clubs.^{E082} It also argues that PRA-style arrangements create misalignment and friction, and that more integrated systems reduce friction and improve performance.^{E082}

V2.2 accepts this diagnosis and applies the same core mechanism: central alignment, unified contracting logic, and a single operating plan across the elite system.

What the WRU also admits about contraction risk

The WRU's own feasibility analysis recognises that moving from four teams to fewer teams carries major transition risk. It explicitly flags that Models B and C involve loss of one club with staff, player and fanbase difficulties, and that Model D is very challenging with loss of two elite clubs and damage to fanbases.^{E011}

That acknowledgement matters because it means the risk is not hypothetical. It is already recognised in the WRU's own framework.

Why V2.2 is a credible systemic alternative

V2.2 proposes systemic change without forcing the loss of a region and without relying on a high-friction transition as the primary lever. It does this by:

- Alignment without deletion: central player management and contracting standards, unified performance frameworks, and shared high-performance services, with four protected regional identities.
- Trust reset built into delivery: independent oversight and compulsory publication of models and assumptions, so decision-making is auditable and not dependent on trust in private briefings.
- Pathway investment without narrowing the professional funnel: V2.2 backs the need for stronger pathways and a better bridge from SRC, but rejects solving pathway weakness by reducing professional opportunities.
- Lower disruption risk: the WRU's own analysis shows the disruption and fanbase risk of contraction. V2.2 pursues the same step-change outcomes through operational integration, not structural removal.^{E011}

Delegate test

If you want transformational change that is more likely to succeed, the test is straightforward:

- Does the option remove friction and improve alignment, as the WRU says is essential?^{E082}
- Does it avoid the feasibility and fanbase damage risks the WRU itself flags with contraction?^{E011}
- Does it make funding logic and investment decisions visible and auditable to the whole game?^{E246}

On those criteria, V2.2 is a systemic-change option designed to pursue the WRU's stated objectives while reducing one major implementation risk: losing a region and deepening the trust gap at the moment the sport needs unity.

1 Elite Performance and Player Welfare

1.1 Centralised player management and welfare standards

To compete at the highest level, Wales needs a more coordinated player-management system across the WRU and the regions. The case for this is not that Ireland or New Zealand can simply be copied; it is that smaller unions have shown the value of aligning workload, welfare, and national priorities more tightly than Wales has managed in recent years.

Under Ireland's central-contracting and welfare structures, Johnny Sexton publicly argued that Ireland benefited from lighter club workloads and better-managed training load than key rivals.^{E016} That is relevant comparator evidence, not conclusive proof that the same outcomes would transfer automatically to Wales.

In practical Welsh terms, the proposal is for the WRU to set common standards for players of national interest while regions continue to deliver day-to-day programmes. That would include:

- season match and minutes thresholds for players of national interest;
- mandatory rest blocks after sustained match exposure;
- national return-to-play and reintegration standards; and
- common GPS, wellness, and injury-risk monitoring standards across the four regions.

Single national S&C, fitness monitoring, and nutrition framework. The intent is one national framework for strength and conditioning, fitness monitoring, and nutrition, with regions delivering locally but against common standards. This is a governance and quality-control proposal, not a claim that a single central site is required.^{E018}

Brain health and duty of care. This model should also be linked explicitly to brain-injury risk management. A more coherent welfare framework gives Wales a stronger basis for consistent concussion protocols, return-to-play discipline, and duty-of-care reporting in a sport facing growing legal scrutiny.^{E019}

1.2 Selection policy and overseas-based players

An expanded selection pool is important for a small nation. Wales should review whether its current overseas-eligibility threshold remains the best balance between domestic retention and national-team strength.

The cap threshold was reduced from 60 to 25 during the 2023 player dispute.^{E020} The policy question is therefore no longer whether change is possible, but what threshold best serves Welsh rugby's current circumstances.

South Africa is a useful comparator rather than a direct template. Reuters reported that South Africa removed the restriction on selecting overseas-based players with fewer than 30 caps in 2018, broadening the available pool under Rassie Erasmus.^{E021} That example shows one route a union can take; it does not settle the Welsh trade-off, which also includes domestic player retention and regional attractiveness.

Welsh Exiles programme and availability governance. The ideal remains to keep a strong core of players in Wales under central or hybrid arrangements. For players who move abroad, the realistic objective is not full WRU control but a more systematic approach to:

- monitoring fitness and rehabilitation progression through agreed reporting where feasible;
- securing release at minimum for all World Rugby Regulation 9 windows, with additional access only where clubs agree; and
- keeping Welsh-qualified players connected to camps, standards, and succession planning through a formal Exiles programme.^{E049}

Complete removal of the threshold has pros and cons. The benefit is a wider selection pool. The risk is that Welsh regions become less attractive if too many players can leave without international cost. V2.2 therefore presents this as a policy choice requiring explicit trade-off, not as a frictionless fix.

Availability discipline for players outside Wales. Where Welsh-qualified players are based outside Wales, this paper does not assume that foreign clubs will accept broader access arrangements than those already required under World Rugby Regulation 9. The realistic base position is release for mandatory international windows, supported by agreed medical, conditioning, and reporting standards where relationships allow. Any access beyond Regulation 9 should be treated as negotiated upside rather than as a planning assumption.

1.3 Player welfare and support

A modern high-performance system must treat players as people, not assets. Recent events, including Owen Farrell stepping away from England duty to prioritise mental wellbeing, underline the need for wraparound care beyond the pitch.^{E022}

The proposal is for a welfare programme covering mental health support, career and education planning, and post-rugby transition for centrally managed and regionally contracted players alike.

Hybrid contracts as a design principle, not a settled scheme. England's enhanced EPS-style hybrid agreements are a useful reference point. Reuters reported values of around £160k per player per year for a defined cohort, coupled with increased national oversight of conditioning and medical matters.^{E023} Hybrid contracts remain a design option for a defined cohort of priority players based in Wales. Here they are treated as a later contracting mechanism subject to costing, legal drafting, and agreement between the WRU and the relevant region, not as an already-funded programme. The strategic case is that a limited number of such contracts could improve retention, welfare governance, and load management if they are transparently costed and contractually workable.

Funding and trade-offs. Any hybrid-contract cohort would need to sit within the central player-retention and welfare budget described in Section 3. For overseas-based players, the Exiles programme should focus on monitoring, availability, and integration support rather than full salary co-funding.

1.4 Shared performance principles

Undefined phrases such as “tactical DNA” are avoided here. In this paper, shared performance principles should mean common performance principles, shared conditioning and return-to-play standards, role-profile alignment across age-grade and professional environments, and a clearer national game model. It should not imply rigid playbook control or daily coaching interference from the centre. The purpose is to reduce developmental friction and improve readiness for international rugby, while preserving region-level

coaching autonomy.

As WRU Director of Rugby and Elite Performance Dave Reddin stated, the high-performance system should be built from the ground up with aligned standards and decisions.^{E025}

In practice, that means:

- regular technical workshops where national and regional coaches agree core principles;
- shared definitions for transition attack, exit play, breakdown speed, defensive spacing, and conditioning expectations; and
- measurable alignment indicators published at system level rather than vague references to style.^{E026}

1.5 Definition of centralised within a four-region model

In this proposal, “centralised” means the WRU holds authority over contracting frameworks, load-management standards, welfare governance, pathway integration, and common performance principles. Regions retain operational delivery, local identity, community presence, and matchday control.

1.6 Summary

The elite-performance case here is that Wales should become more coordinated, not merely smaller. Central player-management standards, clearer welfare governance, a more explicit overseas-player trade-off, and shared performance principles are presented here as mechanisms that could strengthen the four-region model if they are costed and governed properly.

1.7 Cross-reference: funding models and constraints

The funding and governance models set the constraints for elite-performance investment. See Section 3.3.

1.8 Pillar summary

The counter-proposal argues for a more centralised player-management system informed by comparator unions such as Ireland and New Zealand, but it now states more clearly that these are comparators rather than direct templates.^{E027E028} A Welsh version would cap minutes, mandate rest, and coordinate conditioning standards across regions and national squads. It would also review the overseas-eligibility threshold in light of the 2023 change from 60 caps to 25, while recognising the retention risks of a fully open policy.^{E029E030} A comprehensive welfare programme and a narrower, better-defined concept of shared performance principles complete the elite pillar.

1.9 Key enhancements

- **Wales-first hybrid contract clause:** WRU co-funding for a limited cohort of priority players, with explicit welfare and load-management rights, subject to final costing.^{E032}
- **Player Passport app:** anonymised conditioning and compliance indicators, with individual clinical data excluded from non-medical reporting.^{E033}
- **Availability KPI:** target above 92% availability for international windows, with published definition and baseline.^{E034}
- **Development-loan protection:** a clearer description of how short-term loans and return options would

work for edge cases.^{E035}

- **Overseas-player availability protocol:** standardised wording for Exiles monitoring and minimum-window release expectations, recognising that foreign clubs will not accept open-ended obligations.^{E036}
- **Annual performance-principles workshop:** a defined forum for regional and national coaches, with published system indicators.^{E037}

2 Player Pathways and Academies for a Stronger Pipeline

Scope: Player pathway, academies, and transition to professional rugby.

Assumes: Funding and governance constraints are defined elsewhere.

Depends on: Finance section for funding architecture; Grassroots section for participation base.

2.1 Rebuilding the Talent Pathway

A durable national team is built on a robust player pathway. Wales must overhaul academy and development structures to produce players who are skilled, physically resilient, and tactically intelligent.

The warning signs are now measurable at the base of the pyramid. Children's organised sport participation outside the curriculum has fallen significantly: in 2022, 39% of pupils took part in organised sport three or more times a week, down 9 percentage points from 2018.^{E038} That trend is not about rugby only, but it directly impacts rugby's talent volume unless we intervene.

Wales also faces a specific, evidenced choke point around ages 16 to 18. BBC Wales Investigates surveyed schools and found a major reduction in sixth-form rugby teams over the past two decades, with similar patterns in youth teams at club level.^{E039} This is the critical window where athletes either progress to structured performance environments or leave the game.

The WRU consultation frames the challenge as talent spread across too many clubs, a gap between SRC and professional rugby that is too large, and a system that is not sufficiently joined up.^{E040}

The proposal responds by widening opportunity, strengthening the bridge between levels, and retaining four regional destinations at the top of the pyramid while adopting Ireland-style alignment.

2.1.1 The Post-16 Choke Point and Retention Problem

What we can evidence now

- School rugby at 16 to 18 has declined sharply in many areas. BBC Wales Investigates found that among 95 schools that run or ran at least one sixth-form team, half have stopped in the last 20 years.^{E041}
- Club surveys in the same investigation indicate a comparable drop-off in youth sides and reductions in senior teams.^{E042}

Commitment

Publish an annually audited Pathway Yield Dashboard that tracks:

- registrations by age band and geography
- retention rates from U16 to U18, and from U18 to U23
- dual registration and minutes played across school, club, SRC, and academy
- conversion outcomes into SRC, pro contracts, and national age-grade squads

Risk and mitigation

- Risk: critics will ask for WRU longitudinal registration and retention data by single-year age cohorts.
- Mitigation: publish an audited Pathway Yield Dashboard with cohort-level registrations and retention rates.
- Mitigation: include definitions, methodology, and annual version control.

This turns pathway debate into measurable delivery.

2.1.2 Professional Opportunities and the Funnel Width

A central strategic risk of contraction is that it narrows the professional funnel precisely when Wales needs to widen retention and game minutes for 18 to 23 year olds.^{E043}

Illustrative capacity impact (using one simplified squad-size assumption only)^{E044}

- 4 regions: about $4 \times 38 = 152$ senior squad places
- 3 teams: about $3 \times 38 = 114$ senior squad places

That is a reduction of about 38 places under this one assumption, before considering knock-on effects to development squads and associated minutes.^{E044}

This does not claim that 38 is the correct or optimal squad size in every model. It is a simple illustrative comparison. The WRU consultation also describes broader performance environments, so any final decision should specify senior squads, academy numbers, and development minutes together rather than relying on one headline number.

This is not an argument for inefficiency. It is an argument that Wales must not solve a performance and finance problem by shrinking the number of domestic elite minutes available to Welsh-qualified players at the most fragile point of the pathway.

This directly rebuts the consultation framing by distinguishing between the need for alignment, which this proposal adopts, and the decision to delete one region, which it rejects.^{E040}

Interpretation note on opportunity volume. Any comparison such as 4×38 versus 3×38 should be read as an illustration of possible opportunity volume, not as a complete affordability proof or final squad-design recommendation. A serious comparison must consider senior squad places, academy places, minutes available to Welsh-qualified players, NWQ policy, injury coverage, and the strength of the development competitions beneath the professional layer.

Regional reach outside the south-east and south-west. Facilities or hubs in North and Mid Wales should be staged against demonstrated player demand, travel burden, and conversion data, not announced as if identical provision is already justified everywhere. The principle is reach and access; the delivery model should remain evidence-led.

Women's pathway wording. Any women's pathway references should remain framed as direction of travel, subject to competition, commercial, and governance constraints that sit outside this document unless

separately evidenced. The case for stronger women's pathways is valid on its own merits; it should not be overstated through unsupported assumptions about automatic structural spillover from the men's game. Women's pathway planning should be treated as a parallel strategic workstream with its own conversion measures, not as a passive spillover from the men's structure.

2.1.3 Pathway output as the primary system test

The strongest long-term defence of a four-region model is not sentiment alone. It is pathway output. For that reason, this paper treats player development as the primary performance test of the system rather than a secondary benefit.

A stronger Welsh system should be measured not only by the number of professional destinations, but by whether it consistently produces, retains, and progresses Welsh-qualified players through the full pathway. Publication-standard monitoring should therefore include:

- academy intake and retention by age band;
- conversion from academy to senior professional debut;
- Welsh-qualified minutes by role and age profile;
- early-career player loss to other systems;
- injury and load-management visibility across the pathway; and
- geographic participation and progression coverage.

This does not prove that four regions are automatically superior. It does clarify the correct test. If the system does not improve pathway yield, then structural preservation alone is not enough.

Opportunity-volume comparisons should therefore be read as one component of a larger pathway test, not as a standalone proof of sustainability.

2.1.4 National Academy plus Regional Centres, with Enhancements

The WRU's proposed pathway architecture contains strong components, including a Men's National Academy, Regional Training Centres, and a PDC network aligned to SRC clubs. The proposal adopts the architecture and strengthens the delivery model, while retaining four regions.^{E045}

Operating model

1. Welsh Rugby Academy (ages approx 17 to 23)^{E046}

Centrally governed, with national standards, shared data, and shared curriculum.

2. Two high-performance centres for geographic reach^{E047}

A South Wales centre and a second hub outside the M4 corridor, most plausibly in North Wales with staged Mid Wales outreach if demand and funding are evidenced.

3. PDC and satellite network aligned to SRC and schools

A hub-and-spoke structure that brings elite coaching, analysis, and athlete education closer to communities, then funnels the best into the national academy and age-grade squads.

Risk and mitigation

- Risk: North Wales investment is viewed as aspirational rather than funded.
- Mitigation: stage the funding with audited allocations and geographic KPIs.
- Mitigation: publish the funding source before scaling and treat early phases as a proposal.

Curriculum priorities

- durability and contact skill development
- explicit strength and conditioning progression by age band
- game intelligence through video, scenario training, and decision skills for all positions
- workload management at academy level consistent with welfare standards in Pillar 1

2.1.5 Bridging Competitions: Academy to Club to SRC to Pro

This framework treats competitive minutes as the currency of development.

- **SRC as the bridge tier:** SRC is explicitly the critical tier between age-grade and pro rugby, and further investment should professionalise daily delivery and align coaching, conditioning, and medical support.
- **Affiliated development teams and minutes guarantees:** each region should operate an affiliated A or development XV pathway through SRC and aligned clubs so 18 to 23 year olds play meaningful senior rugby, not train-only seasons.^{E043}
- **U23 and cross-border development matches:** a structured programme for the 19 to 23 band, including an inter-regional tournament and targeted fixtures against comparable Irish and Scottish development teams, to avoid the lost years problem.^{E048}

Risk and mitigation

- Risk: more minutes without controls increases injury risk and degrades performance.
- Mitigation: tie minutes targets to Pillar 1 load-management caps, rest blocks, and medical clearance.
- Mitigation: use performance gates and phased exposure for late developers.

2.1.6 Pathways That Support Exports, Without Losing Players

Exports are a modern reality. The proposal embraces two principles:

- retain as many top prospects as possible with superior development and welfare support
- track and integrate those who go abroad so they remain visible, eligible, and connected

Welsh Exiles programme

- identifies Welsh-qualified players in other systems early
- provides guidance, development touchpoints, and integration into camps
- sets a standard monitoring and availability protocol for those receiving WRU-supported development contracts

- ensures minimum access for international windows through the regulation framework, plus negotiated access where feasible.^{E049}

This prevents off-radar losses and turns foreign minutes into a net benefit rather than a permanent leak.

2.1.7 Investment Logic and Women's Pathway Integration

All credible models recognise that the pathway and the women's game require sustained investment. The WRU's published pathway documents set out expanded development initiatives and investment, including women's and girls' PDC expansion and age-grade programmes.^{E050}

Position:

- increase investment in academies, coaching, and girls' pathways
- do so without sacrificing the men's regional footprint
- ring-fence pathway investment with annual audited reporting and outcome KPIs

Risk and mitigation

- Risk: ring-fence targets force coaches to pick players who are not ready.
- Mitigation: measure ring-fence as minutes and contracts earned through performance gates.
- Mitigation: allow hardship exemptions with independent audit.

2.2 Pillar Summary (Delegate-Ready)

Wales must rebuild the pathway from school and club to SRC and the professional game. The evidence shows reduced organised sport participation among pupils and a clear post-16 retention risk in rugby participation and team provision.^{E038E039} The WRU consultation accepts the need for a more joined-up system and a stronger bridge.^{E040} The proposal adopts the best structural components (national academy, regional training centres, PDC network, SRC alignment) and strengthens them with a retention-first design while keeping four regional destinations, so Wales widens the funnel instead of narrowing it.^{E045}

2.3 Key enhancements

- **TARGET: Publish an academy ring-fence of 25% rising to 40%** applied as minutes and contract allocation targets for academy graduates, with hardship exemptions and independent audit.^{E051}
- **PROPOSAL: Establish a North Wales Acceleration Fund** staged over 3 years with audited allocation and geographic KPIs, pending a published funding source.^{E052}
- **TARGET: Integrate women's U20 and U23 streams** into academy hubs aligned to the WRU women's pathway and PDC network.^{E053}
- **Establish National Development Contracts** that support overseas opportunities while preserving a structured return pathway and Wales availability.^{E054}
- **Explore foreign club MOUs** with clear release and welfare terms, starting with a small number of partners only if there is evidence that clubs will engage on realistic terms.^{E055}
- **Publish an Every School Every Year delivery KPI** measuring teams and fixtures aligned to national participation data.^{E056}

3 Smart Financial Governance and Contracting

Scope: Financial governance, funding models, and contracting structure.

Assumes: Governance and oversight mechanisms are defined elsewhere.

Depends on: Implementation section for phasing; Part III reference materials for model inputs.

What this section does and does not claim

This section tests whether a four-region alternative can be modelled on a credible and auditable basis. It does **not** claim that the WRU has already committed to a four-region funding package, that the model replaces the unpublished WRU workbook, or that ownership, investor, and debt constraints are already settled. Throughout this section, the distinction is:

- **verified current-state facts;**
- **published WRU direction;**
- **counter-model assumptions used for comparison; and**
- **open disclosure gaps that remain material to the decision.**

The question addressed here is whether the four-region case is substantial enough to merit comparative validation, not whether it is already contractually agreed.

3.1 Damage Since the 2023 Professional Rugby Agreement - Governance and Funding Issues

(FACT / REPORTED)

The WRU consultation (September 2025) presents the current four-region system as fundamentally broken and contraction as the necessary fix.^{E057} However, the major crises since the 2023 Professional Rugby Agreement (PRA23) occurred under the WRU's central oversight and funding model. These events point to governance, funding allocation, and decision-making failures rather than the number of teams.

Period	Event	Impact	Status	Source
Feb to Mar 2023	Players threaten strike during Six Nations over contract impasse	Near-disruption of the international campaign and loss of trust	FACT	WRU statements and media ^{E058}
2023	Cardiff Rugby ownership and funding instability remains acute, but no administration event is asserted here	Financial fragility remains visible, without overstating the legal position	FACT / RE-PORTED	Club and WRU announcements; see April 2025 administration event separately
2023 to 2025	Regions face repeated funding pressure and delayed contracts	Star players considered or completed moves abroad; talent drain risk increased	FACT	WRU consultation p.7 and club reports ^{E060}

April 2025	Cardiff Rugby enters administration; WRU acquires the business and assets	Formal insolvency event with immediate ownership and continuity consequences	FACT	Public filings and WRU communications ^{E061}
May 2025	PRA signing deadline missed by Ospreys and Scarlets; Cardiff and Dragons sign	PRA instability and deepened mistrust over governance and funding	REPORTED	Media reporting ^{E200}
Oct 2025	WRU announces contraction to three teams and licences	Immediate player and fan unrest; ownership concentration concerns	REPORTED	WRU announcement and stakeholder reporting ^{E062}
Jan 2026	Jac Morgan and Dewi Lake depart to Gloucester; Aaron Wainwright to Leicester	High-profile talent loss and public concern over planning clarity	REPORTED	Player and club statements ^{E063}
Jan to Feb 2026	Swansea Council legal intervention over Y11/Cardiff deal; deadline pressure from player representatives	Further trust erosion and uncertainty for west Wales rugby	REPORTED	Council and WRPA statements ^{E064}
Ongoing 2026	EGM requisition including a no-confidence motion in WRU Chair	Governance crisis at the top and calls for a full finance review	FACT	Requisition notice ^{E065}

Key observation: Most of the above occurred while operating under four regions and the WRU's central funding and governance framework. That does not prove that team count is irrelevant; funding sufficiency remains a live question. It does show, however, that governance quality, ownership stability, and decision transparency are separate variables that cannot be assumed away by contraction alone.^{E066E201}

The proposal directly addresses the root causes through:

- Independent Oversight Board with reserved-matters scrutiny and audit powers
- Ring-fenced efficiency savings and community investment
- Equitable base funding plus merit top-ups with full transparency
- Phase 0 freeze on irreversible changes until independent validation

This timeline shows that the damage is recent, multi-causal, and not reducible to a single structural explanation. V2.2 therefore argues for fixing the centre while testing the four-region case against a higher proof standard.

3.2 Refinancing Reality Check - What the £55 to 60m Facility Actually Means

(FACT / REPORTED)

The WRU Chair told the Welsh Affairs Committee that the January 2026 refinancing is a £55m facility plus a £5m side tranche for stadium capex, priced around SONIA + 2.75%, structured as a 3.5-year bridge - with another refinancing likely required in 2 to 2.5 years.^{E067}

This is not “problem solved”. It is refinancing risk twice, arrangement fees twice, and continued variable-rate exposure while the game remains in turmoil.

For full trust, V2.2 narrows the disclosure request to the items most relevant to decision-making:

- a high-level explanation of the covenant structure and any material restrictions it creates for the rugby business;
- the intended use of the £5m capex tranche, distinguishing stadium works from rugby-system investment; and
- any material exclusivity or advisory arrangements that affect strategic freedom.

The Independent Oversight Board and mandatory publication of all models provide the governance framework to make such transparency standard, not optional.

Disclosure gap	Status
Revenue split (broadcast, commercial, matchday, participation, grants)	NOT DISCLOSED IN CONSULTATION PACK. ^{E246}
Debt level, interest cost, and facility terms	NOT DISCLOSED IN CONSULTATION PACK. ^{E246}
Covenant package, DSCR and headroom	NOT DISCLOSED IN CONSULTATION PACK. ^{E246}

Historical Actuals Snapshot (FY2023–FY2025) Revenue (turnover): £101.3m, £103.5m, £106.1m.^{E281E282E283} Net debt: £118.8m, £129.2m, £124.1m.^{E314E315E316} Interest payable on bank and other loans: £1.5m, £3.0m, £2.8m.^{E335E336E337} Source: 03_WRU_Historical_Actuals in the master reconciliation model.

Debt reality (FY2025 actuals) Net debt: £124.1m.^{E316} Gross debt (bank and other loans, debenture loans, finance leases) totals £128.0m.^{E325E328E331} Cash and cash equivalents: £3.9m.^{E334} Facility fees, covenant metrics and security package are not disclosed in the consultation pack.^{E246}

Security disclosure (consultation pack) **What is stated:** The consultation pack does not publish a security package or pledged assets.^{E246} **What is not stated:** whether the stadium, commercial revenues, Six Nations stake or regional assets are pledged.^{E246} **What we are requesting to be published:** full security package, covenant definitions, lender consent requirements, and fee schedule.^{E246}

Confirmed WRU direction (as of 28 Jan 2026) WRU direction is three professional men’s clubs (Cardiff, East, West) with an equal squad-budget path starting at £6.4m rising to £7.8m, and three licences if required.^{E003} **Execution risk:** If clubs cannot agree a consensual route, a tender process in 2026 has been described as the mechanism to award licences.^{E004}

Why the four-region model merits comparative consideration The WRU’s current direction is three professional men’s clubs with equal squad budgets and licences if required.^{E003E005} The alternative argues that central alignment and cost control can, in principle, be pursued without removing a region. That is a proposition to be validated, not assumed. The consultation also stated that the “optimal system” could be two clubs (Model D), but the live direction is three clubs; this comparison therefore focuses on the three-club structure and its transition risk.^{E068}

Comparative precedent and its limits Ireland (population ~5m) operates four provinces under strong central alignment and has been reported among the world’s top-ranked teams in recent years.^{E070} That does not prove that Wales can reproduce Irish outcomes. It does show that a four-team footprint is not inherently incompatible with a small-nation high-performance system.

Direct response to the WRU performance-gap argument The WRU shows Wales falling behind peers in its consultation material.^{E071} The alternative response is:

- TARGET: Keep four regions to preserve opportunity volume for Welsh-qualified players, while publishing minutes data to test whether that volume is being used well.
- TARGET: Use central load management to improve player freshness, drawing on comparator evidence rather than treating it as proof.^{E072}
- TARGET: 25 to 40% academy ring-fence means a more visible pipeline, provided the metric is audited and performance-gated.^{E073}
- TARGET: Ring-fenced savings mean investment in coaching and facilities, not only in central infrastructure.

Stretch outcomes, not forecasts: improved ranking competitiveness by Year 5 and deeper World Cup-cycle competitiveness by Year 10.

Financial Sustainability as a Foundation: None of the above is possible without a stable financial base. Recent years have exposed severe governance and budgetary issues in Welsh professional rugby. By early 2023, the regions were facing major funding cuts, unable to offer new player contracts, and several star players openly pondered an exodus abroad. The uncertainty became so dire that players nearly went on strike during the Six Nations. Cardiff Rugby’s formal administration event came later, in April 2025, and should not be retrofitted into the 2023 timeline.^{E058E061} This plan tackles these issues head-on with **smart financial governance** reforms to ensure every pound is accounted for and every assumption is visible.

Equitable and Transparent Funding Model: The WRU and regions should establish a long-term **funding agreement** that is equitable and performance-oriented. Each professional team must receive a viable baseline of funding if it is to be competitive, but viability and competitiveness are different thresholds and should not be conflated. A model to consider is **equal core funding plus merit adjustments**: for example, each region gets an equal base grant, and additional funding can be tied to agreed outcomes such as Wales-qualified player development, league performance, or community engagement. Importantly, the distribution mechanism should be transparent so the regions and public can see how funds are allocated.

The WRU’s published figures of £6.4m rising to £7.8m refer to squad-budget paths in the adopted three-team direction, not simply to WRU cash grants in isolation.^{E005}

ASSUMPTION: under a four-region scenario, this document models a starting point of around ~£5.5m per region in central support. V2.2 no longer describes that as “similar total outlay” to the three-team model. It is a lower per-team figure that would require additional regional revenues, disclosed private capital,

cost savings, or phased cost control to become viable. That is precisely why the counter-model requires independent validation before it can be treated as decision-grade.

3.2.1 Funding perimeter and category discipline

For publication purposes, the paper separates five distinct funding categories:

1. **WRU contribution** - cash support or centrally allocated rugby funding that the WRU would provide under the chosen structure;
2. **regional self-generated operating revenue** - matchday, sponsorship, hospitality, retail, local commercial income, and other region-controlled revenue;
3. **pooled or allocated commercial revenue** - centrally negotiated or shared income distributed by formula;
4. **efficiency savings** - cost reductions from procurement, shared services, contracting discipline, and duplication removal; and
5. **restricted capital or private investment** - external capital, community shares, benefactor support, or other non-operating funding that may carry governance, repayment, or control conditions.

These categories should not be blurred. A four-region scenario may appear more credible or less credible depending on how much of the bridge sits in recurring operating cash versus one-off or control-bearing capital.

Any £5.5m-style starting figure in the four-region scenario should be labelled clearly as an illustrative modelling input for comparative purposes. It is not a published WRU commitment, not proof of competitiveness, and not the same thing as total regional operating resource.

Ownership and Capital Disclosure Gap

V2.2 cannot yet state a final ownership or investor structure for Cardiff, Ospreys, or any wider professional-game capital solution. The source base does not yet disclose:

- final ownership path and control rights;
- investor return expectations;
- related-party restrictions;
- heritage protections, if any;
- lender consent requirements for material transactions; and
- the extent to which external capital is assumed in the base case rather than the downside case.

Until those items are disclosed, ownership should be treated as a decision dependency, not as a solved feature of the model.

3.2.2 Conditional four-region stabilisation period

The four-region case is not advanced as an unconditional entitlement. The safer position is to support a defined stabilisation window, for example 24 months, during which four regions are retained only alongside hard disclosure, reporting, and delivery triggers.

These triggers should include:

- agreed budget-control compliance at each region;
- publication of ownership and capital structure summaries;

- no emergency funding event outside agreed controls;
- minimum pathway and academy conversion reporting;
- contract-certainty performance against defined windows; and
- commercial performance reporting against audited baselines.

If those conditions are missed on a repeated or material basis, the response should not be denial or rhetorical escalation. The response should be automatic reappraisal of the operating model. This strengthens the four-region case by making it conditional on delivery rather than dependent on assertion.

3.2.3 Professional and community game separation

One of the most important governance upgrades still available to Welsh rugby is clearer separation between the professional game and the wider game at reporting level. The paper therefore recommends a ring-fenced professional operating perimeter, separate reporting lines for community and pathway investment, and transparent treatment of transfers between the two.

The purpose of this separation is not cultural division between the elite and community game. It is reporting clarity. Stakeholders should be able to see:

- what is being spent on the professional game;
- what is being invested in academies and player development;
- what is being invested in grassroots and school rugby; and
- whether cross-subsidy, refinancing pressure, or emergency support is distorting decision-making.

This recommendation is framed as a governance and reporting improvement, not as a claim that all such separation already exists.

Central contracting discipline: To get more rugby value from limited budgets, Wales should move toward a more centralised contracting framework for priority players and a common contract architecture across the regions. The aim is not for the WRU to pay every salary. It is to reduce internal bidding wars, align player-management decisions with national priorities, and use clearer templates, salary banding, and approval rules so contract decisions are more consistent and auditable. Comparator evidence from Ireland supports the case for tighter central coordination, even though any Welsh model would still need its own legal and financial design.^{E075E076}

Value and cost discipline: Contracting should be governed by clearer performance, availability, and succession priorities rather than by short-term competition between regions. The paper therefore recommends a more disciplined framework in which contract spend is reviewed against retention, availability, and pathway outcomes, rather than treated as a series of disconnected negotiations.

Shared services and operating efficiency: The regions and WRU should also pursue shared medical, sports science, analytics, procurement, legal, and back-office services where duplication adds cost but little strategic advantage. This is a governance and operating-efficiency recommendation, not a claim that every function should be centralised. Financial monitoring should identify stress earlier and favour collaborative restructuring over reactive crisis management. The administration and ownership shock at Cardiff in April 2025 illustrates why earlier visibility of financial pressure matters.^{E061}

How the proposal saves money (delegate-friendly, concrete, auditable)

- **Central contracting framework:** one negotiating entity, clear salary bands, and Welsh-qualified incentives to prevent bidding wars.
- **Shared services across all regions:** one national performance data stack, shared medical protocols, shared S&C methodology, shared analyst pool, shared scouting and opposition analysis where it is non-competitive.
- **One administration layer for duplicated functions:** HR, legal, procurement, IT, travel operations, insurance. Regions keep front-of-house brand and commercial identity, but back office is not duplicated four times.
- **Central procurement and standardised vendors:** kit, travel, accommodation, nutrition supply, software licences, medical consumables, imaging, recovery tech.
- **Published reinvestment rule (ring-fence):** a fixed proportion of released savings is automatically allocated to academies, schools, clubs, women's and North Wales acceleration, with annual audited reporting.

Note: Savings are line-itemed in 07_Structural_Savings_Detail and roll up mechanically into the model. Base case uses £2m to £3m annual savings; £4m to £8m is treated as upside only. If savings are not realised by Year 2, the ring-fence is reduced and the contingency plan triggers.^{E077}

Regional identities and revenue: Equitable funding does not mean homogeneity. Each region should still be responsible for improving ticketing, sponsorship, retail, and local commercial performance within a clearer system-wide framework. The WRU can support that through pooled sponsorship structures and more consistent commercial standards, but local management still matters. KPI targets for own-generated income should be published only where baselines and measurement rules are clear.

In summary, **smart financial governance** in this plan means living within our means while testing, not assuming, whether a four-region model can be made viable. By centralizing and coordinating spending, adopting clearer funding rules, and tightening contract discipline, Welsh rugby may be able to stretch limited resources further. Whether that is enough to sustain four competitive regions remains the core question for the model and the validation process, not a point that V2.2 claims to have settled by assertion.

3.3 Funding models and what they imply

The WRU consultation document set out four structural options for men's professional rugby, all predicated on combining WRU funding with private investment to sustain elite clubs. Each model defined how many clubs would compete, whether funding was equal or tiered and how the academy pathway and women's rugby would be configured.

3.3.1 Model A: Four clubs, unequal funding (2 + 2)

- **Structure:** Four professional men's teams in the URC and European competitions, with **two elite clubs** and **two development clubs**.
- **Budgets:** Elite clubs would have squad budgets of **£6.7 million** per year and development clubs **£5.2 million**. Academies would receive £800 k per club and coaching/back-room staff £1.9 m. WRU funding over five years would total **£120 million**, with reported private investment of **£25 million** over five years.^{E078E207E208}
- **Rationale:** Concentrate resources into two high-performance environments while retaining four teams;

development clubs could eventually graduate into elite status.

3.3.2 Model B: Three clubs, equal funding

- **Structure:** Three professional men's teams, each funded equally and competing in the URC and Europe.
- **Budgets:** Squad budgets of **£6.9 million** for all clubs and identical academy/coaching budgets. WRU investment over five years is modelled at around **£121 million**, with reported private investment of **£21 million** over five years.^{E079E212E214}
- **Rationale:** Maintains three competitive clubs with uniform resources; aligned with WRU's final decision.

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

- **Structure:** Two elite clubs and one development club.
- **Budgets:** Elite clubs receive **£6.9 million** squad budgets; the development club receives **£5.4 million**. WRU investment over five years is modelled at around **£116 million**, with reported private investment of **£21 million** over five years.^{E080E219E220}
- **Rationale:** Splits resources between two flagship sides and a feeder club while retaining three teams.

3.3.4 Model D: Two clubs, equal funding

- **Structure:** Two elite professional clubs competing in the URC and European competitions.
- **Budgets:** Both teams receive **£8 million** squad budgets. WRU investment is modelled at around **£94 million** over five years, with reported private investment of **£17 million** over five years.^{E081E224E225}
- **Rationale:** Concentrate all talent and resources into two elite teams to maximise competitiveness.

3.3.5 Key Features of the Proposed Optimal System

The WRU document argued that the current structure "fails to collaborate," that players do not play enough together at the right competitive levels and that there is insufficient funding across four clubs.^{E082} The proposed system sought to centralise contract management, increase academy funding, align men's and women's pathways and introduce private investment.

3.4 Real finance: budgets, sustainability and investment

3.4.1 10-Year financial model summary (technical reference)

(ASSUMPTION / TARGET): Scenario structure for testing the four-region case, not a bankable forecast.

The companion financial-model materials listed in Part III contain the worked scenario model, sensitivities, and line-by-line assumptions. The core-paper reading should stay high level. The base case combines:

- a lower starting level of central support per team than in the WRU's published three-team squad-budget path;
- conservative shared-service and operating-efficiency assumptions rather than maximal savings claims; and
- rights-independent commercial improvement as the base case, with any rights-dependent upside treated separately.

The decision-grade point is narrow. The model is intended to show that a four-region operating path can be tested transparently. It does not claim that every grant step, growth rate, or surplus output in those companion materials is decision-grade in its current form.

Core reading rule. The companion financial-model materials listed in Part III are for testing assumptions and failure logic. They are not bankable forecasts, confirmed funding agreements, or published WRU commitments to the figures used in the counter-model.

3.4.2 Detailed 10-Year Financial Model

The companion financial-model materials listed in Part III contain the line-by-line assumptions, revenue and cost categories, and sensitivity cases used in the counter-model. Those workings are included for independent validation, not as a substitute for the unpublished WRU workbook or for missing ownership and covenant disclosures.

Perimeter and revenue ownership bridge		
Line	Perimeter item	Ownership / treatment
A	WRU central revenues (national team, central sponsorship, broadcast share)	Retained at WRU; only the allocated portion flows into the model.
B	Regional matchday and regional sponsorship	Retained by regions; included in system-level commercial revenue only if pooled.
C	Shared commercial pool	Allocated by published base and merit formula.
D	Stadium and non-rugby events	Excluded unless explicitly ring-fenced to rugby.
E	Grants and participation funding	Ring-fenced to community and pathway delivery; excluded from pro operating base.
F	Private investment	Treated as restricted capital, not operating revenue unless a disclosed revenue-share exists.
G	One-off items (asset sales, loans, exceptional grants)	Excluded from base case and disclosed separately.

Calculation note: in the companion financial model, projected net position equals WRU core grant + allocated system-level commercial revenue + efficiency savings minus total expenditure.

Key Assumptions and Stress-Test

- ASSUMPTION: Attendance and conversion improvement are modelled conservatively in the base case, with downside and stretch cases tested separately in the companion workbook.
- ASSUMPTION: Commercial revenue growth in the base case comes from stronger local conversion, pooled sponsorship structures, and other rights-independent measures; any media-rights upside is treated as contingent rather than base-case.
- ASSUMPTION: Efficiency savings are conservative in the base case, with higher savings treated as upside only.
- ASSUMPTION: Downside cases are included so the model can be judged on failure logic rather than on best-case presentation.

- ASSUMPTION: Full Excel with line items, revenue streams, cost breakdowns, and multiple sensitivities is listed in Part III for independent validation.^{E083}

Implication

ASSUMPTION: Under conservative conditions, the model suggests a medium-term break-even path if validation supports the inputs. It remains a scenario tool, not a verified future outcome.

3.4.3 The Three-Team Budget vs PRA and Other Nations

The final decision to run **three men's teams** with equal funding translates to an initial **£6.4 million per club**, rising to **£7.8 million** in the published squad-budget path.^{E084} That is marginally lower than the **£6.9 million** average squad budget proposed in Model B but higher than the development allocations in Models A and C. V2.2 avoids relying on headline international budget comparisons here because operating budgets, playing budgets, tax environments, and ownership structures are not directly comparable across unions.

The safer point is narrower: even the WRU's adopted three-team budget path still leaves Welsh rugby operating in a constrained environment by leading Tier-1 professional standards, so structural change alone cannot be assumed to close the competitive gap.

The chart below visualises the differences in total WRU funding across the current PRA and the four consultation models. It shows the adopted three-club plan (Model B) sitting between the status quo and the two-club option, and makes clear the savings the union associated with the two-club model.

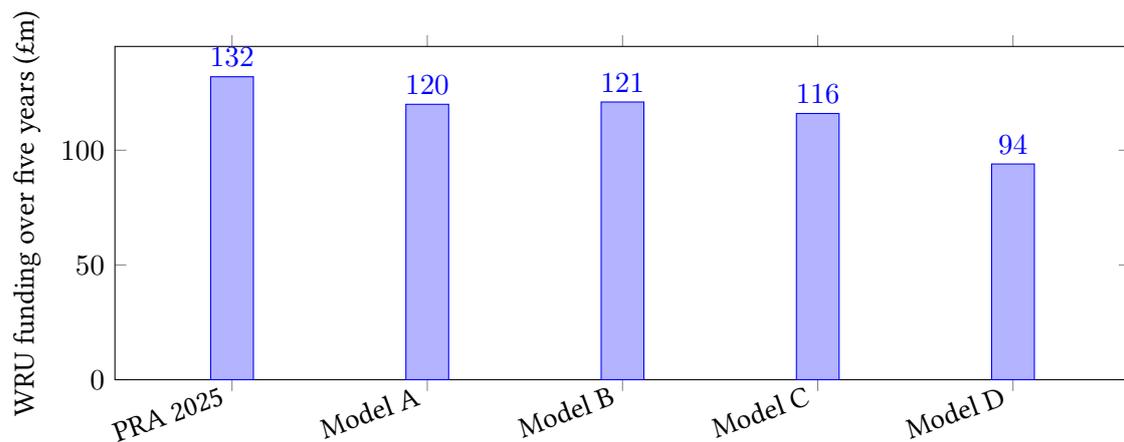


Figure 1: WRU funding totals across the current PRA and Models A to D (five-year totals, £m; WRU funding only).

E086

3.4.4 Investment Allocation and Transparency

The WRU's consultation materials note that club budgets would need to be supplemented by **new private investment** to reach competitiveness.^{E087} However, fans expressed concern that the union did not specify how much private capital was required, what proportion of equity would be sold or how investor returns would be generated.^{E088} The confidential investment memoranda remain unpublished, leaving supporters unable to judge whether the proposed funding levels are realistic.^{E089}

The missing Excel model ("Welsh Rugby Financial Models") and the unpublished **Investment Allocation Analysis and Funding Levels - Wales vs Other Nations** make it difficult to verify the WRU's financial

assumptions.^{E090} The union's evidence submission to Parliament emphasised that independent advisors and an oversight panel supported the conclusions, yet calls for an independent audit of the models and for publication of the underlying data have not been answered.^{E091} In the absence of transparency, mistrust grows; fans fear that the WRU may be under-estimating future costs or over-stating private investment prospects.

3.4.5 Growth engine participation and funding model (v2)

Baseline participation is treated as stable. Incremental growth from schools, community engagement, or improved conversion should be modelled conservatively and shown separately from the current-state operating base. This avoids overstating durability and keeps the demand case transparent.

The consultation pack notes sustained regional attendance pressure and treats playing opportunities as only one part of a wider system that includes pathway quality, facilities, academies, and player allocation. Demand-side upside is therefore presented as sensitivity, not as the foundation of solvency.^{E092}

Fan funding should remain classified as restricted capital or community-backed funding, not as recurring operating revenue. If structured as repayable debt, it creates future servicing obligations and should be shown only as a conditional instrument, not as a quiet plug for the base case.

Limitation. This module remains a transparent counter-model for participation, conversion, demand, and transition funding. It is not a full WRU P&L, does not replace unpublished WRU allocation schedules, and does not settle the final perimeter of the professional game.

Open modelling gap. This paper still does not model an Anglo-Welsh or Premiership participation scenario. If that route is to be treated as decision-grade rather than rhetorical, it should be added as a separate comparative case with explicit league, rights, travel, competition, and contracting assumptions.

3.4.6 Financial guardrails and failure logic

The model should use guardrails to stop optimistic narrative from substituting for operating discipline:

- TARGET: region-level spending discipline should be tied to a transparent squad-cost envelope and annual audit;
- TARGET: academy and pathway allocations should be published separately from senior operating spend;
- OPEN ISSUE: any private-capital protections around control, heritage, related-party transactions, and exit rights remain to be defined;
- TARGET: annual publication should cover regional budgets, academy spend, pathway allocations, and community distributions within a fixed reporting window.

Failure logic should also be explicit. If by the agreed review point the model is missing its core funding bridge because efficiency savings are not realised, recurring commercial revenue remains materially below plan, or acceptable capital solutions are unavailable on terms compatible with governance and heritage protection, the Board and stakeholders should trigger a formal reappraisal rather than continue on assumed recovery. That does not predetermine contraction. It does impose a discipline that the model must earn continuation through disclosed performance.

This is the correct publication posture for V2.2: a testable scenario, not a confirmed funding agreement.

3.4.7 V2.2 finance note

Detailed finance recommendations are provided in Section 3.8. The purpose of the finance section is to move the debate from assertion to comparability. The WRU's published direction remains a three-club pathway with stated squad-budget ranges and, in some models, a requirement for additional private investment. The alternative does not deny that affordability pressure exists. It argues that the four-region case should be tested on the same disclosure standard before irreversible change is locked in.

For that reason, direct-to-consumer digital-rights upside or other rights-dependent revenue should not sit inside the base case unless the rights position and counterparties are evidenced. Base-case modelling should rely only on revenues and savings that Welsh rugby can influence more directly: disciplined procurement, clearer shared services, stronger local conversion, more usable pooled sponsorship structures, and published reinvestment rules.

3.5 Financial frustrations and credibility

Discussion threads contained sharp critiques of WRU financial management.^{E097} Fans cited stadium deals, hospitality spending and consultant fees as evidence that the union should look inward rather than cut clubs.^{E098} There was anger that key financial assumptions in the consultation document (e.g. private investment requirements) were not shared with supporters.^{E099}

3.6 Licensing, ownership and deal mechanics in fan debate

3.6.1 From models to mechanics

Comparing pre- and post-consultation language shows a shift from debating abstract models to discussing **transactional mechanics**. Words like "licences", "WRU revenue", "WRU funding", "buy Cardiff", "RCK" (WRU chair Richard Collier-Keywood) and "Tierney" become markedly more distinctive after the consultation. Supporters increasingly ask **who owns what**, **who pays what**, how licences will work and what liabilities are being transferred. The emergence of the phrase "buy Cardiff" reflects the controversy over a proposed sale to Y11 Sport & Media; "licence" points to the WRU's plan to license professional clubs.

3.6.2 Deal mechanics: share and amplification

Within Lens B, comments were grouped by specific deal mechanics. The proportion of comments and their amplification are summarised below:^{E100}

Mechanic	Share	Score share	Amplification
Investor/owner/benefactor framing	3.9 %	5.7 %	1.49
Licensing models	2.0 %	2.6 %	1.28
Debt/refinancing & covenants	1.2 %	1.9 %	1.56
"Buy Cardiff" / sale mechanics	0.7 %	1.7 %	2.41
WRU licence fee	0.1 %	0.2 %	2.34

The most highly amplified items are "buy Cardiff" and "licence fee" - topics that barely register in volume but spark intense engagement.^{E100} They underscore the anxiety surrounding prospective sales, licence fees and who benefits from them.

3.7 V2.2 recommendation: Equal and sustainable funding

Equal and Sustainable Funding. Fans who accept three teams do so only if funding is transparent and equitable. The WRU should guarantee equal or proportional funding for each professional side, publish financial projections and share the terms of any private investment deals.

3.8 V2.2 finance recommendations (detail)

1. **Publish the financial models:** Release the detailed spreadsheets underpinning the funding scenarios, including assumptions on revenues, costs, private investment and academy funding. Allow independent verification and public scrutiny.
2. **Provide national and international benchmarks:** Compare Welsh budgets with those of Irish provinces, English Premiership clubs and Top 14 teams to demonstrate how the proposed funding levels stack up. Explain how Wales can remain competitive with far smaller budgets.
3. **Ring-fence community investment:** Guarantee that any savings from contraction are reinvested into academies, women's rugby and community clubs. Specify the amount ring-fenced for each.
4. **Clarify investor terms:** Publish a high-level summary of the partnership agreements with private investors, including the ownership structure, investment horizons and return expectations. Fans need assurance that club control and heritage will not be compromised.
5. **Transparency on use of funds:** Commit to annual reporting on how WRU funds and private investment are allocated across squads, academies, coaching and grassroots programmes. This will build trust and demonstrate accountability.

By addressing the financial fog that surrounds the current WRU plan, V2.2 aims to re-frame the debate from suspicion to informed discussion. Fans are not inherently opposed to change; they simply want to understand the financial logic and see evidence that savings will be used to strengthen the game at all levels. Media reports in January 2026 illustrate how the WRU's post-consultation actions fuelled further outrage. The union entered a **period of exclusivity** with the investment firm **Y11 Sport & Media**, which owns the Ospreys, to purchase **Cardiff Rugby**, a club the WRU had controlled since April 2025. The proposed sale triggered immediate backlash: Ospreys players released a statement saying that they had been "**left in the dark by the WRU and Y11**" and that they struggled to understand why the most successful Welsh side might disappear. Meanwhile, the Central Glamorgan Rugby Union attempted to convene an **extraordinary general meeting (EGM)** to move a vote of no confidence in WRU chair **Richard Collier-Keywood**. These events became focal points for fan conversations, reinforcing perceptions that decisions were being made behind closed doors without adequate consultation.^{E096}

3.9 Pillar summary

Financial stability underpins every reform. Recent crises - player strike threats in 2023 and Cardiff Rugby's administration in April 2025 - illustrate the danger of unsustainable spending and weak ownership resilience.^{E058E061} The counter-proposal calls for an **equitable and transparent funding model**: each professional team would receive a viable base grant, with merit-based top-ups linked to performance and community engagement. **ASSUMPTION:** this paper models a baseline of around **£5.5 million per region** in central support, but it no longer describes that as equivalent to the WRU's three-team squad-budget path.

Funding decisions would be published to prevent suspicions of favouritism.

Central contracting and shared services remain important components. Ireland is relevant as a comparator

for tighter central coordination, but the Welsh case is framed more narrowly: clearer contract architecture, consistent banding, fewer internal bidding wars, more disciplined review of contract value, and shared-service efficiencies where duplication adds cost without improving performance.^{E075E076} Any private capital should be treated as transparent, separately disclosed, and ring-fenced where conditions require it.

4 Grassroots Revival and Coach Education

Scope: Grassroots participation, schools, community clubs, and coach education.

Assumes: Pathway transition ownership is defined in the Pathways section.

Depends on: Finance section for funding; Implementation section for delivery phasing.

Grassroots reform is treated here as a delivery requirement, not a rhetorical flourish. The available evidence points to long-term pressure on school provision, access to pitches, and youth retention.^{E102} That matters because elite reform becomes harder to sustain if the participation base continues to narrow.

Funding status note. The £15m grassroots and coaching figure in this paper is treated consistently as a model allocation target within the broader £40m commitment, subject to affordability, annual audit, and delivery review. It is not a published WRU commitment, and it should not be written as though the cash is already secured irrespective of the professional-game decision.

Schools rugby as a rebuilding priority: The WRU, Sport Wales, and Welsh Government should be asked to develop a **Schools Rugby Action Plan**. The paper frames this as a staged programme rather than as an instant guarantee that every school will be fully rugby-active. The medium-term ambition remains that every secondary school in Wales can offer rugby in some form, but delivery depends on staff capacity, facilities, transport, and local demand. **TARGET:** a ring-fenced portion of the proposed £40m commitment could support development officers, school-club links, equipment grants, and transport support for schools that have lost rugby or cannot currently sustain it.^{E103}

Competition structure and visibility: A clearer schools competition structure at U16 and U18 level would give players, teachers, and schools something tangible to organise around. South African and Irish school competitions show the value of visible school-age rugby ecosystems, even if Wales cannot replicate them exactly.^{E104} The practical lesson is not to import another country's model wholesale, but to rebuild a recognisable progression route from school rugby into clubs, academies, and age-grade representative teams. Analysis cited in the source base also points to the long-term risk of losing state-school participation.^{E105}

Community clubs and local access: Community clubs remain the practical bridge between school participation and the elite pathway. The paper therefore supports a tighter regional-feeder structure in which each region agrees clear development relationships with clubs in its catchment area. The aim is not to create bureaucracy for its own sake, but to make coaching support, talent identification, and calendar co-ordination more predictable. Regional academy days, shared coach clinics, and club festivals are examples of useful low-cost touchpoints.

Girls' and women's participation: Women's rugby should be treated as a growth opportunity in its own right, not as an assumed spillover from men's reform. Wales Women drew a record crowd of 21,186 against England at Principality Stadium in 2025, which is a stronger current demand signal than the older figure previously cited here.^{E113} The practical implication is separate visibility of participation, retention, coaching support, and development capacity rather than generic inclusion within wider pathway rhetoric.

4.1 Women's rugby as a standalone growth engine

Women's rugby is not merely an adjunct to men's structural reform. It is a growth engine in its own right and should be planned, funded, and measured as such. That means:

- separate women's pathway KPIs;

- transparent reporting on participation, retention, and progression;
- a staged domestic-performance roadmap where evidence supports it;
- explicit coaching and strength-and-conditioning support for girls' and women's pathways; and
- ring-fenced visibility of women's development investment.

The strategic logic is straightforward. A healthier Welsh rugby system should expand audience reach, player participation, and development depth. The women's game is central to that expansion and should not be treated as a by-product of decisions taken elsewhere. That requirement flows directly into coach education and pathway coordination.

Coach education: A stronger player base will not convert into stronger outcomes without better coaching. The proposal therefore retains a **Coach Education and Development Plan**: subsidised coaching courses, mentoring for newer coaches, and clearer pathways for former players into development and academy roles. The evidence base also supports the broader point that coaching quality is a strategic lever rather than an optional extra.^{E108} **TARGET:** Wales should track the number of qualified coaches, especially at Level 2 and above, and use that as a hard delivery measure rather than relying on anecdote alone. A national coaching conference remains a sensible supporting mechanism if it is tied to practical curriculum-sharing rather than symbolism.^{E109}

Pathway coordination: Instead of implying a large new institution, the paper proposes a compact **Pathway Coordination Group** involving schools, clubs, regional academies, and WRU development staff. Its role would be practical: align calendars where possible, reduce hand-off failures between school and club rugby, and review where players are being lost from the system. It is intended as a coordination forum, not a second executive structure.

The strategic point is simple. If Wales wants a stronger professional and international game, it needs more reliable player access, stronger coaching, and less leakage between school, club, and academy environments.

4.2 National coaching and schools reset

Structural reform at the top of the game will remain fragile unless the coaching and school-level base improves. The paper therefore recommends a five-year coaching and schools reset rather than relying on academy reform alone.

At recommendation level, this should include:

- minimum coaching-support standards;
- targeted school activation in areas without sustainable rugby provision;
- support for teachers and volunteer coaches;
- stronger links between schools, clubs, development centres, and academies;
- publishable participation and fixture metrics; and
- a clearer route from school contact to club retention.

The purpose is not to treat every school as identical. It is to rebuild the base of the pyramid in a measurable way, so that Welsh rugby is not forced to argue endlessly about scarcity at the top while participation capacity underneath remains patchy.

4.3 Women's Participation per Capita

(REPORTED / TARGET)

Wales already has one of the stronger per-capita women's rugby bases in Europe.^{E110} The proposal's dedicated U20 and U23 streams, together with targeted grassroots investment, are intended to expand this pool. Under contraction scenarios, access points and local visibility could become more concentrated, which is why V2.2 treats regional reach as a material design question rather than a side issue.

4.4 Pillar summary

The grassroots pillar is now framed as a delivery case. Club and school rugby participation has been pressured by budget cuts, competing sports, and the loss of playing-field provision.^{E112} V2.2 therefore proposes a Schools Rugby Action Plan, targeted development staffing, stronger school-club links, and a clearer competition ladder. Girls' and women's participation is treated as a specific growth opportunity rather than as an assumed by-product of men's reform.^{E113}

Coach education is the second core lever. Subsidised coaching courses, mentoring, and a clearer route for former players into coaching roles would improve quality at the base of the system. A compact Pathway Coordination Group would link schools, clubs, regions, and WRU development teams so that the grassroots-to-pro journey is easier to track and less dependent on informal relationships.

4.5 Key enhancements

- **TARGET:** £15m ring-fenced (37.5% of the £40m commitment) for grassroots and coaching.^{E114}
- **TARGET:** "Every School, Every Year" ambition expressed as a medium-term access goal, not as an immediate guarantee.^{E115}
- **TARGET:** National Coaching Academy co-located with one academy hub, targeting 100 new Level 3 coaches by Year 5.^{E116}

5 Commercial Growth and Fan Engagement

Scope: Commercial revenue levers, matchday, media, and digital engagement.

Assumes: Financial baselines are defined in the Finance section.

Depends on: Implementation section for phasing and delivery capacity.

Commercial growth matters because the financial case is weak if Welsh rugby relies only on cuts, emergency funding, or private transactions. V2.2 therefore keeps a growth agenda, but makes the limits clearer: not every rights package is controlled by the WRU, not every digital idea is investable, and not every attendance uplift should be presented as a forecast.

Broadcasting, media, and rights realism: Welsh rugby needs more visibility, but this section no longer assumes that the WRU can unilaterally redesign every rights arrangement. URC, Six Nations, regional, and national-team rights sit across different competitions and contracts.^{E117E119} The decision-grade point is narrower: the WRU and regions should treat visibility as a strategic objective when negotiating future packages, particularly for Welsh derbies, shoulder programming, and archive or behind-the-scenes content. Any direct-to-consumer digital product should therefore be framed as **rights-dependent** and partnership-led rather than as an immediate standalone launch.

Matchday growth and fan experience: Regional attendance has been under sustained pressure.^{E120} V2.2 retains a matchday growth target, but treats it as a planning target rather than a disguised certainty. The most credible levers are practical: family offers, clearer scheduling, better in-stadium connectivity, stronger food and pre-game provision, and more disciplined use of showcase fixtures such as Judgement Day.^{E121E123} The Cardiff Devils example remains relevant as a local illustration that entertainment quality and family accessibility matter, even across different sports.^{E122}

Digital fan relationship: The strongest digital opportunity is not speculative technology. It is a usable, data-compliant fan relationship layer: registration, ticketing, content, merchandise, and loyalty in one place. A “Fy Rygbi Cymru” platform remains a sensible concept if it is built around known needs such as ticket wallet, fixtures, highlights where rights allow, and targeted offers.^{E118} Fantasy and prediction products can support attention, but they are secondary to getting the core data and content stack working.

Commercial partnerships and the stadium asset: Principality Stadium remains one of Welsh rugby’s major economic assets, and sold-out Six Nations events are highly valuable.^{E125} The more credible commercial question is how to connect national-team demand to stronger year-round engagement with the regional and pathway game. V2.2 therefore emphasises pooled sponsorship offers, consistent supporter data, and better calendar discipline rather than speculative technology showcases. Additional non-rugby event income may still matter, but it should not obscure the need for a more robust rugby-specific revenue base.

International and diaspora reach: There is still a case for building a better global audience through digital content, diaspora targeting, and selective commercial partnerships. V2.2 no longer assumes that overseas fixtures or showcase events are automatically worthwhile; they should be judged on travel cost, player-welfare impact, and sponsor demand.

The commercial argument is therefore practical rather than grandiose. Welsh rugby needs more visible content, better matchday conversion, stronger first-party fan data, and a clearer commercial offer to sponsors. Those are difficult tasks, but they are easier to test and govern than broad claims about instant global expansion.

Control boundary note. This section distinguishes between what Welsh rugby can influence directly and what depends on third-party rights structures. Matchday quality, supporter communication, local conversion, pooled sponsorship design, and first-party data are substantially within influence. League-wide media packaging, some broadcast windows, and certain cross-competition rights are not. The commercial case should therefore be strongest where control is strongest.

5.1 Fan Engagement and Revenue per Capita

(FACT / REPORTED / TARGET)

ASSUMPTION: Four regions can generate broader local sponsorship reach and more distributed matchday engagement than a smaller footprint, but that proposition must be tested rather than assumed.^{E126}

Nation	Average attendance per region (home game)	Population	Per-region attendance per 1,000 people	Status
Ireland	around 12,000 to 18,000	5.35m	2.2 to 3.4	REPORTED
Wales (4 regions)	around 5,000	3.15m	1.6	FACT ^{E127}
England	around 12,000	57m	0.2	REPORTED

Comparator caution: these figures are broad attendance ranges across different competition structures and markets. They are useful for scale, not as like-for-like proof.

TARGET: the proposal's attendance target of 5,000 to 7,500 would increase Wales to around 2.4 per 1,000 on this per-region basis.^{E128}

5.2 Illustrative matchday-economics sensitivity note

(ASSUMPTION / TARGET)

The strategic point is narrow: footprint and conversion interact, so recurring matchday income becomes harder to rebuild if Welsh rugby reduces venues or fails to improve venue standards.^{E129}

Reading note. This subsection is illustrative only. It is not a forecast, valuation exercise, or local-economic-impact model. Fuller arithmetic belongs in technical modelling material rather than in the core decision paper.

5.3 Consultation process: WRU plan and fan perspectives

The opening section of the WRU's consultation document sets out the **consultation process**. It explains that the WRU Board, faced with financial and performance headwinds, considered a range of structural options and committed to an open consultation with stakeholders before making a decision. The WRU consultation document lists the stakeholders to be consulted - the four professional clubs, the Professional Rugby Board, the Welsh Rugby Players Association, the Joint Supporters' Group, the WRU Council, the Women's Rugby Committee and representatives of other unions - and promises a wider engagement programme to seek views from fans, partners and sponsors.^{E132}

Fan experience suggests a very different story. The public survey appears to have contained **13 questions**, only eight of which related to rugby.^{E133} There was **no direct question** asking respondents to choose between Models A - D, and one question asked participants to allocate percentages of funding rather than

indicate structural preferences.^{E134} The most widely quoted question read: *"I am in favour of making significant changes if this helps Welsh national and professional club teams to return to winning ways."*^{E135} Supporters criticised this as leading and said the survey felt like a **box-ticking exercise** designed to justify a predetermined outcome. Approximately **one-fifth of engagement** during the consultation threads consisted of comments alleging a **bait-and-switch**, "PR exercise" or foregone conclusion.^{E136} Many fans noted that the WRU had not published the survey instrument or detailed results, fuelling suspicion that the process was not genuinely consultative.^{E137}

The WRU consultation document emphasises that the WRU "wishes to carry out a consultation process to obtain views from all our stakeholders", but Reddit discussions show that supporters felt excluded from shaping the final plan.^{E138} Comments repeatedly demanded transparency: they wanted to see the full question set, demographic breakdowns and the weighting methodology used to interpret the 7,000+ responses.^{E139} The absence of this information was a major factor in driving distrust.

The analysis below summarises how digitally engaged supporters discussed the consultation process. It is indicative rather than fully representative, but it remains useful because trust, fairness, and data transparency recur consistently across the evidence base.

5.4 Fan Sentiment: What Supporters Actually Discussed

To understand how fans reacted to the consultation, we analysed 39,851 Reddit comments posted between August 2025 and 1 January 2026 (the "consultation window") and a focused subset of 1,730 comments from 17 consultation-specific threads. These comments came from 6,291 unique authors. That is a significant sample of digitally engaged supporters, but it is not a substitute for a full electorate-wide survey.^{E140}

5.4.1 Team-Count Preferences

Fans clearly expressed preferences about how many professional clubs should remain. Among comments that explicitly mentioned team numbers or models, the engagement-weighted distribution was:

- **49.5 % favour retaining four teams (~80 comments)** (Model A) - Comments argued that cutting a club would destroy regional identities, reduce player opportunities and alienate long-standing supporters.^{E141}
- **40.2 % favour two teams (~80 comments)** (Model D) - A significant minority believed radical contraction is necessary to compete internationally; these voices often emphasised financial realism.^{E141}
- **10.3 % favour three teams (~30 comments)** (Models B or C) - Some commenters supported a compromise, but usually stressed equal funding and transparent governance.^{E141}

5.4.2 Governance and Trust

A central theme was **distrust in the consultation process**. About 20 % of the engagement in the consultation threads revolved around accusations of a predetermined outcome, biased survey questions and opaque data.^{E136} Fan comments frequently labelled the exercise a "bait-and-switch," complaining that they were **not asked** to choose between Models A - D and that survey questions seemed designed to justify a cut.^{E136} In our sentiment analysis:

- **Opposition to WRU central control** accounted for 86.3 % of engagement among comments mentioning governance. Many fans described the plan as a "power grab" and cited past mismanagement and high consultancy costs to argue against the WRU running the professional game.^{E142}

- **Trust in the process** was split: approximately 57.8 % of weighted comments expressed distrust, while 42.2 % expressed some level of trust or hope that the consultation was genuine.^{E142}
- **Attitudes towards the WRU** were even more polarised: 87.8 % of engagement expressed distrust in the WRU itself, compared with 12.2 % expressing support.^{E142}

5.4.3 Identity and Affinity

Another recurrent theme was **protection of club identity**. Fans insisted that names like *Cardiff*, *Scarlets*, *Ospreys* and *Dragons* represent communities and histories rather than mere geographies. Generic franchises such as “East Wales” or “West Wales” were rejected as erasing heritage. Comments stressed that supporters would “walk away” if their club’s identity was lost.^{E143}

5.5 Post-consultation sentiment and emerging crises

5.5.1 Time window definition

The post-consultation period is defined as 2025-10-01 to 2026-02-23. To move beyond anecdote, we analysed the full Reddit database `/mnt/data/wru_reddit.sqlite` covering **263,085 comments** from 2011 to 2026.

5.5.2 Scale and segmentation

After the WRU Board confirmed in late October 2025 that men’s professional rugby would contract to **three** teams with equal funding, public discussion did not subside. Thousands of additional comments posted between **November 2025 and February 2026** continued to debate the merits of the decision and to scrutinise the union’s actions. At least **several hundred posts and comments** in early 2026 referenced new controversies, showing that the consultation process had not restored confidence but had instead opened a new chapter of distrust.

Within this window we captured **58,853 comments**. Two subgroups isolate the substantive debate:

- **Lens A - WRU-referential comments.** These are comments where the text or context explicitly references the WRU, its board, chief executive, the Professional Rugby Board or the consultation itself. In the post-consultation window, this subset contained **12,827 comments**, with a higher average upvote score (9.11) than the overall post-consultation corpus (6.13). Lens A filters out general match chatter to focus on governance talk.
- **Lens B - WRU strategic debate (high-signal subset).** These are comments that discuss the mechanics of the consultation: numbers of teams, club mergers, the extraordinary general meeting (EGM), governance structures, licences, investors and owners, or debt/refinancing. This subset consists of **2,595 comments** and provides the richest data on how supporters evaluated the WRU’s plans. The quantitative insights below come from this lens.

5.5.3 The post-consultation narrative stack (Lens B)

Within Lens B we measured each theme’s **share of comments**, **share of total upvote score**, and **amplification** (score share divided by share). Amplification values greater than 1 indicate that a topic attracts disproportionate attention and agreement. The results are summarised in the following table:

Although governance and financial topics account for less than a third of comments, their amplification

Theme	Share of comments	Score share	Amplification
EGM, governance reform & council/INED framing	11.1 %	13.2 %	1.19
Grassroots, clubs, pathways, volunteers	8.4 %	10.9 %	1.29
Contraction & mergers (2 vs 3 vs 4 teams)	8.2 %	10.4 %	1.27
Incompetence/shambles/farce critiques	2.7 %	5.0 %	1.86
Financial distress (debt, refinancing, bailouts)	1.9 %	2.7 %	1.46
Central control & “power grab” framing	0.5 %	0.9 %	1.74
Process distrust (“sham”, “rubber stamp”)	0.3 %	0.6 %	1.87

is high. Explicit accusations of **incompetence** and **process distrust** receive nearly twice the upvotes you would expect from their frequency, signalling that those sentiments strongly resonate with readers.

5.5.4 Explicit criticism rate and impact

Using word-boundary matching for phrases such as “disgrace”, “shambles”, “corrupt”, “scam”, “lying” and “rigged”, roughly 8.6 % of Lens B comments contained explicit negative language. These comments generated 13.7 % of the total upvote score - a 1.6x amplification. Negative framing is thus a minority view but a highly influential one.

5.5.5 Shift toward mechanics

Comparing pre- and post-consultation language shows a shift from debating abstract models to discussing **transactional mechanics**. Words like “licences”, “WRU revenue”, “WRU funding”, “buy Cardiff”, “RCK” (WRU chair Richard Collier-Keywood) and “Tierney” become markedly more distinctive after the consultation. Supporters increasingly ask **who owns what**, **who pays what**, how licences will work and what liabilities are being transferred. The emergence of the phrase “buy Cardiff” reflects the controversy over a proposed sale to Y11 Sport & Media; “licence” points to the WRU’s plan to license professional clubs.

5.5.6 Deal mechanics people fixate on

Within Lens B, comments were grouped by specific deal mechanics. The proportion of comments and their amplification are summarised below:

Mechanic	Share	Score share	Amplification
Investor/owner/benefactor framing	3.9 %	5.7 %	1.49
Licensing models	2.0 %	2.6 %	1.28
Debt/refinancing & covenants	1.2 %	1.9 %	1.56
“Buy Cardiff” / sale mechanics	0.7 %	1.7 %	2.41
WRU licence fee	0.1 %	0.2 %	2.34

The most highly amplified items are “buy Cardiff” and “licence fee” - topics that barely register in volume but spark intense engagement. They underscore the anxiety surrounding prospective sales, licence fees and who benefits from them. This deal-mechanics distribution is also discussed in Section 3.6 in the context of governance and contracting.

5.5.7 Contraction stance (counted and engagement-weighted)

Within Lens B, 24 % of comments take a clear position on contraction or mergers. **Anti-contraction** stances represent 23.3 % of these comments, **pro-contraction** 15.9 %, and **mixed** 4.1 %. The remainder are neutral or ambiguous. Weighting by engagement ($\log(1+\text{score})$) does not materially change the ratios: anti-contraction sentiment remains roughly 1.5 times more prevalent than pro-contraction. This confirms that

with news of an attempted no-confidence motion. Contraction and merger talk spikes around rumours of club sales. Financial distress topics are lower in volume but consistently attract above-average engagement, suggesting that fans are attuned to the union's financial position.

5.5.9 Bottom line

Taken together, these metrics reveal that post-consultation sentiment is not a howl in the wilderness but a **structured debate about legitimacy**. Supporters focus on governance mechanisms, financial transparency and licensing frameworks. Contraction remains a divisive issue, with opposition outweighing support. The most influential comments frame the WRU as **procedurally untrustworthy, operationally incompetent and structurally extractive**. Addressing this legitimacy gap, through data publication, stakeholder engagement and transparent decision-making, is essential for any reform to succeed.

The themes that dominated the consultation period - trust, governance and identity - persisted into 2026. The WRU's own evidence submission to Parliament acknowledged that the consultation demonstrated strong concern about **abrupt contraction** and a consistent desire for improved governance and delivery confidence. It noted that many respondents focused less on the precise number of teams and more on whether the WRU could demonstrate control, transparency and external assurance. Even so, when the union announced its three-team model, supporters reacted with suspicion. Comments lamented that the survey instrument and raw results remained unpublished and argued that the final decision still felt pre-determined.

5.6 Fan reactions to implementation and governance events

5.6.1 Player departures and competitive decline

The volatile post-consultation landscape also coincided with a talent drain. Ospreys co-captains **Jac Morgan** and **Dewi Lake** signed for Gloucester, while Dragons back-rower **Aaron Wainwright** joined Leicester.^{E063} Fans read these departures as a verdict on the direction of Welsh rugby. Many comments asked how contracting to three teams would stem the exodus when players already seemed unconvinced by the WRU's vision. This sense of decline sharpened the view that reforms were being imposed without a clear plan for maintaining competitiveness or inspiring loyalty.

5.6.2 The evidence submission vs. fan reaction

In its evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee, the WRU argued that the consultation produced **clear and material conclusions**: the status quo was unsustainable, stakeholders prioritised stability and clarity, and there was strong concern about excessive contraction.^{E144} The union emphasised that this feedback led it to abandon the two-team model and adopt a three-team structure.^{E145} However, the same evidence also highlighted that **trust, governance and delivery confidence** were central themes.^{E144} The turbulence of early 2026 - secretive negotiations, disgruntled players and an attempted EGM - suggests that these governance concerns were not resolved by the consultation. Instead, they continued to drive scepticism in public forums.

5.6.3 Summary of post-consultation sentiment

The data-driven analysis above demonstrates that post-consultation discourse did not dissipate - it intensified around governance.^{E146} Fans moved from debating models to interrogating the **mechanics of control**, tracking terms like "licence", "buy Cardiff" and "WRU revenue". Explicit accusations of incompetence and

procedural fraud accounted for only a small fraction of comments, yet they generated disproportionate engagement.^{E146} Those metrics, coupled with the narratives emerging from news reports, show that **dis-trust remained high**. Conversations shifted from theoretical model selection to **scrutinising the WRU's implementation**, with many fans viewing subsequent decisions as evidence that the union still lacked transparency. Calls for an EGM and statements from players demonstrate that concerns were shared beyond online forums.^{E147} In short, the consultation did not draw a line under Welsh rugby's governance debate; it merely set the stage for the next round of conflict.

The enduring focus on governance, identity and fairness underscores that a revised WRU plan must address not just structural questions but also the **culture of decision-making**. Without concrete steps to involve stakeholders and publish data, it is unlikely that fan sentiment will improve.

5.7 Alignment matrix: counter-proposal vs fan priorities

The WRU plan sought to **concentrate resources** and **centralise control**. Models B - D would reduce the number of men's teams; all models centralise player contracts and rely on private investment.^{E148} The final decision (Model B) embraces equal funding for three clubs and centralises oversight of academies and women's teams.^{E145}

By contrast, the **dominant public sentiment** favoured retaining four teams and protecting local identities.^{E141} Even where supporters acknowledged financial pressures, they emphasised the need for fairness (equal funding), transparency and community involvement.^{E149} The consultation's **lack of published data** fuelled distrust: supporters could not see how responses were weighted, what questions were asked or how results supported the chosen model.^{E137}

Fan priority	Counter-proposal response by pillar	Evidence reference
Trust, transparency	Publish survey data, funding models, and governance terms; formal stakeholder oversight	Sections 3, 5
Identity and heritage	Protect regional brands, fan affiliation, and community visibility	Section 5
Fairness and funding clarity	Equal or proportional funding, clear budgets, published projections	Section 3
Communication	Plain-language summaries, FAQs, and regular briefings	Section 5

5.8 V2.2 recommendations: trust, identity, governance and communication

5.8.1 Publish the data and survey instrument

Publish the Data and Survey Instrument. To restore trust, the WRU should release the full set of survey questions, response distributions and weighting methodology. This transparency would allow stakeholders to understand why Model B was chosen and to propose constructive alternatives.

5.8.2 Protect regional identities

Protect Regional Identities. If contraction is unavoidable, any merged or rebranded clubs should retain the heritage and visual identity of existing regions. Supporters must recognise their club in the new entity.

5.8.3 Community and stakeholder governance

Community and Stakeholder Governance. Introduce a structured forum - for example a supporters' and stakeholders' council - giving fans and club representatives input into strategic decisions. Seats on the professional game board or an assurance forum could be reserved for independent experts and stakeholder delegates to strengthen accountability without creating a second executive hierarchy.

5.8.4 Clear communication

Clear Communication. The consultation document is dense and legalistic, while the public survey appears to have been brief and arguably leading. V2.2 includes an accessible executive summary, clear visualisations and plain-language FAQs explaining trade-offs, costs and benefits. The WRU should also commit to regular public briefings during implementation.

5.9 Pillar summary

The commercial pillar is deliberately narrow. The aim is not to promise a speculative media or technology windfall. It is to identify the areas where Welsh rugby can more credibly improve performance: better matchday conversion, clearer pooled sponsorship packaging, a usable fan-data layer, stronger supporter communication, and better use of fixtures and regional touchpoints. Where media rights or distribution arrangements sit outside direct WRU control, this document says so explicitly.

The commercial case therefore rests on three principles. First, more contact points matter: four regions create more local surfaces for ticketing, sponsorship, retail, community activation, and supporter retention. Second, those surfaces only translate into value if conversion improves and if the data architecture is usable. Third, rights-dependent upside should be treated as contingent and partnership-led, not as a base-case assumption.

5.10 Key enhancements

- **TARGET: Fy Rygbi Cymru fan-data and loyalty layer:** a single registration, ticketing, CRM, and rewards environment tied to content, tickets, and retail. It should be described as a practical data and loyalty platform, not as a blockchain, VR, or speculative tech proposition.^{E150}
- **TARGET: Welsh Rugby Syndicate:** pooled sponsorship offers across regions to stabilise commercial income.^{E151}
- **TARGET: Matchday conversion programme:** better hospitality, family offers, food and beverage conversion, retail capture, and post-match engagement, measured against audited baseline data.
- **TARGET: Rights discipline:** seek better visibility, scheduling, and promotional packaging where Welsh rugby has influence, while acknowledging that URC, EPCR, Six Nations, and other rights structures may require partner consent.

5.11 Fan economics before speculative upside

The most credible commercial upside in Welsh rugby is not speculative media transformation. It is better conversion of existing supporter interest into usable revenue and stronger repeat engagement.

For that reason, V2.2 prioritises fan economics that are more directly controllable:

- ticket conversion;

- hospitality yield;
- food and beverage spend;
- merchandise capture;
- family and youth offer design;
- post-match retention; and
- first-party data quality.

This leads to a more practical recommendation: a national matchday standards and conversion programme, with venue-by-venue baseline measurement and annual reporting. The commercial case for four regions becomes materially stronger if each region is treated not only as a rugby team, but as a better-run fan and community platform.

Rights-dependent upside should remain outside the base case unless separately evidenced.

6 Phased Implementation with Milestones

Scope: Delivery phases, milestones, and accountability gates.

Assumes: Governance and funding mechanisms are defined elsewhere.

Depends on: Finance and Governance sections for constraints and oversight.

Transforming Welsh rugby requires a **phased approach**. This section sets out time-bound delivery stages with measurable KPIs so clubs and stakeholders can track progress and challenge under-performance early. See Part III for the reproducible performance-evidence reference materials.

6.1 Phase 0: Stabilisation (0 to 6 months)

Phase 0 is the immediate trust reset required before any irreversible structural change:

- Appoint the independent validator within 14 days and publish the core model workbook, assumptions dictionary, validator exceptions log, and disclosure-gap table.
- Publish a short ownership, capital, and transaction summary covering what is known, what is not yet disclosed, and what approvals or consents remain outstanding.
- No PRA finalisation, licensing, merger, or contraction step should proceed without model validation and a minimum disclosure pack for reserved matters.
- Form the Independent Oversight Board and agree its reserved-matters remit, reporting cadence, disclosure rights, and cooling-off process.
- Adopt and publish **Shared Principles for Welsh Rugby Reform** with regions, clubs, players, and supporter stakeholders as a transparency and conduct framework, not as a substitute for formal legal process.
- Launch a quarterly traffic-light dashboard covering finance, pathway, contract certainty, and delivery risk.
- Define the conditional stabilisation triggers for the four-region operating window, including reporting cadence, failure thresholds, and formal reappraisal process.
- Publish separate reporting templates for professional rugby, pathway investment, women's development, and grassroots/community investment.
- Rebase KPI baselines after validator review where the source data, perimeter, or disclosed assumptions materially change.
- Adopt a transfer-window stability protocol: immediate contract-certainty rules, interim contracting authority, and retention-risk escalation for critical positions.

Why Phase 0 matters for current decision-making Adopting Phase 0 immediately demonstrates good faith, stabilises current uncertainty, and gives every club confidence that decisions will be evidence-led and reversible until validated.

6.2 Phase 1: Short-Term (Years 1 to 3)

Planning note: the KPI figures below are delivery targets, not forecasts. They should be rebased after Phase 0 validation and disclosure review. Retention of four regions is linked to delivery quality, not treated as unconditional.

Delivery priorities (Years 1 to 3)

- Finalise a revised Professional Rugby Agreement that codifies four-region continuity, governance gates, and funding transparency.
- Launch the National Rugby Academy across two hubs and activate satellite development centres.
- Launch pathway dashboard reporting across academies, development centres, and professional transitions.
- Implement national load-management protocols for Wales-qualified elite players.
- Introduce the hybrid contracting framework and standardized contract architecture across regions.
- Launch women's pathway reporting and coaching-capacity plan.
- Start the Schools Rugby Action Plan in schools currently without rugby provision.
- Launch national coaching and school-rugby support framework in priority areas.
- Expand coach education volume and mentorship capacity.
- Implement first-wave commercial and fan-platform initiatives.
- Launch national matchday standards and conversion baselining across regions.
- Maintain competitive baseline outcomes to preserve public confidence.

KPIs by end of Year 3

- TARGET: Average annual game count for core Wales XV reduced by 15%.
- TARGET: At least 10 academy graduates debut in professional regional environments.
- TARGET: All four regions operating within agreed budget controls without emergency bailouts.
- TARGET: all four regions reporting against agreed stabilisation triggers.
- TARGET: pathway conversion dashboard operating on published cadence.
- TARGET: women's participation and progression reporting published on same cadence.
- TARGET: matchday conversion baseline established for all professional venues.
- TARGET: school and coaching support programme active in priority zones.
- TARGET: Youth participation up by 20% against baseline.
- TARGET: Average regional home attendance up by at least 15%.
- TARGET: Independent governance structures operating on published cadence.

6.3 Phase 2: Medium-Term (Years 4 to 5)

Planning note: medium-term targets remain conditional on the Year 1 to Year 3 validation results and should not be treated as guaranteed outcomes.

Delivery priorities (Years 4 to 5)

- Expand to an Elite 25 central-management cohort with clear club-country coordination.
- Embed tactical alignment across regions and national age-grade structures.
- Scale academy-to-pro conversion and formalise overseas player pathway protocols.
- Drive regions toward sustainable operating performance.
- Extend schools and community participation coverage nationwide.
- Increase women and girls pathway capacity and retention.
- Lift commercial yield through attendance, digital conversion, and rights value.

KPIs by end of Year 5

- TARGET: At least one Welsh region regularly competing in URC playoff or equivalent knockout contention.
- TARGET: Wales in sustained Six Nations contention with at least one title or Triple Crown outcome in cycle.
- TARGET: Measurable reduction in early-career player loss rate.
- TARGET: All regions meeting financial variance and reporting thresholds.
- TARGET: Registered player base trending toward 95,000+.
- TARGET: Domestic audience and sentiment metrics improving year on year.

6.4 Phase 3: Long-Term (Years 6 to 10)

Planning note: long-term targets are directional measures for system health, not promises of titles or rankings.

Delivery priorities (Years 6 to 10)

- Consolidate Wales as a consistently competitive Tier 1 system.
- Maintain four-region viability through stronger pathway output and improved economics.
- Convert pipeline depth into durable national-team succession planning.
- Continue revenue diversification and reduce dependency concentration risks.
- Re-anchor rugby participation and coaching excellence across all regions of Wales.
- Export Welsh coaching and high-performance capability as a system strength.

KPIs by Year 10

- TARGET: Multiple Six Nations title-contending cycles and sustained top-tier ranking competitiveness.
- TARGET: A Welsh region reaching title-winning contention in URC or European competition cycle.
- TARGET: Two-competitive-XV depth profile from the Wales-qualified player pool.
- TARGET: Material uplift in WRU and regional revenue resilience against baseline.
- TARGET: Registered player base exceeding 100,000.
- TARGET: Public confidence in direction of travel materially improved and sustained.

These milestones are designed as accountability gates, not aspirational slogans. If targets are missed, independent review and course-correction should trigger automatically before progression to the next phase.

6.5 V2.2 recommendation: phased implementation

Phased Implementation. If consolidation proceeds, do it over a defined period (e.g. three seasons) with clear performance metrics and review points. This allows clubs, academies and supporters to adjust and provides opportunities to reverse course if negative effects appear.

6.6 Pillar summary

The implementation logic is staged across three horizons. The first horizon stabilises trust and governance, the second scales delivery and performance, and the third consolidates long-term competitiveness and

financial resilience. Each horizon is gated by measurable indicators rather than narrative claims.

This structure allows clubs and stakeholders to compare plan performance against stated assumptions at fixed checkpoints. It also provides a clear mechanism for intervention if delivery drifts, preserving strategic flexibility while protecting against rushed irreversible decisions.

6.7 Recommendations index

The recommendations are embedded in the relevant pillars for clarity. Use this index to locate each item:

- Publish the data and survey instrument (see consultation section)
- Protect regional identities (see fan engagement section)
- Equal and sustainable funding (see finance section)
- Community and stakeholder governance (see governance section)
- Phased implementation (this section)
- Investment in pathways and women's rugby (see pathways section)
- Clear communication (see fan engagement section)

7 Learning from Tier-1 Models

Scope: Comparative lessons from Tier-1 systems and structural takeaways.

Assumes: Wales-specific constraints are defined in Finance and Governance sections.

Depends on: Pathways and Elite sections for implementation context.

This section is now framed as a **comparative lessons** section rather than as a catalogue of proof texts. Ireland, New Zealand, France, Scotland, South Africa, and Japan all operate in materially different financial, cultural, and legal environments. The question is therefore not which model Wales can copy, but which mechanisms appear to transfer credibly.

How to use this section. The comparator material in this section is included to test mechanisms, not to import another country's model by slogan. Ireland, New Zealand, France, Scotland, and South Africa each operate in different legal, commercial, demographic, and competitive conditions. The relevant question for Welsh rugby is therefore not "who should we copy?" but "which mechanisms appear transferable, on what limits, and under what Welsh constraints?" This section should be read as a menu of mechanism lessons, not as proof that Wales will replicate another union's outcomes by adopting similar language.

Ireland - four teams with strong central alignment: Ireland remains the closest structural comparator because it combines a relatively small population with a four-team professional footprint.^{E153E154} The most relevant lessons are strong central alignment, a coherent academy system, and tighter management of elite player load.^{E075E155} Ireland's recent ranking and Grand Slam performance show that a small-nation, four-team model can work when funding, governance, and pathways are coherent.^{E156} The limit to the comparison is equally important: Ireland's commercial base, school structure, and institutional stability are stronger than Wales's current position, so V2.2 treats Ireland as a mechanism comparator, not as a budget template. Ireland's academy and coaching depth are also central to the model's success.^{E157E158E159}

New Zealand - integrated pathway and load management: New Zealand offers a different lesson. Its value lies in system integration: a visible route from school and club rugby through provincial competition to Super Rugby and the All Blacks, backed by national contracting and strong performance governance.^{E162E163E164} The coaching and talent-identification culture is also instructive.^{E165E168} Wales cannot import New Zealand's scale of rugby participation or cultural position directly, but it can learn from the way player welfare, succession planning, and coaching standards are treated as system responsibilities rather than isolated club issues.^{E166E167E169E170E171}

France - development policy and local-player incentives: France is not a structural peer in size or budget, but the JIFF system remains a useful example of how regulatory design can change pathway outcomes over time.^{E172E173} The point is not to transplant Top 14 economics into Wales. It is to note that clearer incentives for developing and selecting homegrown players, backed by serious academy infrastructure, can shift behaviour materially.^{E174E175E176} France also shows that reconnecting professional clubs with local development can be a strategic choice rather than a sentimental one.^{E177}

Scotland, South Africa, and Japan: Scotland is a useful counter-example because it shows that a smaller professional footprint can coexist with competitive improvement if overseas-player selection remains open and the top-end talent cohort is strong enough.^{E178E179E180} South Africa's relaxation of its overseas-player restriction, and Japan's 2019 evidence of the value of coherent preparation and tactical clarity, are both relevant at the margin.^{E021E181} None of these systems is a direct Welsh blueprint, but all reinforce the narrower point that team count interacts with other policy choices rather than determining outcomes on its own.

What transfers to Wales: The recurring transferable mechanisms are:

- tighter central alignment between national and professional priorities;
- stronger academy and pathway governance;
- clearer management of elite player load;
- incentives that reward local-player development; and
- more discipline in how financial constraints are handled.

What does not transfer cleanly: V2.2 does not assume that Welsh rugby can simply import Irish budgets, New Zealand participation culture, or French commercial power. That is precisely why the document's core argument rests on alignment and decision quality first, and only then on structural preference. Wales still has its own history of innovation and over-performance, but the point of invoking that history is to justify reform, not nostalgia.^{E182}

7.1 Pillar summary

The comparator evidence supports mechanisms, not guarantees. Ireland shows that four professional teams can coexist with strong central alignment and competitive success.^{E183} New Zealand reinforces the importance of integrated pathways and player-welfare control.^{E166} France shows how development incentives and academy policy can shift long-term outcomes.^{E173} Scotland, South Africa, and Japan underline that eligibility rules, system coherence, and preparation can materially shape performance without offering a direct Welsh blueprint.

7.2 2026 update

Ireland are reported among the world number 1-ranked teams in recent years while operating a four-province system with central alignment.^{E069} Leinster's budget scale continues to illustrate the funding gap Welsh regions must overcome through smarter systems rather than contraction.^{E184} The practical lesson is unchanged: structure and alignment matter as much as raw budget size.

7.3 Closing synthesis

The comparator section does not prove that Wales should retain four regions. It does show that successful small-nation or reforming systems tend to share certain characteristics: clearer alignment, better pathways, tighter welfare control, and stronger incentives around local-player development.^{E185E186} Those are the features V2.2 argues should be tested first before assuming that contraction alone is the decisive answer.

8 Analysis of WRU Plan vs Fan Sentiment

Scope: Alignment between WRU plan, consultation record, and fan sentiment.

Assumes: Underlying data tables are maintained in Finance and Fan Engagement sections.

Depends on: Governance section for oversight mechanisms.

This section consolidates the consultation record, the WRU decision, and the fan response into a single read-out. Detailed model tables, financial assumptions, and sentiment breakdowns are embedded in Sections 3 and 5 to avoid duplication, but are referenced here for clarity.

The March 2026 head-to-head table in the Executive Summary (Table 7) captures the current structure comparison. The rows most directly linked to sentiment are the men's professional footprint, governance and trust, and transition risk; each reflects the repeated fan emphasis on identity protection, transparency, and avoiding forced regional loss.^{E187}

Interpretation note on consultation and sentiment evidence. Consultation-window comments and digitally engaged supporter discussion are relevant because they reveal the depth of distrust around process, ownership, identity, and financial opacity. They are not, on their own, a constitutional mandate or a substitute for full-market research. Here their role is narrower: they explain why transparency, sequencing, and visible evidence standards are central to legitimacy.

8.1 Consultation models and decision context

The WRU consultation set out Models A - D and a proposed optimal system, then selected a three-team structure with equal funding.^{E188} The Finance section summarises the model definitions and the five-year funding totals. This decision is now the baseline for the licensing timetable to 2028 and the associated private investment plan.^{E189}

8.2 Survey design and legitimacy concerns

Fan discussion repeatedly argued that the public survey did not test preferences between Models A - D or directly ask about central control.^{E190} The Fan Engagement section documents this critique in detail, including the volume of comments that describe the process as a box-ticking exercise and call for the survey instrument and response distributions to be published.^{E137} The trust gap remains a binding constraint on implementation.

8.3 Fan sentiment and identity

Across consultation-window comments, supporters emphasised protection of regional identities and transparency around funding, contracts and ownership.^{E191} The alignment matrix in the Fan Engagement section shows how these priorities map to the counter-proposal responses. The data-driven team-count and governance stances are reported in the Fan Engagement section for the consultation period and in the post-consultation read-out section for the post-consultation period.^{E192}

8.4 Post-consultation escalation and 2026 context

The post-consultation read-out shows a shift from model debate to deal mechanics and governance questions.^{E193} This aligns with real-world escalation: the Y11 period of exclusivity over Cardiff Rugby,

player backlash, refinancing under discussion, and the Central Glamorgan RU EGM requisition.^{E096} These events reinforce why the governance and transparency measures in this proposal are treated as non-negotiable.

8.5 V2.2 implications

The recommendations index in the Implementation section aggregates the V2.2 items. In this proposal those recommendations are tied to an Independent Oversight Board, a published financial model, and a Phase 0 stabilisation plan. The core argument is consistent: performance goals will only be credible if the process is trusted, identities are protected, and funding logic is visible.

9 Governance, Legal and Independent Oversight Board

Scope: Governance model, oversight, and legal scaffolding for delivery.

Assumes: Financial thresholds align with Finance section assumptions.

Depends on: Implementation section for phasing and activation.

This section now sets out a compact governance and assurance framework. It is designed to improve trust and discipline without creating a second operating hierarchy. It also avoids asserting that every mechanism here is immediately adoptable through one procedural route.

9.1 Independent Oversight Board (IOB)

Purpose: The IOB is framed here as an **assurance and disclosure body**, not as an executive board. Its job is to make reserved-matter decisions more transparent, to test whether agreed disclosures have been made, and to provide an independent escalation route when trust breaks down.

Indicative composition: TARGET: a five-member body consisting of an independent chair, a finance or audit expert, a governance or regulatory expert, one professional-game nominee, and one player or pathway nominee. Final composition should be settled only after constitutional and legal review.

Indicative remit:

- review whether required models, assumptions, and quarterly reports have been published;
- review a narrow class of **reserved matters** before final decision;
- issue written observations and, where disclosure is incomplete, require a short cooling-off period before an irreversible reserved-matter decision proceeds; and
- publish a brief quarterly assurance note to clubs and stakeholders.

Reserved matters should be narrow. Here they are limited to matters such as:

- change to the professional footprint, licence structure, merger, or closure proposal;
- material change to the professional funding formula or academy ring-fence;
- material investor, ownership, or debt transaction affecting the professional game; and
- departure from agreed transparency and reporting commitments where that departure affects a major decision.

What the IOB should not do:

- run day-to-day rugby operations;
- approve ordinary commercial contracts, staffing, or team selection matters;
- approve ownership transfers, debt restructurings, or constitutional amendments in place of the body that is legally empowered to decide them;
- substitute for WRU Board, Council, or club decision rights; or
- act as a standing political chamber for every dispute.

Operating design: Rather than a blanket spend veto, V2.2 proposes a **hold-and-explain right** on reserved matters only. If the IOB concludes that required disclosure has not been made, or that a reserved-matter paper is materially incomplete, it can require publication of missing material and a short pause before the

decision proceeds. That is a narrower and more workable mechanism than a transaction-threshold blocking right.

Area	IOB role	Limit
Quarterly reporting	Check that agreed data, dashboards, and disclosures are published	No operational management role
Reserved matters	Review decision paper, assumptions, and evidence completeness	No power over ordinary day-to-day matters
Escalation	Require short cooling-off period and written explanation if disclosure is incomplete	Not a permanent blocking right on execution
Stakeholder assurance	Publish brief quarterly note and reasons for any escalation	Does not replace Board, Council, or club authority

9.2 Legal framework and process limits

This document does not present the PRA heads-of-terms companion note as final legal text. The PRA template is a heads-of-terms structure for later drafting, validation, and counsel review.^{E194} V2.2 also distinguishes between:

- strategic positions that clubs or stakeholders may support in principle;
- implementation mechanisms that require later drafting and negotiation; and
- constitutional, Articles, or meeting-admissibility questions that require independent legal confirmation.

The purpose of this section is therefore to improve process clarity, not to make unsupported claims about EGM versus AGM competence, licence enforceability, or the final legal form of governance changes. The PRA heads-of-terms companion note should therefore remain explicitly heads-of-terms only until later drafting is commissioned and independent counsel review has been completed.

9.3 Stakeholder coalition and communication

Trust will not recover through structure alone. V2.2 therefore replaces coalition-signature language with a simpler and more defensible approach: publish a short set of **Shared Principles for Welsh Rugby Reform**, circulate them for comment, and use them as a communications discipline across clubs, regions, players, supporters, and the WRU. Those principles should cover transparency, evidence publication, heritage protection, pathway investment, and conduct during the validation period.

This is not a substitute for legal process, voting rights, or ownership negotiations. It is a public discipline device. The aim is to reduce ambiguity, stop parties talking past one another, and provide a common reference point for what will and will not be claimed before validation is complete.

A practical communications cadence should then follow:

- publish the core model perimeter and disclosure-gap table;
- publish the quarterly dashboard and any validator exceptions;
- issue a short assurance note after any reserved-matter escalation; and

- hold regular stakeholder briefings with written Q&A output.

10 Full Risk Register and Scenario Planning

Scope: Consolidated risk register with mitigations and triggers.

Assumes: Financial thresholds align with Finance section assumptions.

Depends on: Governance section for oversight and enforcement.

This section provides a consolidated risk register with mitigations. The full working register is maintained alongside the PRA heads-of-terms companion note and the financial-model reference materials listed in Part III.^{E195}

Risk	Likelihood x Impact	Why it matters	Mitigation and trigger
Region liquidity failure	Medium x High	Contract disruption, player exits, and emergency intervention risk	Monthly liquidity monitoring, minimum cash-warning thresholds, and pre-agreed contingency planning. Trigger: failure to meet payroll or covenant breach forecast.
WRU refinancing or covenant stress	Medium x High	Limits strategic freedom and can force reactive decision-making	Publish high-level covenant and refinancing constraints, require early escalation of material lender restrictions, and test any restructuring plan against debt capacity. Trigger: revised lender conditions or deteriorating headroom.
Player exodus and contract uncertainty	High x High	Weakens competitiveness and undermines trust in the plan	Phase 0 contract-certainty rules, targeted retention tools for critical positions, and published decision timelines. Trigger: missed renewal windows or key-position losses beyond agreed threshold.
Commercial shortfall	Medium x High	Undermines the affordability case for four regions	Rebase growth targets annually, separate base case from stretch case, and cut discretionary projects before pathway ring-fences. Trigger: attendance or sponsorship running materially below plan for two reporting periods.
Matchday conversion stagnation	Medium x Medium	Commercial upside remains theoretical rather than recurring	Establish venue baseline measurement, annual review, and operational matchday standards. Trigger: no measurable conversion improvement across the published reporting cycle.

Governance and trust breakdown	High x High	Stakeholders disengage and challenge implementation legitimacy	Reserved-matters disclosure rules, quarterly reporting, and independent escalation through the IOB. Trigger: repeated publication failures or major decision taken without agreed evidence pack.
Failure to meet stabilisation triggers	Medium x High	Weakens the conditional case for four regions and forces formal reappraisal	Define triggers early, publish cadence, and enforce the consequence pathway. Trigger: repeated or material failure against the stabilisation dashboard.
Ownership or investor conflict	Medium x High	Creates control, heritage, and related-party concerns	Do not assume ownership terms; require publication of high-level structure and restrictions before approval. Trigger: proposed transaction without disclosed governance summary.
Pathway output stagnation	Medium x High	Undermines the strategic justification for preserving four professional destinations	Publish academy-to-pro conversion data, Welsh-qualified minutes, and retention metrics; review the operating model if pathway yield stalls. Trigger: repeated shortfall against the pathway dashboard.
Women's growth under-delivery	Medium x Medium	Missed participation, audience, and development upside	Set separate KPIs, publish reporting, and maintain ring-fenced visibility of women's development activity. Trigger: repeated slippage in participation, retention, or progression reporting.
Legal or procedural challenge	Medium x Medium	Delays action and damages credibility	Distinguish strategic endorsement from formal legal adoption; seek constitutional advice before relying on meeting mechanics. Trigger: motion admissibility dispute or conflicting advice on Articles route.
WRU entity-level insolvency or formal restructuring	Low to medium x Very high	Could abruptly reorder decision rights, timing, and available cash across the whole system	Maintain a separate entity-level contingency plan, identify minimum rugby-continuity protections, and require early disclosure of covenant stress or restructuring indicators. Trigger: covenant breach notice, going-concern qualification, emergency financing process, or formal restructuring advice.

Each risk in this register should map to a visible owner, an evidence source, and an action trigger. The register is not a narrative appendix; it is an operating control document and should align directly with the finance section's failure logic.

11 Conclusion

Y Strategaeth Amgen V2.2 is not a demand for blind acceptance of a four-region model. It is a structured case that the four-region alternative is substantial enough to merit comparative validation before Welsh rugby locks itself into further irreversible structural change.

The document's claim is deliberately limited. It does not say that every mechanism is settled, that the finance case is already proven, or that ownership and procedural questions have been resolved. It says something narrower and more important: the live three-club direction, the four-region counter-model, and any serious variant should be judged against the same disclosed assumptions, evidence standards, and validation threshold.

The immediate decision is therefore not "change or no change". The immediate decision is whether Welsh rugby will make its next major structural choice on visible evidence or on incomplete disclosure. The minimum credible next step is:

- publish the comparable model perimeter and key assumptions;
- validate the WRU and counter-proposal cases on the same basis;
- disclose the material ownership, debt, and investor-risk constraints;
- separate strategic endorsement from later legal, contractual, and constitutional process; and
- avoid irreversible structural action until that work is complete.

If the four-region case fails that test, decision-makers will at least be acting on evidence that others can inspect. If it survives, Welsh rugby will have preserved a more plural, less destructive reform route without sacrificing accountability.

The strongest version of the four-region argument is therefore not that Wales should preserve four teams on sentiment alone. It is that Welsh rugby should preserve four teams only within a system capable of earning that outcome through transparency, pathway yield, financial discipline, stronger women's development, better grassroots renewal, and better fan conversion. That is the strategic standard this paper now seeks to define.

12 A Constructive Path Forward for the WRU Board

Strategic Options to Preserve Credibility and Reduce Conflict

Context note - prepared against the public context as at 24 February 2026

This section is a strategic decision aid, not legal advice and not a prediction market.

Executive Summary

The Board's challenge is not simply structural preference. It is credibility under uncertainty. Publicly, the hardest unresolved issues remain the funding bridge, ownership and investor structure, debt constraints, and procedural route. That means the Board should prefer options that increase evidence quality and reduce irreversible error, rather than options that merely preserve momentum.

This section is therefore a strategic decision aid. It is not legal advice, not a mandate claim, and not an attempt to pre-negotiate the outcome. The options below are framed by one question: which route best restores trust while keeping Welsh rugby able to decide on the basis of disclosed evidence rather than compressed process?

Within that frame, Option 1 remains the fullest expression of this paper's strategy. But the minimum credible route, if the Board is not prepared to pivot fully, is still an evidence-first validation pathway.

Structured comparison: blueprint vs WRU current direction

Dimension	Y Strategaeth Amgen V2.2	WRU current direction	Core distinction
Governance reform	Stronger disclosure, reserved-matters assurance, and validation-first sequencing	Board-led restructuring and compliance emphasis	Independent assurance versus executive concentration
Regional identity and structure	Four regions retained as strategic assets	Three-club direction with licence route if required	Preservation versus contraction
Commercial direction	Growth architecture with pooled sponsorship, data, and fan conversion	Stabilisation first, growth case less explicit in public materials	Growth plan versus contraction-led reset
Pathways and performance	Protect opportunity volume while tightening standards	Narrower top-end footprint with aligned pathways	Four destinations versus fewer destinations
Decision logic	Validate first, then decide irreversible steps	Contraction direction already chosen in principle	Comparative validation versus prior directional commitment

Option 1: Full pivot to the V2.2 framework

Description: Adopt the four-region, centrally aligned alternative as the working basis for a revised PRA and pause irreversible contraction steps pending validation.

Strengths: best match with the substance of this paper; strongest route to preserving four regions; clearest break from the trust problem.

Risks: demands a larger public pivot; still requires validation of affordability and governance practicality.

Minimum conditions: published validation, a credible governance route, and enough delivery capacity to implement the shift without creating a second credibility failure.

Option 2: Partial pivot within a tighter envelope

Description: Keep four regions through a conditional stabilisation window, adopt stronger central contracting and pathway alignment, and phase funding and delivery more conservatively than the full V2.2 model assumes.

This is better read as a conditional stabilisation route than as a weak compromise. Four-region continuity is earned through reporting, financial discipline, pathway output, and delivery triggers rather than assumed in advance.

Strengths: easier to implement than a full pivot; preserves room for four regions.

Risks: may satisfy no one fully if the funding case looks too thin or too hedged.

Minimum conditions: enforceable stabilisation triggers, a published reporting cadence, and a credible funding envelope that does not rely on undeclared rescue assumptions.

Option 3: Independent review and validation route

Description: Pause irreversible structural steps, publish the core model set, and commission a time-limited independent review of the WRU plan and the four-region alternative.

The independent review should test not only finance and governance, but also whether the pathway-output case, women's-development case, grassroots-delivery case, and commercial-conversion assumptions are strong enough to support four-region continuity.

Strengths: strongest procedural credibility if the Board is not ready to pivot fully.

Risks: can look like delay if not accompanied by contract certainty, publication, and a hard timetable.

Minimum conditions: publication of the core model set, a defined review timetable, contract-certainty measures during the review window, and a genuine pause on irreversible action.

Option 4: Governance refresh without structural reset

Description: Change leadership or governance optics while keeping the three-club direction broadly intact.

Strengths: lowest immediate structural disruption for current leadership.

Risks: weakest answer to the criticism that the process and evidence base are not yet trusted.

Minimum conditions: governance change paired with real disclosure, clearer accountability, and a more credible evidence process than the current one.

Recommended reading of the options

From the standpoint of this document, Option 1 remains the preferred substantive strategy. For immediate governance credibility, however, Option 3 remains the minimum acceptable route if Option 1 is not yet achievable.

Illustrative Board statement

“The Board acknowledges that material questions remain on the funding bridge, ownership and capital structure, debt constraints, and delivery risk. We will therefore publish the core evidence base, identify the unresolved disclosure gaps, pause irreversible structural action for a defined validation period, and assess the WRU plan and the four-region alternative against the same disclosed assumptions.”

Bridging paragraph

This section is included to show that Y Strategaeth Amgen can be read not only as a critique of the WRU direction, but also as a structured route to a less destructive and more evidence-led decision process.

Part III

Technical Annex and External Validation References

External Document List

This public PDF keeps the back end deliberately lean. The paper relies on four main source families:

- published WRU consultation, Board, and related official materials;
- official WRU, club, and stakeholder statements;
- annual reports, parliamentary evidence, and other published institutional records; and
- reputable media reporting for items marked **REPORTED**.

Full source tracing is maintained outside this public PDF in companion source-ledger and evidence-register materials.

Spreadsheet and Master-Model Reference

The main Section 3 finance case is supported by companion technical materials that are not reproduced in this public PDF:

- **Master reconciliation workbook:** `WRU_Master_Reconciliation_Model_v1.2.xlsx`
- **Financial model and assumption note:** the 10-year financial model and assumption pack used for validation-stage testing

These materials are for independent validation of assumptions, formulas, sensitivities, and failure logic. They are not bankable forecasts or confirmed funding agreements.

Evidence and Validation Pack Reference

Companion material	Purpose	Status in this publication
Source ledger and evidence register companion files	Full source trace, E-ID mapping, and audit trail	Maintained outside the public PDF
Evidence clusters / validation pack note	Organised source families and supporting evidence groupings	Maintained outside the public PDF
WRU admissions and response note	Working comparison between WRU claims and the counter-proposal response	Maintained outside the public PDF
Financial model and assumption pack	Line-by-line validation of Section 3 inputs, sensitivities, and failure logic	Technical companion only
PRA heads-of-terms note	Governance and drafting scaffold for later legal review	Technical companion only

Savings mechanics and audit trail note	Operating-efficiency logic, reinvestment path, and reporting mechanics	Technical companion only
Performance evidence plan	Reproducible method for testing the performance hypothesis	Technical companion only

Publication note. Detailed working materials, including the source ledger, evidence-cluster tables, change-log material, and technical validation notes, are retained as repo-side companion materials rather than reproduced inside this public PDF.

Short Method Note

Our analysis draws on 39,851 public comments posted on Reddit during the consultation window (**August 2025 to 1 January 2026**) across 524 posts, together with a focused subset of 1,730 comments from 17 consultation-specific threads. These comments came from 6,291 unique authors. They are useful for tracking the views of a digitally engaged rugby audience, especially on trust, identity, and governance, but they are not presented as a substitute for a population-wide mandate or a formal electorate-wide survey.