



THE WAY FORWARD - IN FOCUS

MEN'S PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF WELSH RUGBY

THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS

Men's Player Development – In Focus

The 'In Focus' series looks in-depth at The Way Forward, the WRU's long-term plan to build a stronger, more sustainable future for Welsh rugby.

Each paper takes a closer look at one of the key areas of investment that will shape the game over the next five years – from player development, talent identification and coaching to the women's game and the community pathway.

Where the consultation asked the big questions, In Focus now provides the answers. Setting out how these changes will be delivered, the impact they will have, and the opportunities they will create for players, coaches, clubs, and fans across Wales.

This is the roadmap for the future of Welsh rugby, and how we can move forward – together.

Contents

1 Introduction and a message from our Chair	Page 03
2 A Unified Pathway – How the new system works	Page 04
3 Putting the plan into practice	Page 05
4 Creating a development pathway that is uniquely Welsh	Page 08
5 In summary – What this investment will deliver	Page 10
6 The Future Starts Now	Page 11

THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS

Introduction..

This week we will look at Pathways, competitions and academies.

In this, the first in the Series, we focus our attention to Men's Player Development, one of the foundations upon which the future of Welsh rugby will be built.

From community clubs to the national stage, the journey of a player in Wales is being reshaped through a bold new investment in talent, coaching, and opportunity. The creation of a National Academy, supported by Player Development Centres across the country, marks the start of a unified and high-performing pathway designed to give every young Welsh player the chance to reach their full potential.

For too long, our systems have been fragmented and fractious. Now, through **The Way Forward**, we are connecting every part of the game under one vision – to make Wales the best place in the world to become a rugby player.

In this In Focus, we explore how the new pathway will work, why this moment represents a turning point for Welsh rugby, and how the investment being made today will shape the players, coaches, and teams of tomorrow.

A message from our Chair

This is a defining moment for Welsh rugby. Following the most extensive consultation in our history, we've listened and acted, uniting our efforts behind one clear goal: to make Wales the best place in the world to become a rugby player.

Through our new National Academy system and a network of Player Development Centres, we're creating a connected, consistent pathway for every young player, wherever they are in Wales.

This investment marks more than a structural change – it's a cultural shift. We are placing player development, coaching excellence, and collaboration at the heart of our game.

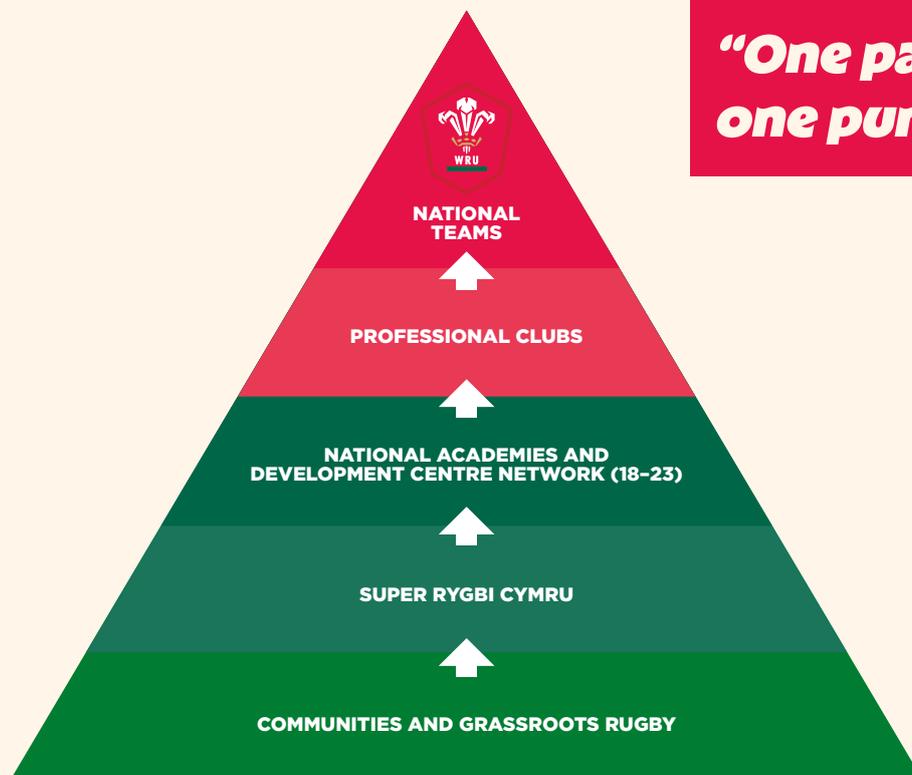
Because this isn't just about rugby – it's about pride, community, and the future of Welsh sport.

Richard Collier-Keywood
Chair of the WRU Board

***"A stronger future
begins with how we
grow our players."***

THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS

The Unified Pathway – How the new system works



**“One pathway,
one purpose.”**

A unified pathway concept – Men’s player pathway

Structure overview – Men’s player development pathway

At the heart of this new system is a single Men’s National Academy that will bring together the country’s most promising players in one coordinated programme.

Working centrally and through two Regional Training Centres, the National Academy will ensure that our most high potential players, can access world-class coaching, performance support, and education to prepare them for professional and international rugby..

Below the Academy, 12 Player Development Centres will identify and nurture players from 14-18 years old, ensuring every talented player, wherever they live in Wales can access a clear, supported pathway that connects community clubs, schools, and universities with the national performance system.

“When you bring talent together earlier, you don’t just develop players, you build a culture and that is right at the heart of this new unified pathway. We want players to be given the best opportunity to succeed in an environment that supports excellence and breeds togetherness ”

- Dave Reddin, WRU Director of Rugby & Elite Performance

THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS

Putting the plan into practice

To deliver a step change, not just incremental improvement, we are building a connected, high-performance pathway that develops skill, resilience, and identity at every stage. The new system will align and simplify how Welsh players develop, compete, progress, and ultimately win at the highest level.

At its core is the Men's National Academy, supported by two Regional Training Centres and a network of 12 Player Development Centres (PDCs) aligned to Super Rygbi Cymru (SRC) clubs. Together, they will provide a seamless, nationally-led structure that ensures young players can access elite development opportunities closer to home, regardless of geography or background and maximise their potential. These will underpin thriving national-age teams at U18, U19, and U20.



“Our goal is to make every step on the player journey purposeful – so when a young player reaches the senior environment, they’re prepared and ready with the skills, qualities, and experiences to thrive; they’re continuing on a pathway designed for success.”

– John Alder, National Lead – Player Development and Pathways

Our timeline

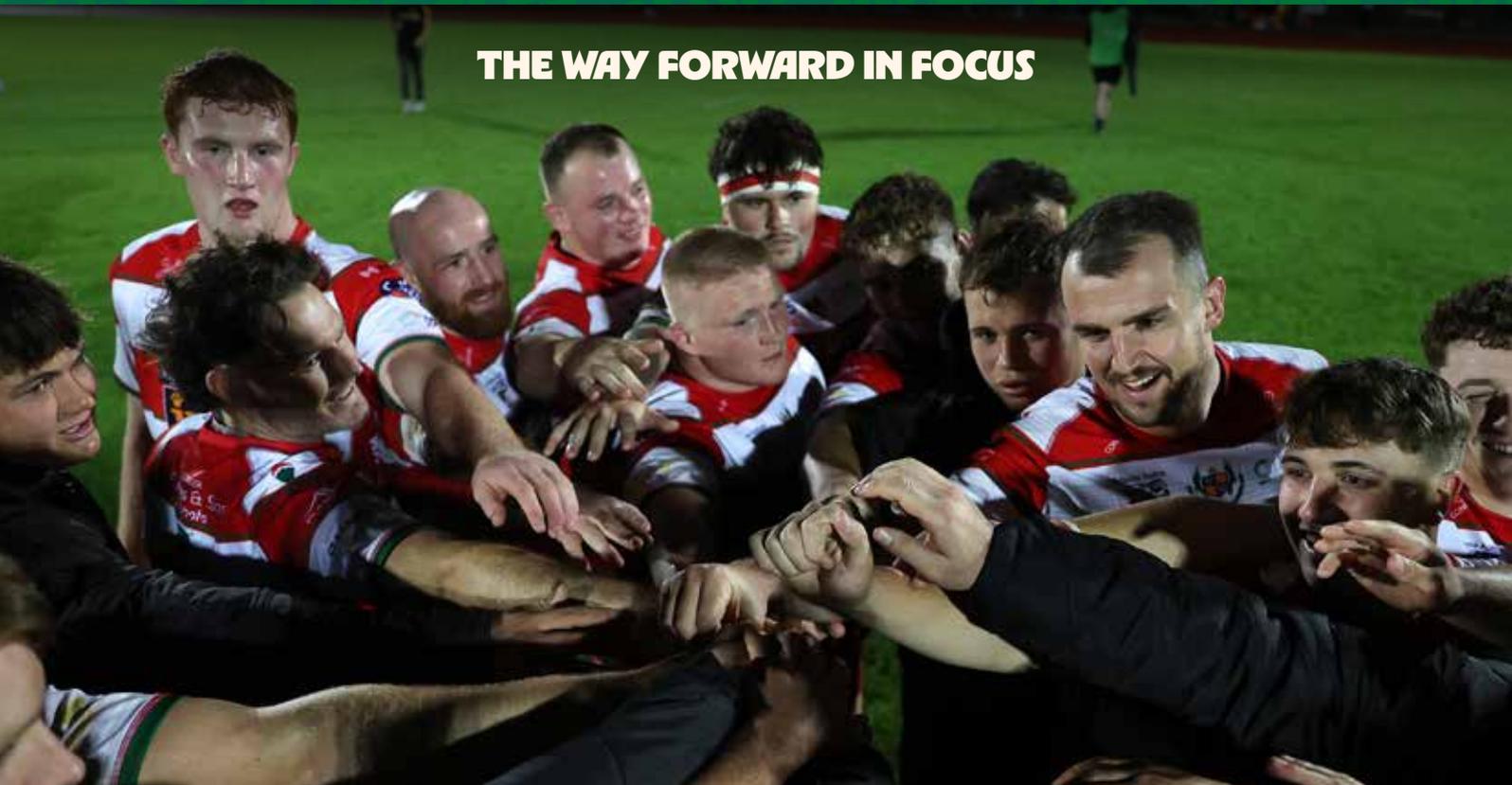
What is happening now, next and later

- Short-term (2025–26) – Review and align existing age-grade programmes and confirm PDC locations.
- Medium-term (2026–28) – Recruit and deploy National Academy and PDC staff, embed shared coaching frameworks and data systems.
- Long-term (2028–30) – Deliver a fully integrated pathway from age 14 to senior professional rugby, supported by consistent coaching, central player tracking, and a national and aligned Games Programme.

How we’ll make it happen

- **Unified talent framework** linking academies, regions, and national teams under one clear governance model.
- **Shared player data and development metrics** across all performance environments to track progress and inform decision-making.
- **Enhanced coaching curriculum** emphasising long-term athlete development, physical literacy, and holistic player welfare.
- **Integrated games programme** providing progressive competitions from semi-professional to professional rugby.
- **Central employment of key staff** to ensure national alignment, accountability, and consistent delivery standards.

THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS



Working together

The new model is built on collaboration. The WRU will work closely with professional clubs, SRC clubs, universities, schools, and education partners to deliver aligned player development environments. Staff will be employed nationally but operate locally through Regional Training Centres and PDCs – a model that brings both unity and local identity.

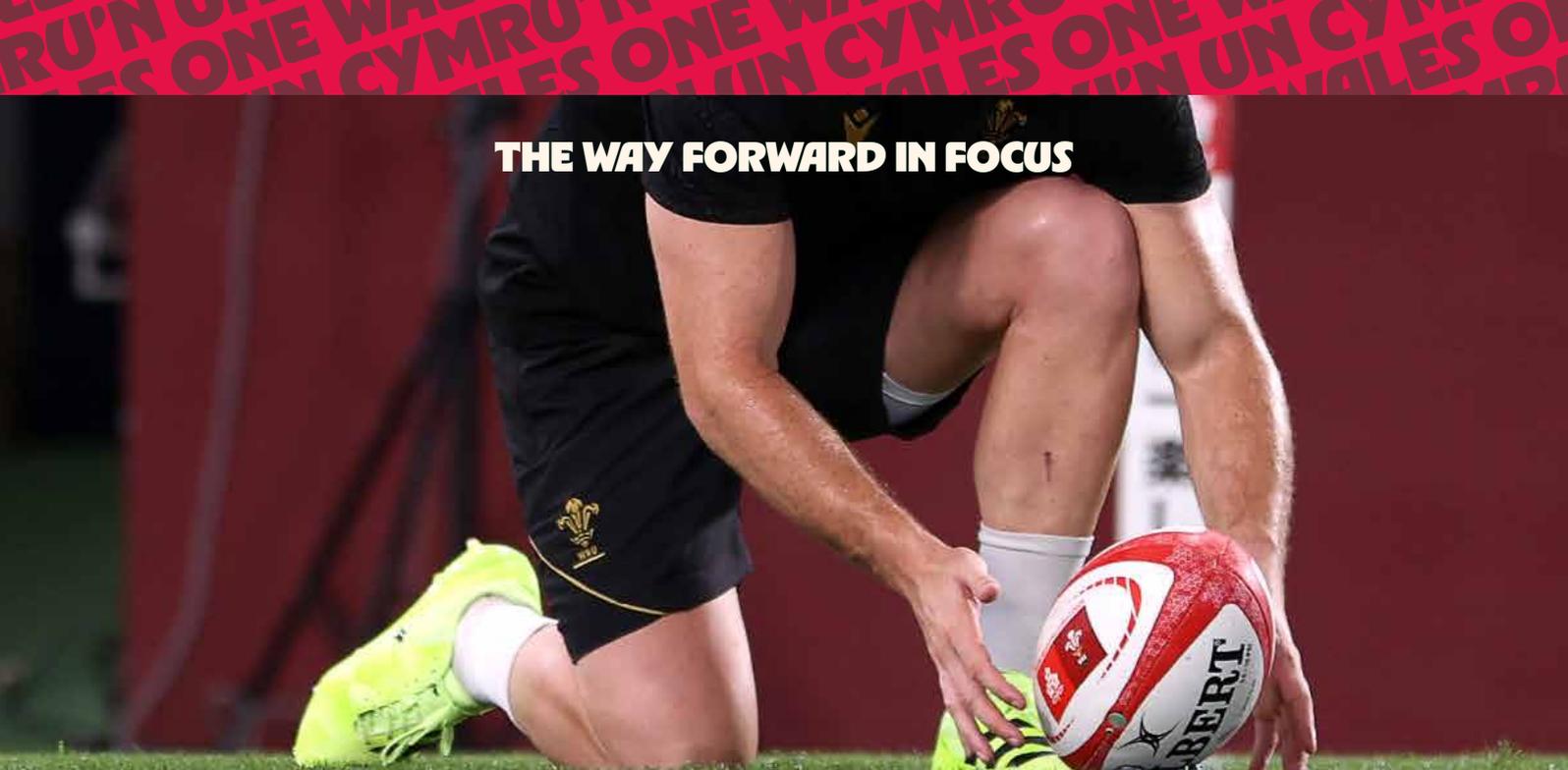
This shift will enable better integration between the community, semi-professional, and professional tiers, reducing duplication and friction. It will also ensure a clearer player journey and stronger engagement from parents, coaches, educational establishments and clubs.

What we've achieved so far

- ✓ Successful pilot of **alignment between Wales U20 and senior national team staff** in the 2025 season, including the creation of the Wales Pathway Player (WPP) scheme, enabling shared player data and performance insight.
- ✓ Established **regional performance working groups** to co-design the unified coaching framework and national curriculum.
- ✓ Creation of **Super Rygbi Cymru** as a competitive bridge between academy and professional rugby.
- ✓ Early reforms to the **Emerging Player Programme (EPP)** for boys aged 14–16, creating a more inclusive entry point and extended talent confirmation.
- ✓ Secured significant funding from Sports Wales to develop a **new pathway gym** at our National Centre of Excellence to support the conditioning of our emerging talent

“As a fan, it's exciting to see the future being built properly. We've got amazing young talent, it's good to know they'll have the support to make it all the way.”

– Fan view from the WRU Consultation Engagement Survey



THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS

Our investment

Delivering this transformation requires an additional £2.35 million investment in FY27, rising to £3.1 million by FY30, into pathway personnel, programmes, and competitions.

This builds on the existing £3.35 million currently invested in the Regional Academy system, meaning total WRU investment in the men's player pathway will exceed £6 million annually by FY31.

How the investment will be used

National Academy (with two & Regional Training Centres – £2.7m per year by FY30) – Establish a semi-centralised training and support programme for 60 elite players aged 18–23, with access to world-class coaching, performance science, and education support, and supported by market-competitive player contracts..

Player Development Centres (£2.3m per year) – Deliver localised elite development for 14–18-year-olds, including professional coaching and S&C support, doubling full-time coaching capacity.

Games Programme (£90k per year) – Fund restructured competitions from U15 to adult rugby to ensure balanced, progressive competition exposure.

Expected outcomes

- Increased conversion rate from age-grade to professional and international rugby.
- Reduced inefficiency and duplication between regional academies and the WRU.
- Greater inclusivity and accessibility for players across Wales.
- Clearer, more consistent competition and progression structures.
- Sustainable growth of a competitive, nationally aligned talent pool.
- By aligning investment, structures, and people around one shared vision, the WRU is creating the conditions for Welsh players to thrive – ensuring our next generation has the platform, the support, and the belief to succeed.

Creating a development pathway that is uniquely Welsh

“Turning our size into strength – a system that brings every corner of Welsh rugby closer together.”

Around the rugby world, successful player development systems share many of the same ingredients, alignment, consistency, and long-term thinking. But the challenge for Wales is not to replicate another nation’s model; it is to create a pathway that reflects who we are, our culture, our communities, and our values, while equipping players to perform on the global stage.

Wales is different. Our strength lies in connection, between players and fans, clubs and communities, educational establishments and national teams. The new development system harnesses that connection, uniting people and programmes under one purpose -to grow players who embody the Welsh rugby DNA, who are skilful, brave, intelligent, and deeply proud to wear the red jersey.

“The best systems in the world are those that reflect the nation they serve, and in Wales, our greatest strength has always been our closeness – between educational establishments, clubs, communities, and the people who love the game. This new system turns that connection into our competitive edge. With Player Development Centres and Regional Hubs located across Wales, no player is ever far from the support, coaching, and opportunity they need to progress,

“We don’t just want players to seek out opportunities – we want opportunities to find them.”

– Dave Reddin, WRU Director of Rugby & Elite Performance

The new National Academy structure and network of Player Development Centres are designed to make elite rugby both world-class and distinctly and uniquely Welsh. This means players can train and study close to home, stay rooted in their communities, and still have access to the highest standards of coaching, science, and support. It also means that the same philosophy, language, and learning framework will guide every stage – from a 14-year-old at a PDC in North Wales to a senior international preparing for a Six Nations campaign.



THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS



By blending evidence-based best practice with Welsh identity, the WRU is building a pathway that grows not just better players, but better people. Players who understand where they come from, who they represent, and what it means to play for Wales.

THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS



“From potential to performance – the impact of change.”

In summary – What this investment will deliver ?

By FY30, the WRU’s investment in men’s player development will deliver:

- **More home-grown talent** competing at professional and international level.
- **Enhanced coaching standards** across every age group.
- **Integrated systems** for player tracking, injury prevention, and performance support.
- **Greater inclusion** across all regions of Wales, ensuring talent from every community can thrive.

Investment in Numbers

 **£28M**
total investment over five years

 **12** Player Development Centres active by 2026

 **400+**
players supported annually through the new pathway

 **100+**
coaches trained through enhanced WRU coaching programmes



THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS

***“The pathway is building.
Now let’s walk it together.”***

The Future Starts Now

This is the start of a new era for Welsh rugby, built on shared purpose and lasting investment.

Every player, parent, coach, and fan has a role to play in making this vision real. Whether it’s supporting your local Player Development Centre, volunteering in community rugby, or cheering on the next generation, your belief is what powers this change.

Together, we will build a system that delivers world-class players, inspiring rugby, and national pride for years to come.

THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS

JOIN THE MOVEMENT – PLAY YOUR ROLE IN THE WAY FORWARD

FANS: BACK THE NEXT GENERATION

Show your support at grassroots and Super Rygbi Cymru games. Be part of the journey that shapes tomorrow's internationals.

PLAYERS: BELIEVE IN THE PATHWAY

Commit to the process. Every session, every match, every opportunity matters – because the new system is designed for you.

COACHES: SHAPE THE FUTURE

Adopt the shared philosophy, share best practice, and help bring the Welsh rugby DNA to life in every environment.

PARENTS: SUPPORT THE JOURNEY

Encourage, don't pressure. Help young players balance rugby, education, and wellbeing as they grow through the pathway.

CLUBS: CONNECT & COLLABORATE

Work with your nearest Player Development Centre to identify and support local talent. Together with clubs and our educational establishments, we grow the game.

THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS

COMMUNITIES: **KEEP RUGBY LOCAL**

Host training camps, open days, or community festivals. Make rugby accessible to every young person in Wales.

PARTNERS: **INVEST IN POTENTIAL**

Your backing fuels progress. Support the facilities, programmes, and people who will drive Welsh rugby forward.

For more detail on how the WRU is investing in the future of Welsh rugby, from player development and coaching to facilities and competition structures visit [The Way Forward](#), our dedicated hub for updates, insights, and progress stories.

TOGETHER, WE'RE BUILDING A STRONGER, MORE CONNECTED GAME FOR WALES.



DIOLCH