



THE WAY FORWARD - IN FOCUS

THE WOMEN'S GAME

BUILDING A STRONG, SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE
FUTURE FOR THE WOMEN'S GAME IN WALES

THE WAY FORWARD IN FOCUS

Women & Girls Game – 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 and coaching to the women's game and the community pathway.

Where the WRU's recent 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.

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Introduction

This paper sets out a bold and comprehensive roadmap for the transformation of women's rugby in Wales laid out as part of the 'The Way Forward' investment in the future of Welsh rugby. It is designed to turn ambition into action by defining the strategic priorities that will underpin the One Wales vision.



These priorities will ensure that every part of the game, from grassroots participation to elite performance is connected, aligned, and working toward a shared goal: creating a system that is uniquely Welsh, inclusive, competitive, and sustainable.

Central to this transformation is a significant increase in investment in the women's game. Current investment is c. £3.7m a year and will rise by £1.4 million a year in 2026 and by a further £0.6 million a year by 2030. Total annual investment by 2030 will be c £5.7m. This paper explains how that funding will be allocated to deliver measurable improvements in participation, player development, competitions, environments, and infrastructure to elevate the performance of our elite teams.

Beyond financial investment, we also explore how the WRU will embed a unified development framework for women's rugby that connects educational establishments, community clubs, and the player pathway to the elite game. By doing this we can ensure that every girl and woman in Wales has access to rugby opportunities that reflect our values and aspirations.

Message from the WRU Chair

"We are proud to share our bold and transformative vision for the future of women's rugby in Wales. This is the most significant investment in the women's game in our history. It is driven by the One Wales strategy we published in June 2024 and which placed the women and girls game firmly at the very heart of Welsh rugby.

From grassroots participation to elite performance, we are creating a system that is distinctly Welsh. A system that is inclusive, competitive, and sustainable.

This commitment goes far beyond financial investment; it represents a cultural advance. We are laying strong foundations for a thriving ecosystem that supports players, coaches, staff, and communities.

Women's rugby in Wales will be better represented and better funded than it has ever been before. While recent progress, such as the introduction of professional contracts, firstly in 2022 in Wales, and enhanced player development opportunities around the Celtic Challenge competition has been encouraging, the global game is evolving rapidly. If Wales is to maximise competitiveness on the international stage, we must accelerate our development further.

Our commitment is clear: the women's game is a strategic priority. The decisions we make today will shape the future of Welsh rugby, ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to thrive in a system that recognises and nurtures their talent.

We set ourselves the goal to be at the top of the women's game and competing at the highest level on the world stage within some five years. With this renewed investment, I'm confident we have the roadmap in place to get there."

Richard Collier-Keywood
Chair of the WRU Board

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Putting the Plan into Practice: Timeline of Investment Roll-Out

The vision outlined in this paper becomes meaningful only when it is translated into clear steps that drive real change. This next section shows how that shift will happen in practice. It sets out a phased programme of investment and activity that turns long-term ambition into year-on-year progress. Each stage has been designed to build momentum, strengthen the foundations of the women's game, and create the conditions for sustained success.

By mapping out how resources, structures, and opportunities will grow over time, this plan provides clarity for players, coaches, clubs, and partners across Wales. It ensures that every part of the pathway develops with purpose and that decisions made now continue to support the women's game for many years to come.

“We need to ensure we’re providing a future for our players. A future for our 8-year-old girls, just as we do for our 8-year-old boys.”

“We will do this through providing a pathway and a system that is visible, that is coherent and accessible, in order to deliver the success that we so desperately want to achieve.”

“This is a long-term commitment by the Welsh Rugby Union because we can see the opportunities ahead.”

Amanda Bennett, former Wales international and WRU Board Member.

Our critical goal is to accelerate the ecosystem for the development of women's and girls' rugby in Wales. Every stage of a player's journey is interconnected, so investment must be systemic and strategic.

The Women's Rugby World Cup earlier this year highlighted both the opportunities and the urgency for change. Women's rugby is a sporting spectacle people want to watch, engage with, and support commercially. The World Cup showed that clearly.

***This is where strategy becomes action
– this is how the future takes shape.***





To capture this interest for Wales, we are committed to a whole-system approach that spans talent identification, player development, and competitive structures. Investment will be concentrated into three key pillars:

A National Academy

The Welsh Rugby Union will establish a dedicated National Academy for women players, creating a high-performance environment that mirrors the standards of our men's programme. This will be the first time such a high-level, high-profile investment of this type has been made in Wales.

This initiative represents a long-term investment, starting at £360,000 per annum in year one and rising to £400,000 per annum by 2030. This investment will deliver sustainability and growth.

The Welsh Women's National Academy will focus on the critical 18–23 age group, a pivotal stage when players make life-defining decisions about education, careers, and sport. Full-time staff will lead talent identification and deliver wrap-around support in coaching, sports science, nutrition, medicine, and psychology, providing players with the tools they need to thrive and compete with the best in the world.

A central beacon for the women's game, the National Academy will embed the DNA of Welsh rugby in its culture and environment, driving performance standards and supporting players as they grow into elite athletes.

Player Development

Investment into player development is about strengthening what already works and making it more accessible across Wales. For example, Cardiff Met University has one of the UK's leading women's rugby programmes.

Wales's existing PDC and U18 programme is already producing internationals such as Seren Lockwood and Branwen Metcalfe who were both capped for Wales earlier this year in Australia and at this year's Women's Rugby World Cup respectively. And our existing Player Development Centres (PDCs) are expanding to meet growing demand.

The expansion of the PDC's includes three central hubs supported by nine new satellite centres, situated in North, East, South and West Wales. This ensures coverage across all regions of the country with high-performance training opportunities hopefully no more than one hour away in travel time.

These centres will become talent identification 'hot-spots' and will provide structured coaching and training opportunities within dedicated high-performance environments.

By building on our already successful programmes with new investment we can quickly elevate partnerships and help create clearer pathways for emerging talent from grassroots to elite level.

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“The women’s game is developing at an exponential rate, that’s really exciting for the players coming through and established players too.” says, Siwan Lillicrap, WRU Women & Girls Pathway Manager

“Having had the honour of representing my country at the highest level, and experienced first-hand the transition from amateur to professional, I know how critical the player pathway is to a sustainable and successful future for Wales both on and off the field.

“In my current role as Performance Pathway Manger for the women’s game, we’ve seen the success of the PDC’s, skills clinics and U18 development camps, which has enabled more girls to explore rugby at a higher level, experience training within a high-performance environment, and ultimately get on the pathway to play for Wales.

“The expansion of the PDC’s means a clearer, more defined and accessible pathway for the next generation of talent coming through, empowering young players to dream big and see a clear route to wearing the red iersev for Wales.”

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Competitions

Competitive opportunities are the cornerstone of player development and addressing the lack of competitive playing opportunities for women in Wales is a priority.

For too long, players have had to leave Wales for the PWR in England to access consistent high-performance environments, a trend we aim to reverse.

“Our vision is clear” Belinda Moore, WRU Head of Womens Rugby. ***“We must create a sustainable, multi-layered pathway that keeps talent in Wales and raises performance standards across the game.”***

The Celtic Challenge is a proven success story. Since its launch in 2023, the cross-border competition, has become a vital part of the national programme and a key development platform for current and future internationals.

Gwalia Lightning and Brython Thunder have already proven themselves as breeding grounds for success, accelerating the playing careers of a number of internationals including Maise Davies, Alaw Pyrs, Molly Reardon, Jenni Scoble and Sian Jones who all pulled on the red jersey for Wales this season.



2026 will see investment soar from the current £200,000 to £500,000 per team across the competition in year one, with new investment rising to £680,000 by year four.

The investment comprises four full-time specialists to deliver coaching, skills development, athletic performance, strength and conditioning, nutrition, and psychology, ensuring Welsh rugby is in line with other high-performance programmes of this calibre.

Our additional investment into the Celtic Challenge will help create a multi-layered pathway at every level of the game in Wales and a much more robust structure to retain talent, raise performance standards, and feed directly into the national team.

Alongside the Celtic Challenge sits an ambition for the development of a domestic league. The four-team league will provide vital game time and ‘competitive minutes’ for academy players aged 18 – 23 along with latent talent and former players who come back to the game after their international careers.

Investment is earmarked to start at **£96,000** per annum for the competition, rising incrementally to more than **£265,000** per annum over five years.

The development of a domestic league is part of a long-term commitment to building depth within the Welsh player pathway, creating stronger foundations for progression into the Celtic Challenge and beyond and retaining world-class talent in Wales.

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Our timeline – What is happening now, next, and later

■ **Short-term** (2025-2026) – Launch the Women’s National Academy for players aged 18–23 and expanding performance support services to cover all aspects of player development, including physical, technical, and psychological preparation.

This phase also focuses its attention on strengthening the Celtic Challenge competition through increased, targeted and strategic investment as well as laying the groundwork for a future domestic competition.

■ **Medium-term** (2027-2028) – We will remain laser focused on growing the player base and deepening competitive opportunities within Wales; continuing to advance age-grade and emerging player programmes to ensure alignment across the pathway.

■ **Long-term** (2028-2030) – We will continue investing in player welfare, education, and expanding the player pathway.

Fully integrate academy graduates into professional and international pathways, and achieve system-wide alignment with Welsh Rugby DNA principles.

How we’ll make it happen

- **Establish a unified data platform** linking all To deliver on this vision we will create and roll out a series of strategic initiatives with player development at their core; reimagine competition structures; and embedding operational excellence across the women’s game.
- **Academy Contracts:** Enable increased training loads while supporting education and career development
- **Celtic Challenge Teams:** Provide professional environments comparable to English PWR clubs
- **Domestic League Ambition:** Bridges the gap between community and elite rugby
- **Talent Insight and Management:** Ensures consistent and fair evaluation across men’s and women’s rugby
- **Staffing:** Centralised employment aligned to Welsh Rugby DNA, ensuring continuity and quality

“Investments in the National Academies and the pathway are really significant changes for the future of rugby in Wales. They will create massive opportunity to produce top talent in big volumes.”

Dave Reddin
WRU Director of Rugby & Elite Performance



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A Strategy for the Women's Game that is uniquely Welsh

Our vision is to create a pathway that reflects the DNA of Welsh rugby while meeting the ambitions of the One Wales strategy. This is not about replicating other nations; it's about leveraging our strengths, our community, our culture, and our commitment to build something distinctly Welsh and sustainable.

- **Connected Pathway:** From U18 programmes and educational partnerships to the National Academy and domestic league, every element is designed to keep talent in Wales and nurture future internationals.
- **Performance and Identity:** The National Academy and Celtic Challenge will embed Welsh rugby values in high-performance environments, ensuring players grow within a system that feels authentically Welsh.
- **Retention and Attraction:** By creating competitive opportunities at home, we reduce the need for players to leave Wales and provide a compelling reason for talent to return.
- **Long-Term Commitment:** This is a historic moment; the WRU has never invested at this scale in the women's game. It is a bold, future-focused strategy to ensure Welsh teams compete in play-offs and finals of major championships.

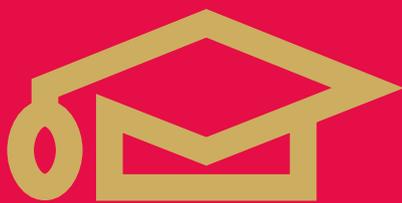
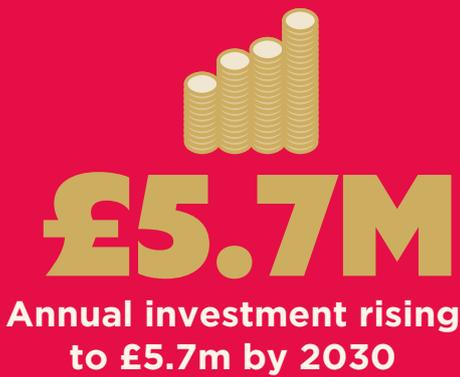


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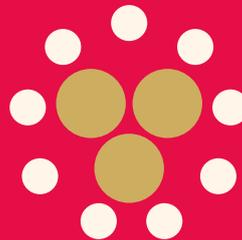
In Summary: What this Investment will deliver

- A fully resourced National Academy supporting players aged 18-23
- Professional Celtic Challenge teams with enhanced coaching and support
- A new domestic women's league that nurtures talent and provides high-quality competition
- Expanded age group programmes ensuring continuous development
- Comprehensive support services across coaching, health, psychology, and education
- A clear, sustainable pathway from grassroots to international rugby

Investment in numbers



One National Academy



3 PDC HUBS with 9 satellite centres across Wales

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The Future starts now

“A new era begins. Now let’s build it together.”

This is a pivotal moment for the women’s game in Wales. The investment and strategy outlined in this paper set the foundations for a system that supports every girl and woman to thrive in rugby. This future depends on all of us. Whether you’re developing young talent, championing your club, supporting a player’s journey, or helping to elevate the women’s game in your community, your contribution will shape what comes next.

“This unprecedented investment in the women’s game marks a defining moment for Welsh rugby” says, Belinda Moore, Head of Women’s Rugby.

“We can now build on existing progress with fervour; shaping opportunities, and a future where every young player can dream bigger than ever before. Personally, I’m excited to see the next generation of talent flourish and to witness the impact this will have on the game across Wales.”

“We’re building something that will inspire communities and strengthen the sport for years to come.”

Together, we are creating a pathway that is uniquely Welsh. A pathway built on belief, opportunity, and ambition. This is how we inspire the next generation. This is how we ensure the women’s game not only grows but flourishes.

“This unprecedented investment in the women’s game marks a defining moment for Welsh rugby.”

Belinda Moore
Head of Women's Rugby



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JOIN THE MOVEMENT – PLAY YOUR ROLE IN THE WAY FORWARD

FANS: STAND WITH THE TEAM

Celebrate the women's game at every level. Follow your favourite players on social media, support the Celtic Challenge teams, and champion the players who represent Wales on the world stage. Join the movement and help drive the women's game forward.

PLAYERS: OWN YOUR JOURNEY

Every training session, every match, every opportunity matters. The expanded pathway and academy system will give you the environment to grow and push your limits. Believe in your potential and in the future we're building around you.

COACHES: SHAPE THE FUTURE

Create environments where girls and women learn, compete, and excel. Embrace the shared Welsh Rugby DNA, develop talent with purpose, and help raise standards across every level of the game.

PARENTS: SUPPORT THE JOURNEY

Your encouragement fuels confidence. Help your daughters balance club rugby, education, and wellbeing as they progress through the new development structures. You are a vital part of their journey. Find a girl's HUB near you here: wru.wales/community-rugby.

CLUBS: BE PART OF THE PATHWAY

Work with the WRU, educational establishments and communities to strengthen local opportunities for girls and women. Build welcoming environments that keep players engaged and connected to the wider system.

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COMMUNITIES: GROW THE GAME LOCALLY

Celebrate women and girls in rugby. Attend matches, support events, volunteer and help nurture a vibrant rugby culture in your area. The future of the game is rooted in community pride.

PARTNERS: INVEST IN POTENTIAL

There has never been a more impactful moment to support women's rugby. Your investment fuels new competitions, strengthens talent systems, and helps create a sustainable future for the women's game.

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.



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