



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru The National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol The Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

**Dydd Mercher, 25 Ebrill 2012
Wednesday, 25 April 2012**

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Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order No. 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the Meeting

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Peter Black	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Janet Finch-Saunders	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Mike Hedges	Llafur Labour
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Gwyn R. Price	Llafur Labour
Kenneth Skates	Llafur Labour
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

John Deakin	Ysgrifenydd, Uwch Gynggrair Cymru Secretary, Welsh Premier League
Jonathan Ford	Prif Weithredwr, Cymdeithas Bêl-Droed Cymru Chief Executive, Football Association of Wales
Tom Morgan	Cyn-chwaraewr a Rheolwr yn Uwch Gynggrair Cymru Former Player and Manager in the Welsh Premier League
Neil Ward	Prif Weithredwr, Ymddiriedolaeth Bêl-droed Cymru Chief Executive, Welsh Football Trust

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Rhys Iorwerth	Ymchwilydd Researcher
Marc Wyn Jones	Clerc Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.30 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.30 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. I will go through the usual housekeeping rules. I ask Members around the table to switch off their mobile phones and pagers, as they interfere with the broadcasting equipment and the translation feed. Translation is available from Welsh to English on channel 1, and the amplification of the floor language is on channel 0. The committee operates bilingually, so Members are free to use Welsh or English. We are in a formal session, therefore we do not have to touch the microphones; they are operated by our fantastic back-room staff who keep us all on track.

[2] We are not expecting the fire alarm to operate, but if it does we will take our instructions from the ushers or, as I usually say at this point, the assembly point is by the Pierhead building that you can reach by exiting the building on my left-hand side or you can follow me because I will be one of the first out of the building should there be a fire.

[3] We have not been informed of any substitutions, so we have a full committee.

[4] Do any Members wish to declare any interests before we start? I see that no-one does—

[5] **Bethan Jenkins:** We are fans of different clubs.

[6] **Ann Jones:** Yes, we all have allegiances to football clubs and I think that there will be quite a few more Chelsea Football Club fans after last night's event. However, that is beside the point. I need to declare an interest as a season ticket holder for Rhyl Football Club. I have also corresponded with both Mr Deakin and Mr Ford in the past. So, that is my declaration for the record.

9.31 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Uwch-Gynghrair Cymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth
Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League: Evidence Session

[7] **Ann Jones:** I am delighted to welcome Jonathan Ford, who is the chief executive of the Football Association of Wales, and John Deakin, who is the secretary of the Welsh Premier League. I believe that you are retiring shortly, John.

[8] **Mr Deakin:** Yes, on 9 June I will be riding into the sunset. [*Laughter.*] Twenty years is long enough.

[9] **Ann Jones:** Yes, indeed. You are both very welcome to the committee. We have received your papers, and we have sets of questions for you. Jonathan, do you want to set the scene with a quick overview?

[10] **Mr Ford:** Yes, certainly. First, I want to thank you for the invitation to attend to give evidence and for the inquiry in general. We welcome the inquiry with open arms. We have some objectives for this session and we hope to persuade you of some of things on which we need your help and support. We welcome it with open arms. We are an open and honest organisation, as you know, and we are delighted to be here today.

[11] **Ann Jones:** Okay, thank you. I will start with the first question. You say in your paper—and I would not have expected you to say anything else—that playing standards in the Welsh Premier League have improved significantly since 1992. How have you reached that conclusion and how are you monitoring the standards of play in the league?

[12] **Mr Ford:** It is a complicated question. It is quite subjective if you are talking specifically about playing standards; it is about your opinion on playing standards versus my opinion. Is Chelsea FC a better team than Arsenal Football Club? It is very subjective. Of course it is.

[13] **Ann Jones:** Perhaps that should be The New Saints Football Club and Bangor City Football Club, given that we are in Wales.

[14] **Mr Ford:** Yes, perhaps, of course, but I am talking about standards generally. If you break standards down, you will see that there are several things that you need to consider. There is the playing standard that you see on the field of play, but there is also what goes into improving those standards. Other factors also come into play, including coaching and infrastructure.

[15] To take playing standards first and foremost, there is a general acknowledgement that playing standards have improved over the years since football was created. Even within the Welsh Premier League, playing standards have also improved. The fact that we have players who are now on full-time contracts, coaching staff who are more professionally equipped with regard to their training, and that our coefficient ranking within Europe has also increased, suggest that playing standards have improved.

[16] If you take coaching, however, that is probably a more defined area in which you can actually see what we have done in Welsh football. You will be aware that since we started the league, the number of professionally qualified coaches has increased quite dramatically. In fact, the FAW has put just over £400,000 behind coaching development, and every manager within the Welsh Premier League now holds a Union of European Football Associations A licence. In addition, for the teams that qualify for Europe, there is also someone on the coaching staff who holds a Pro licence. That did not exist before the Welsh Premier League; it has only existed for the past 10 or 15 years. So, coaching standards have increased dramatically.

[17] Coaching standards and development also come into play in relation to academies. As you know, Ann, through the domestic licence and the UEFA licence procedures, we must have academies in place. Every premier league club has an academy in place, which, again, was not the situation previously. So, I suggest that that is a marked improvement.

[18] The final area of the jigsaw, where we are let down a little bit, is with regard to facilities—the infrastructure that is available to us. You are well aware that one of my major objectives is to try to see what we can do to improve the playing surfaces and the surrounding infrastructure. It is clear that we are sorely lacking in relation to infrastructure availability in this country and that is probably one of the major causes that prohibit people from playing football in the first place.

[19] **Ann Jones:** You mentioned football coaching. Mike, do you want to ask your questions now, because they are probably relevant to what Mr Ford has just said?

[20] **Mike Hedges:** I have to declare an interest. I had a long-term involvement with Morriston Town Association Football Club in the days when it was in the Welsh league, and I also refereed in the Welsh league many years ago—

[21] **Ann Jones:** So, you are the person who was shouted at for refereeing.

[22] **Mike Hedges:** People used to. [*Laughter.*] You have spent a lot of money on developing coaching, which is useful. How do you monitor how well coaches are doing and how does that relate to local authorities that have football development officers, which a number of local authorities now have, do they not? How do they work together?

[23] **Mr Ford:** Would you repeat the first part of your question, please, Mr Hedges?

[24] **Mike Hedges:** You have spent a lot of money on coaching; how do you know how well that is working and, again, how does it relate to local authorities that have football development officers?

[25] **Mr Ford:** If I need to ask for John's assistance, he will come in. There were two aspects there. First, it goes back to a little bit of subjectivity with the results. You could look at teaching standards as a good example: you would hope that if teaching standards improve and you have better quality teachers, you would have better qualified pupils at the end of the day. However, a teacher is only as good as the pupils whom she or he has before her or him. On coaching standards, if we have better qualified coaches, that should naturally translate to better qualified players and better standards of playing, but it is a little subjective.

[26] We have coach mentoring schemes and coach monitoring schemes so that we can, ultimately, judge coaches and continually improve them. We have put in a lot of work and effort with our counterparts throughout Europe to ensure that we have different study schemes and that we share the best capabilities and resources in different countries to ensure that the coaches available to us are trained to the best possible standards. Our coaching system has just achieved, I think, the six-star standard, and we are one of only 10 countries in UEFA's Europa League that have achieved that. We are going for the seven-star standard, which would make us—Neil will talk about this in a minute, I am sure—one of the few countries that have that. Our coaching capabilities in this country are way beyond its size, and we are proud of what we do here. However, whether that translates through is subjective. I would certainly hope to suggest that it does.

[27] With regard to the second part of your question, we have local development officers. We have 20 or so development officers who work within each region across Wales, and their job is to work on a club level and in their local community to encourage more people to play football. Obviously, more people and better standards are among their key objectives. I am sure that Neil Ward will talk extensively about that and be able to answer that question more specifically than me; it is his area of responsibility.

[28] **Mike Hedges:** I am sorry, perhaps I should have said that I used to, and probably still do, hold the Welsh badge from the days when that existed.

[29] **Ann Jones:** John, do you want to come in?

[30] **Mr Deakin:** Yes. As I said at the start, I have been working for the Football Association of Wales for 20 years, and one of the most significant and meaningful developments during my time there has been the introduction of the Welsh Football Trust, which is responsible for coach education in Wales. Jonathan has already talked about the UEFA Pro licence holders in the Welsh Premier League and the requirement for that. We were one of the first countries to get the right from UEFA to carry out Pro licence education courses. It is significant that a lot of people from other national associations send their coaches to Wales for education, because they cannot deliver the standard of coaching in their associations that we can deliver. That is reflected in playing standards. Jonathan used the word 'subjective'; my subjective view, having watched Welsh Premier League matches for

the past 20 years and having participated in football at a much higher level than the Welsh Premier League—in fact, I was a referee in England for 12 years before I left the Royal Air Force and took this job—when I started in this job in 1992, there was a real chasm between our standards and those of something like the Football Conference, which is level 5 in England. Although that chasm has not been eradicated, it has certainly been closed, and I honestly think that clubs like Bangor City, The New Saints and possibly Llanelli Athletic Football Club could hold their own in the Football Conference.

[31] **Ann Jones:** Now I know why I always fall out with you, John—it is because you were a referee for 12 years. You have also mentioned my two least favourite teams in the first 10 minutes.

[32] **Mr Deakin:** I have to say that I have heard your comments about referees, and every time I do, I am glad that I retired.

[33] **Mike Hedges:** You are not the only one who is glad that they retired. My other question is this: academies are being run by clubs and I agree that they are hugely important, but I am looking for some information on the relationship between the academies run by the clubs, the local colleges that young people tend to go to, and the academies that are run by teams in—I was going to say the Football League, but Swansea City Association Football Club is in the English premier league now, so let us say teams playing in the English pyramid system. I agree that standards have improved, but Gilbert Lloyd's son, whose name I forget, is still the only Welsh Premier League player to have been called into the main Welsh squad.

[34] **Mr Ford:** If I may add a bit of information and a personal view here, I think that the academies are absolutely fundamental to the success of football going forward. I think that everybody would agree that they are the grooming ground—they are the introduction for a lot of kids out and about in communities throughout Wales. We spend an awful lot of money funding those academies, but unfortunately I do not think there is enough money available in football at a local level yet to fund them even further. We need centres of excellence and greater academy structures; we just do not have the money to do it.

[35] **Mike Hedges:** I was asking how the academies relate to the colleges and how they relate—

[36] **Mr Ford:** Probably not as much as they should. I would suggest that, in a lot of cases, the academies are there and are a prerequisite for the licensing system that we put in place, which is a very good, universal structure across football. I would probably suggest that the money that is intended to be spent directly on academies does not necessarily end up being spent 100% on academies. I would certainly like to see more investment going in to academies in future. That is certainly something that would be of benefit in the long run.

[37] **Mr Deakin:** During my time, and certainly in recent years, I have tried to encourage our clubs to get involved with local education organisations and the community, and some have been reasonably successful at it. I went to Bangor City five or six years ago and it had formed a link with the local college for its academy. We have more to do, but the local football development officers do a good job in this respect. It is all about investment, as Jonathan says, but in these troubled times I know that there is not a bottomless bucket, as such.

[38] **Mike Hedges:** Llanelli has that kind of link as well, and, at a lower level, so does Garden Village Athletic Football Club.

[39] **Mr Deakin:** Yes, and that is great to see, but we want more Llanellis and more Garden Villages. Cambrian and Clydach Football Club, up in the Valleys, has also done a

good job.

[40] **Mr Ford:** There is also Wrexham's centre for excellence. There are a lot of very good examples of where it has worked. If clubs are proactive and forward-thinking, they see this as a business opportunity: one, it is a local community marketing initiative; two, it is an entry point into football; and three, if they do a very good job, they will ultimately receive payments when they sell players on, and those payments can be quite substantial. However, for a lot of clubs, it is still considered as a cost as opposed to an investment in the future.

[41] **Mike Hedges:** In my experience, a lot of the players do not go on to be professional footballers in Britain, but go off to coach in America and Australia, for example.

[42] **Mr Ford:** Yes, and—forgive me, I am probably ad libbing too much now—you would probably be surprised how many players' first introduction was through their local clubs. Players who have come through our system may well go off to the English premier league, or abroad, but their first introduction to football would have been through their local clubs and academies.

9.45 a.m.

[43] **Mr Deakin:** Another club that is good at developing young players is Aberystwyth Town Football Club. It recently sent a player on to Shrewsbury Town Football Club, and because of the training compensation situation, it is due £37,000 from Shrewsbury Town. There are another couple of players that have recently been taken for trials at English premier league clubs and, if they are successful and get a contract at those clubs, once again, Aberystwyth Town will be entitled to training compensation. Hopefully, the club will reinvest it in training young players.

[44] **Ann Jones:** I thought that it was pertinent that we dealt with that point there, but we will now move back. Peter, do you want to take the next couple of questions?

[45] **Peter Black:** Yes; thanks, Chair.

[46] You state that more work is needed to continue to raise the standards and the profile of the WPL in the coming years, and you have already referred to the grounds. What specific action do you intend to take to ensure that this happens?

[47] **Mr Ford:** There are two aspects to your questions: standards and grounds. If I may, I will talk about grounds for a minute. Several years ago, the FAW set up a company called Welsh Ground Improvement. Prior to that, FAW investments in infrastructure were made through existing companies, including the Football Foundation. For the past few years, we have been investing more than £0.5 million a year in infrastructure development, but I have to be honest and say that upgrading facilities and building new stands and stadia is a very expensive business. A rough rule of thumb if you are building a stadium is that for every 1,000 people, you are talking a minimum of £1 million—if I remember correctly. You can see straight away that it is incredibly expensive.

[48] We are building a national development centre in Newport for all of our intermediate squads, our grass roots and training. It is a huge outlay, and we do not have the resources for it. Our turnover is just under £10 million per year. We are putting good percentages into infrastructure, but that is just scratching the surface. The problem that we have had over those years is that none of those funds have been matched to any great degree. Of course, one of the things that I would desperately be trying to do in the future is to find matching partners through local government and national Government to ensure that you invest in the same way as a lot of other countries around Europe invest in infrastructure. Just the other day, Northern

Ireland announced investment in infrastructure of £36 million. Of that, I think that £2 million will go to the national development centre, there is the national stadium, where the teams play, and a funding agreement for all other clubs, as long as the clubs bring 15%.

[49] I can quote figures for you. If you look at England, through the Football Foundation, it has something like £30 million of Government expenditure going into grass-roots football and infrastructure. In Scotland, if I remember correctly, they take money from the estates of people when those estates go into—it is not probate, but when they cannot find the people. That money gets reinvested in sport. I can quote many examples from around Europe of Governments working very closely with sporting bodies to ensure that money is invested. Forgive me, but there is very little from the Welsh Government going into sporting infrastructure. It needs to change.

[50] **Bethan Jenkins:** I get a lot of people saying that Sport Wales, for whatever reason, always seems to give more money to rugby than it does to football. The percentage difference in the money that football gets compared with what rugby gets, for whatever reason, is quite substantial. How do you get that argument through? You are talking about infrastructure needing more investment from organisations such as Sport Wales via the Welsh Government if you are going to realise these changes. Just how have you tried over the past few years to change that scenario?

[51] **Mr Ford:** We have a great working relationship with Sport Wales. Funnily enough, I have meetings with Huw tomorrow on some of the infrastructure plans I have going forward and some of the opportunities that I foresee. So, we have a good working relationship. Do not get me wrong, I love rugby, as I love football and all sports, but when you look at the hard facts and the numbers behind sports, just in the matter of football clubs versus rugby clubs, we have something like 1,500 football clubs throughout this country; rugby has 323. The numbers are absolutely, totally different. If you look at the number of players, we outstrip rugby something like 3:1. On spectators, for live games in Wales alone—adding in Swansea, Cardiff, Wrexham and the like—you get considerably more people watching football than rugby.

[52] Rugby has some fantastic opportunities. I would love to be playing Spain, Italy, France and England every year in the equivalent of a six nations championship—the money that we would make on the back of that would put football in this country in a very different place. I would love to be able to just turn up at the FIFA World Cup every four years, but I cannot. Wales's rugby team just turns up at the Rugby World Cup, because it is one of the founding members. We have to compete with 209 other countries for 32 places. It is not quite a level playing field. If it was and if Wales was competing on an annual basis in the equivalent of a six nations tournament and every four years in a world cup, I can assure you that football would be up there with rugby without a shadow of a doubt—there would not be any difference between them. Many more people participate in and are spectators of football, but if you look at the money on a proportionate basis, it is not equal with what we should get versus rugby.

[53] **Ann Jones:** Okay. Peter, do you want to carry on?

[54] **Peter Black:** This is more of an observation, but when Swansea City and Cardiff City developed their new stadiums, they benefitted a lot from planning gain. Has that been looked at in terms of individual developments within the Welsh Premier League?

[55] **Mr Ford:** We are looking at lots of different opportunities. We are lucky enough to get some grants from our governing bodies, namely UEFA and FIFA. The national development centre that we are developing in Newport is costing over £4 million, and we are doing it in partnership with Newport City Council, which I am pleased to say is donating the

land on a long-leased basis. The majority of that money comes from different grants. A total of €2.5 million come from a UEFA grant that we are able to apply for every four years. FIFA has put in £500,000. I am pleased to say that Sport Wales has match funded a grant from us of £750,000, and I am hoping that the Welsh Government will also put in a little cash.

[56] **Mike Hedges:** Following on from that, Haverfordwest County AFC has benefitted from planning gain, and Aberystwyth Town FC has benefitted from non-planning gain.

[57] **Mr Ford:** There are pots available, and I am trying to exploit every single pot available to me. Since I started, I am pleased to say that the number of grants that we have applied for and received has gone up quite considerably. The amount of money that we have brought into the association on a commercial basis and a grant basis has increased quite dramatically. So, we are trying as hard as we possibly can. We do not quite have the manpower that the WRU has—

[58] **Ann Jones:** Staff power—men and women both.

[59] **Mr Ford:** Thank you. We do not quite have the staff power that the WRU has to campaign on quite such a frequent basis.

[60] **Ann Jones:** We are going to have to make some progress because we are only on question 3.

[61] **Peter Black:** You say that the requirement on all clubs to have a domestic club licence is a clear indication of improved standards and governance. Can you explain how that has led to improvements in the standard of the league?

[62] **Mr Deakin:** To go back to the facilities situation, the club licensing scheme has improved the facilities. Improving facilities has been an evolving process during my 20 years at the association, from the depths of depression to the horizons of hope in the fact that we have improved an awful lot. When it came to the domestic club licensing system, the FAW funding through the Welsh ground improvement grant was targeted to enable clubs in the Welsh Premier League and the feeder leagues to attain the standards that would get them a club license based on the infrastructure aspect of licensing. Club licensing also demands certain standards of coaching and standards of financial control, which was never the case before. So, it is about not just the playing standards or the infrastructure standards, but the fact that the overall governance of clubs has improved. We are still working on that because it has still not been totally mended. There are situations in clubs that are a lot bigger than ours where they get into financial difficulties, and we are doing our level best to ensure that that does not happen.

[63] **Mr Ford:** There is a very good and well-documented example relating to player salaries. We are no different in Wales; player salaries sometimes escalate. I remember going to Merthyr Tydfil Football Club and thinking that it had a very clever financial strategy, albeit incredibly simple, which was that for every £10 it made, it spent £9. In football generally, it is the other way around and player salaries have in many cases been, and still are, well in excess of 100% of the entire budget available in any one year. I am pleased to say that we are running at about 72% in the Welsh Premier League and we are looking to introduce a salary cut that will hopefully bring that down further. It is prudent financial management to spend less than you earn; it takes a little time in football unfortunately because of the number of people that are prepared to invest a little bit of extra cash. Also, part of the licensing system ensures that they are running their business as a business and not as a hobby.

[64] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. We must move on. Rhodri Glyn and Bethan will take the next questions.

[65] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Diolch yn fawr iawn, Gadeirydd.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Thank you very much, Chair.

[66] Gan fod nifer o aelodau o'r pwyllgor wedi nodi eu clybiau lleol, hoffwn gyfeirio at y datblygiadau sydd wedi bod ym Mharc Waun Dew gyda chlwb Caerfyrddin, o ran yr adeiladau a'r gwaith gwych y mae'r academi wedi'i wneud dros y blynyddoedd. Mark Aizlewood oedd yn gyfrifol am sefydlu'r academi ac mae yntau wedi dod yn ôl yn awr fel rheolwr Caerfyrddin.

As many committee members have mentioned their local clubs, I will refer to the developments on Richmond Park with Carmarthen town, in terms of the buildings and the excellent work that the academy has done over the years. Mark Aizlewood was responsible for establishing the academy and he has now returned as manager of Carmarthen.

[67] Rwyf am ofyn cwestiwn ynglŷn â'r newid yn y strwythur o ran y gynghair. Rydych wedi cyflwyno'r strwythur o 12 clwb. Pa waith yr ydych chi wedi'i wneud i werthuso'r hyn sydd wedi digwydd ers 2010-11 pan gyflwynwyd y strwythur newydd, ac os nad oes gwaith wedi'i wneud yn barod, pa fwradau sydd gennych chi o ran gwerthuso llwyddiant y strwythur newydd?

I want to ask a question about the change in structure that has taken place in terms of the league. You have introduced the new 12-club structure. What work have you done to evaluate the success of what has happened since 2010-11, when the new structure was introduced, and if no work has been carried out to date, what intentions do you have to evaluate the success of the new structure?

[68] **Mr Deakin:** I was instrumental in planting the seeds for the changed structure, so I can only say 'guilty as charged' as such. We did not think that a nation the size of Wales, with a population—which you know more about than I do—of 2.9 million, or something like that, could sustain a 20 or 18-club league. So, the initial proposal was to try for two divisions so that all clubs within the current structure were encompassed. Following consultation with the FAW, and because of the FAW strategy at the time, that did not happen. We have just come to the second season of the 12-club structure. Last season, there were pros and cons. The biggest pro was the increased level of attendances, which were significantly up, at over 20%. Also, because of the split—the championship and play-off conference—there were exciting matches throughout the league right up until May, and into May as well because we introduced the play-off system for the final UEFA Europa League place. Therefore, even the club that finishes seventh in the league can still win a place in those play-offs and qualify for Europe. That adds interest.

[69] The cons include the fact that clubs were talking about familiarity. They sometimes played a club four times in the league, and if they were drawn together in the league cup, they could play each other six times. I walk around and speak to spectators and they say things like, 'Oh yeah, we've played Llanelli five times already this season and you're making us play them again'. That is a valid criticism, and the attendance levels have not been sustained this year, which is a worry. However, I do not think that this is something that cannot be rectified. We need to run the system, certainly for another season, to see how it evolves.

10.00 a.m.

[70] Another con is that you tend to lose really good, well-run clubs to relegation. We have a situation now where Newtown Association Football Club is bottom of our league, and it was a founder member of the league. I am absolutely mortified that it should be relegated in my final season as secretary. However, you have to give an opportunity to the clubs in the two feeder leagues to develop, although they have to have club licences and have to prove that they meet the standards of the existing clubs. So, it may not be right. I am a flag-bearer for summer football. I think that it would really work for us, and I would love to try it, but the

thing is that people say, ‘Whoa! Summer football?’ Why not try it? If it is not right, three years down the line you can go back. It is the same with this new structure. It may not be right but I think that we have to give it a chance.

[71] **Mr Ford:** If I may add a point quickly on the process of evaluation, we have a continuous evaluation model at the FAW, and I am pleased to say that a lot of the work that we do in communities with roadshows and visits provides a continuous stream of feedback to us. Of course, football is subjective, so people have different opinions. Our job is to condense those and hopefully make the right decisions going forward. Of course, we have regular meetings and we have established a panel, which John runs, and which has club representatives on it, and we are out and about with those fans, at those matches, on a weekly basis.

[72] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Rwy’n derbyn eich bod wedi nodi’r agweddau cadarnhaol a negyddol, ac rydym wedi cael y dystiolaeth hynny hefyd. Fodd bynnag, yr hyn roeddwn yn ymchwilio amdano oedd rhyw fath o adolygiad gwerthusol a fyddai â rhyw sail wyddonol. Rwy’n derbyn bod gwybodaeth yn cael ei bwydo yn ôl ichi drwy wahanol fyrdd, ond nid wyf wedi clywed unrhyw beth sy’n awgrymu y byddech yn adolygu’r sefyllfa mewn ffordd wrthrychol a gwyddonol.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: I accept that you have noted the positives and the negatives and we have received that evidence as well. However, what I was looking for was some sort of evaluation that would have a scientific basis. I accept that information is fed back to you in various different ways, but I have not heard anything that suggests that you are going to review the situation in an objective and scientific way.

[73] **Mr Ford:** May I ask the Member what exact system you were thinking of?

[74] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** I was looking for a way of reviewing the decision. You have taken the decision to have a 12-club structure, and the evidence that we have been given is that some people have said, ‘Yes, there are positives’, and others have said that there are negatives, as John himself has said. Surely there should be a structured review of whether it is a success or not. Some people, for example, have suggested that a 16-club league structure would suit Wales. What are the comparisons? How do you ensure that that is done in an objective way? You have taken the decision, and your panel may well now say, ‘We have taken the decision, so let’s justify it’. Surely there should be an objective way of looking at that.

[75] **Mr Ford:** If I may, football in general is very used to having opinions, both in the press and the media, and from fans and from panels. As far as a scientific method is concerned, I am not aware of a scientific method to evaluate a 12-club structure versus a 16-club structure versus an 18-club structure. I do not think that that quite exists, other than looking at things such as coefficient rankings, media evaluation, and things such as that. We do bring that information together, but it is ultimately composed by somebody, hopefully in an objective fashion. I would like to think that we are objective at the FAW, and we are striving for the best in everything that we do. John, I do not know whether you have anything to add.

[76] **Mr Deakin:** I am a bit concerned about the use of the word ‘scientific’. The most scientific way of evaluating, as far as I am concerned, is opinions. That is exactly what you are doing now—you are evaluating the Welsh Premier League, and we need to do it in the same way. As I said, I speak to people, and I think that the best thing to do is to speak to people and to all the stakeholders and find out whether they are happy. After all, it is not my league, or the panel’s league, or Jonathan’s league—it belongs to the clubs. They are the most important people in football in Wales—the clubs and the players. That is the key, as far as I

am concerned—getting opinions from them.

[77] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** It is not my job to tell you how to do it scientifically, but, in terms of this report, what we will do is take the evidence, and look at it, and the positive and negative comments, and we will come to a conclusion. In terms of a 12-club league, one of the things that you have to look at is whether that creates a situation whereby the standard of football improves. Does that create a situation whereby you get more young players coming through from Wales and taking part in that structure? What happens to clubs that drop out of that 12-club structure? Does that lead to a situation whereby the efficiency of those clubs and the way in which they serve their community are diminished because they lose their league status? Those are the elements that need to be considered and you consider them in a balanced way and come to a conclusion. You mentioned opinions, but it depends who you get those opinions from. If you talk to a particular person, you will get a particular opinion.

[78] **Mr Ford:** We do not have the time to—[*Inaudible.*] There are such things as parachute payments that I could talk to you about. Also, is having a club at the bottom of a league better than having a club like Cardiff City, which is always at the top of its division at present? Is that better than having a club at the bottom of the premier league and suffering relegation? I guarantee that you would have more people attending Cardiff City matches when it is at the top of league 1 or the championship than you would if it was bottom of the premier league.

[79] **Ann Jones:** We are desperately out of time. We have about 10 questions to get through in 13 minutes. We may return to some of these issues after we have taken some more evidence from other people. So, we must make some progress. Bethan has the next question.

[80] **Bethan Jenkins:** Hoffwn ofyn rhywbeth ynghylch yr hyn a ddywedodd John yn gynharach am gynghrair yr haf. Fel y bu inni ddeall, mae Iwerddon eisoes yn gwneud hynny. Pa fudd fyddai i chi wneud hynny hefyd? Rydym yn gwybod bod pethau negyddol ynghlwm wrth hynny, er enghraifft, mae pobl yn meddwl mai chwaraeon sy'n gysylltiedig â'r gaeaf yw pêl-dreod. Beth yw eich barn chi am y posibilrwydd o dreialu hynny yng Nghymru?

Bethan Jenkins: I want to ask something regarding what John said earlier about the summer league. We understand the Republic of Ireland is already doing that. What benefits would there be for you to do that as well? We know that there are some negative things connected to that, for example, people think that football is a winter sport. What is your opinion on the possibility of trialling that in Wales?

[81] **Mr Ford:** We are both passionate about summer football; you are talking to two people who would actively promote it. However, as John said, it is not our decision alone. There are certain benefits to it. One of the key benefits to my mind is the fact that, when you come around to playing in Europe, you are playing mid-season. Playing mid-season, of course, gives you far greater opportunities in Europe. It will improve our coefficient ranking and will ultimately bring greater benefits to Wales and Welsh football.

[82] There are, however, a lot of people who are more traditional. Just this past year we went to all of our key members and gave them three options: the first was whether they wanted to continue the season as it is; the second was whether they wanted to move to summer football; and the third was whether they wanted to move to a system of having a winter break to cover for some of the inclement weather that we have in this country. It was the third option that was chosen. John and I are very much advocates of summer football. We are not there yet, but perhaps we will be in the future.

[83] **Mr Deakin:** When we looked at this initially, the situation in the Republic of Ireland was a key factor. So, the then chairman, and what was then a director, of the league and I

went to the Republic of Ireland and spoke to all stakeholders in Ireland, including chairmen, players, managers and the media to see how it had worked for them. The response was generally positive. However, the most important stakeholders are the clubs, and the clubs have never voted for summer football in a majority. We have put it to them on a number of occasions and it has always been negative. The gap has closed a little bit, but it has always been negative. The media, particularly S4C, are also dead against it. So, we have carried out the evaluation and, unfortunately, summer football will not happen in my time.

[84] **Ann Jones:** I never thought of myself as a traditionalist, but obviously I am, so there we go. We now move onto the coverage of the Welsh Premier League in the media and attendance at matches. Ken and Gwyn have those questions.

[85] **Gwyn R. Price:** Most of those who have provided submissions to the inquiry are concerned about the WPL's general lack of visibility and coverage in the Welsh media. Does the FAW or WPL have a strategy to try to address this issue?

[86] **Mr Ford:** First, if you look at the media and break it down, you will see that there are several different elements to it. In relation to television, I would argue that, for a league of our stature and size, we have fantastic coverage through the deal that we have with S4C. I am pleased to say that that deal is being renegotiated. The deal comes to an end at the end of this season, and I am hopeful to announce a new deal with S4C going forward that will be along similar lines, whereby we see regular games featured on Saturday highlight programming and so on. For a league of that size, in almost every other country you would certainly not see the same level of coverage. However, other forms of media lack coverage, including print media. When I started there was one person working in the press department, and now there are three people working in the press department, one of whom is a former journalist, Mr Ian Gwyn Hughes. You are probably aware that John's successor is also a former BBC employee. So, the amount of emphasis that we put on making sure that we maximise the coverage we get in all forms of media has increased from a resource point of view, internally, as far as the total number of people is concerned—did you say 'people power', Ann?

[87] **Ann Jones:** Yes.

[88] **Mr Ford:** Bearing in mind the money and the people power we put into it, I hope that we will see fruition. It is an ongoing issue for us. Sometimes, you pick up the local papers and you have six or seven pages of Welsh rugby before you get to football. That is a battle that we still face.

[89] **Gwyn R. Price:** S4C is the main channel in terms of coverage. Are you making inroads into the BBC and ITV regional broadcasting?

[90] **Mr Ford:** I will not break any confidences, but I hope that in the future you will also see much more terrestrial coverage with some of our new deals, for both international and domestic football. I am looking at our tv rights agreements. The papers remain a bit of a battle, but we are putting a lot of resources behind it. I can confirm, because we track how much media coverage we get, that the coverage we receive now, compared to that of two or three years ago, has increased dramatically. We are doing a lot more than we have ever done in the past in local communities, including road shows and school visits with our players, staff and management.

[91] **Kenneth Skates:** I will ask you about attendance at matches, but, before I do so, with reference to television, in particular, have you examined the potential of local tv?

[92] **Mr Ford:** What do you mean by 'local tv'?

[93] **Kenneth Skates:** Local tv is the new format of hyper-local television stations—we will have a number of them across Wales.

[94] **Mr Ford:** With regard to how our tv rights work, we need to negotiate slightly longer term contracts. It primarily revolves around our international game, on a live-feed and highlights basis, as well as our domestic game. Unfortunately, a lot of the deals will be on an exclusive basis. So, if I do a deal with S4C, for example, with the exception of clip rights, you have to sell your lot as an exclusive package in order to get some of the money back. They would not put the money in if it was not on an exclusive basis.

[95] **Ann Jones:** May I ask you about the deal you have done with S4C, with *Sgorio* and the live matches: how much of the deal money goes to those clubs?

[96] **Mr Ford:** I should not really answer that question, because I am in the process of negotiating it, but I will tell you that in the current proposals, the way it will work with S4C is all of that money will go back into Welsh Premier League clubs. We have never been successful before in raising money on the back of our domestic game. All of our money comes from our men's international team. Everything else is a cost to the Football Association of Wales and not a money maker, and the Welsh Premier League is exactly the same. For the first time, if this deal is confirmed, money will come in through a domestic deal for the Welsh Premier League. All of that money will go to the Welsh Premier League, both in terms of infrastructure and facilitation payments.

[97] **Kenneth Skates:** I urge you to take a look at the emergence of local tv: it has potential for football in Wales. Briefly, are you able to give some details on any schemes that you have for increasing attendance at matches?

[98] **Bethan Jenkins:** Better weather? [*Laughter.*]

[99] **Mr Deakin:** Well, yes, I would not be going to a game today.

[100] We have encouraged two-for-one schemes in clubs, family tickets and things such as that. We have even done a promotion through the newspapers. We did a promotion in the *Daily Post* a few years back, which was successful in improving the attendance, but it was not beneficial to the clubs because they lost money on it. It would have been great if those who got in through the promotion free of charge came back the following week, but that was not the case.

10.15 a.m.

[101] I have lost sleep over attendances over the past 20 years because I think that we have a pretty good product, but there is a con in respect of the television coverage. You can watch a game on tv and think to yourself, 'This is a damned good game', but then you will notice the rows of empty seats, which might suggest to the casual punter who switches on that no-one is watching it, so it cannot be any good—that would be their initial reaction. However, if they sat down and gave it a chance, I am sure that they would come along.

[102] **Mr Ford:** One programme that we have launched this season is the Grow Your Club initiative on which we have submitted some evidence. I successfully applied for a grant for €100,000, which we received from UEFA. That encourages the clubs to work together and is a programme to facilitate best practice. A key element of that is marketing and thinking how we can attract more people and finances to the club so that they are better-run. That is running on this season, so we hope that that will provide possible future benefits.

[103] **Ann Jones:** We should not beat ourselves up about attendances because the

attendances at Welsh Premier League games are superior even to those at Scottish division 2, yet we never get credit for that. I speak as one who stands out in all weathers to support my beloved team. I would attend a football match in today's pouring rain, John, so there are some who are dedicated enough to do that. We will now move on to Mark, and we still need to be conscious of time.

[104] **Mark Isherwood:** Okay, thanks ref. How do you respond to the criticisms made in some of the submissions to the inquiry of the quality of pitches at Welsh Premier League grounds, with one stating that it is a major reason for playing standards not improving?

[105] **Mr Ford:** That is a great question because that is one of my key bugbears. It comes down to investment. I have seen, through tv and live games, the standards that we have, and I do not think that that encourages people to play football, either on an infrastructure basis or on a playing-surface basis. We are putting as much money as we can into the infrastructure, but it is not enough. There needs to be a greater level of investment into these clubs and facilities, as that is a key component that encourages people to participate. I can show you countless examples of facilities in desperate need of investment.

[106] What are we doing? I will be honest and tell you my future strategy, hopefully: I would love to see third generation artificial surfaces, not necessarily on a team-by-team basis for each and every competitive match, but certainly as a facility on a practice ground or adjoining ground, to enable all these clubs to be community hubs in their own right. They are great money makers; you need only look at The New Saints Football Club, which plays on an artificial surface, to see that. The amount of money that it makes by hiring out that ground is almost a six-figure sum per year, which subsidises the running of the club. I would love to see a 3G facility at every premier league club throughout this country. That is a programme that I have started to work on, so it is in its formation at the moment, but I would love the Welsh Government's investment assistance to make that a reality. It would take football forward in this country immensely.

[107] **Mark Isherwood:** How do you respond to a further point made in the submissions that the FAW, in the context of your answer, should be providing more financial and administrative support to the league?

[108] **Mr Ford:** We do not have it. We spend all our money on administering and running football in this country—all of it. We are a not-for-profit organisation. Every single piece of money that we earn goes back into football. Of course, we are responsible for the administration of nine teams and we subsidise the Welsh Premier League. That subsidy increased by over 100% last year. The amount of money that we are putting into the coaching programmes and our infrastructure investments through our grants is as much as we can possibly put in. We would make losses every year and I would be making the FAW bankrupt if we were to put in more money. We are desperate for help from other investment partners.

[109] **Mark Isherwood:** Hopefully, those who made those submissions will take note of your response. Could you tell us a little about the Grow Your Club and Shared Access initiatives and how effective, or otherwise, they have been?

[110] **Mr Ford:** Yes, they are still in their infancy. Grow Your Club is this season's programme. As I mentioned to another Member, we applied for a grant from UEFA and we received €100,000. That has allowed us to run a programme that is bringing those clubs together—and not just those clubs, but other clubs as well—to improve everything that they do within their business, whether that is marketing, financial and commercial initiatives or whatever.

[111] The Shared Access scheme is a programme that was started in Ireland. It is an

infrastructure investment, which allows for upgrading and an income stream from an organisation that sells the facilities where mobile masts, namely the masts that we use for 3G development, are put up. If I remember correctly, Ann, Llandudno FC has one up already. Floodlighting systems, because of their height, are ideal for 3G communication devices. Companies are prepared not only to put the infrastructure in but to pay the rent that comes from that. We have only just started it and it is probably a 10-year programme, but, hopefully, if we manage to make it happen, we will see the infrastructure of those floodlights upgraded and also the rent that will come in will go straight back into Welsh football.

[112] **Mark Isherwood:** Briefly, looking at developing the potential for wider community support and community engagement in material kind, is there capacity for developing Wrexham, where the ground is now owned separately from the club, now that there is far greater genuine community ownership of that club?

[113] **Mr Ford:** Wrexham's is a complicated story. In my first year, I do not think that it was ever off my monthly board agenda. I have a very good relationship with the vice-chancellor of Glyndŵr University and I went up to see him recently. The Wrexham Racecourse ground stadium has great historical significance. I would love for more matches of an international standard to be played up there, but it is a complicated issue. A lot of investment is needed. To get it up to UEFA standards so that an international match could be played there, about £500,000 needs to be spent on that stadium. At the moment, for the football club and the rugby that is played there, it is fit for purpose. A bigger stadium is not needed for what it is currently being used, but it would be needed for an international match. However, to fix that other stand and the existing facilities and to get it to the standard at which it could and should be, you are probably talking about an investment of over £10 million.

[114] **Mark Isherwood:** However, what would have been an impossible dream might now be a conceivable dream over a longer period.

[115] **Mr Ford:** If money is available from other parties, yes, absolutely. I could not justify to the Welsh public an investment of what would be the equivalent of one year's FAW turnover on one stadium alone at which we would be playing perhaps once a year. I could not justify that at all. I would be called up before this inquiry, I would hope, if I spent that kind of money on one stadium.

[116] **Ann Jones:** You would have had a letter from somebody, I am sure. Whether you would respond would be up to you, of course.

[117] **Mr Ford:** The FAW has never been involved and should never be involved in any one club's major upgrade in infrastructure. We could not be; it would not be right. We did not subsidise Cardiff City or Swansea City. We cannot show allegiance to one club by giving it a greater grant in an unfair system than any other.

[118] **Mark Isherwood:** My question was more that, by separating the ownership to two different bodies, does that enhance the possibilities for infrastructure development?

[119] **Mr Ford:** I will happily sit there and support Michael in his quest to achieve his 20-year plan. I have been up there and seen him. I will happily work with him on any campaigns that he has. I would love to see Wrexham Racecourse ground back up to international standards as a place where we could hold international matches. I have a marketing product and I need to ensure that that is within the grasp of every single person in this country. I desperately want matches to be played in north Wales, believe me, but I cannot put money in from our own finances. However, I would happily support any programme or campaign with Michael to ensure that we were successful in getting money into the Racecourse ground.

[120] **Ann Jones:** We have four more important questions, and we have about five minutes left. Joyce, you will take the first and last questions in this section and Janet will take the two in the middle.

[121] **Joyce Watson:** Please give brief answers so that we can get to the end. How do you respond to those who have said that your strategic plan, published in January, is too focused on achieving success at a national level and has insufficient emphasis on the Welsh Premier League?

[122] **Mr Ford:** I take that badly, to be honest, because I disagree with it. Funnily enough, somebody asked me that question once before and I put together an answer for them that, I am pleased to say, did satisfy them. It should not be thought of as a number of mentions. It is not mentioned specifically x number of times, but nor are the under-21s, women's football or BME football. The whole idea of the strategy was that it would be all-encompassing and so, of course, you have to be somewhat general in the publication. Please do not differentiate between a document that has been published for people to read and understand versus the working plan. Please be assured that there is a lot of emphasis on the Welsh Premier League and on domestic football in this country; indeed, some would argue that there is much more than there should be. We work tirelessly to ensure that we are doing the right things and spending the right money in the right proportions at all the different levels of the game. We cannot be wholly focused on the national team.

[123] If you were a management consultant coming into my business, you would be quite clear about what you needed to do. Funnily enough, it would not be dissimilar to the WRU model, if I may say so. It is all about the national team in that case. It is all about the pathway from the academy structure to the national team, and everything else is just a cost. If that were the case here, if I did that, we would not have any women's football and we would not have any intermediate football; we would be focused primarily on international success. We cannot do that in our business, because we have the juxtaposition of ensuring that that is successful with ensuring that we do what is right for the communities in which we live and work.

[124] I am very passionate about ensuring that everything we do at grass-roots level and at community level is absolutely right. That is where the money is spent. It is about the future of football, not just for the next three to five years, but for the next 20 years. I have to be honest; that is one of my key passion points, and one reason I enjoy the job I do is because I personally believe that I can improve the lives of the people who live in this country. I just do not have the financial resources to do it to the best of my capabilities. That is why I am here today: I need more money, and I need you guys to invest in football so that we can help this country to be healthier and happier and have a better, balanced lifestyle. I will reduce your health budgets in 20 years if you allow me to do that by giving me more money.

[125] **Ann Jones:** You will not reduce my blood pressure with some of the refereeing decisions. Janet, can you be quick?

[126] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Can you expand on your comment that more sport should be provided by central Government and local government through the WPL? How would you describe your relationship with Government in general?

[127] **Mr Ford:** I will start with the last part. My relationship with Government in general is, I am pleased to say, considerably improved. I absolutely will try to ensure that I am here, available and meeting with AMs and the First Minister. I have probably attended over 20 individual meetings, and I know several Members at this table, having met them privately and on a business basis. So, I would like to think that the relationship has improved. We still have a long, long way to go; do not get me wrong. However, we are now an open, honest,

transparent organisation and I have absolutely no problems with this inquiry—indeed, I welcome it and I hope that it will help to continue to improve the relationship.

[128] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Certain witnesses have suggested—and there was a very strong comment from one witness in particular—that all the problems facing the WPL can be traced back to the fact that the FAW permits six Welsh clubs to play in the English football pyramid. Does the FAW have a policy on that matter, and are you able to make a statement of opinion or give your views on that?

[129] **Mr Deakin:** Basically, I came in at the start of this, in 1992, and I have to say that I think that it was handled badly at that time. In fact, I ended up in the High Court when we were taken there under a restraint of trade action issued by certain clubs. If I had been running those clubs, I probably would have done the same thing. However, the situation is that we have a standard of football to provide, and while I would love to see Cardiff City and Swansea City in a league in Wales, you have to be realistic about it; it is not going to happen. When you set your goals, they have to be attainable. The goals that were set pre-1992 were unattainable. Basically, the only way we will get clubs to commit to Wales is by improving the product within Wales. That, I think, would be the only strategy, as such.

[130] Overall, I have to say that I am sorry that I am retiring, because I am doing so at a really exciting time. Things are happening at the FAW now that you could not have conceived of back in 1992. At least we have a strategy document now. We used to do strategies on the backs of fag packets in 1992, I can tell you. So, everything is being done that can be done to improve football overall in Wales at the moment.

10.30 a.m.

[131] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Do you not accept that all of your problems, as has been mentioned quite strongly here, relate to the fact that you allow the six clubs to play in the English leagues?

[132] **Mr Ford:** I would certainly say that they are welcome to come back at any time.

[133] **Mr Deakin:** That is an insignificant problem now.

[134] **Mr Ford:** Having Swansea in the English premier league—and Cardiff, hopefully—is a good thing.

[135] **Ann Jones:** It lets them back in to the pyramid system as well.

[136] **Mr Ford:** Absolutely. The benefits far outweigh the problems.

[137] **Ann Jones:** I am glad, John, that you admitted that strategies were made on the back of a fag packet; when I told you that, you kept telling me that they were not.

[138] **Mr Deakin:** I have to follow the party line, Chair. Now that I am nearly yesterday's hero, I will say what I think.

[139] **Ann Jones:** That is fine.

[140] **Joyce Watson:** If you want to write with further information on that, as we are constrained by time, that will be acceptable. You have already mentioned diversity in football. You mentioned that you are undertaking some work with Respect in the wider community with black and minority ethnic people, lesbian, gay and bisexual people and women—not that I can see much evidence of that. Will you tell us what work the FAW is

undertaking in tackling racism and homophobia in football, as well as on including people from right across the board, as I mentioned, in the game?

[141] **Mr Ford:** I will pick you up on your first point and on your comment with regard to women's football. I disagree that there is no evidence to suggest that we are dedicated to women's football. We have a very forward-thinking manager who looks after the intermediate squads, the senior teams, the under 19s and under 17s. I am pleased to report that we were successful in our bid to host the first ever international tournament, which is the under 19 women's European championship, which will be held here in 2013. Over 25% of our international budgets is spent on women's football. As little as six or seven years ago, I am sorry to say that that amount would not have been in single figures. It has increased significantly.

[142] The number of women playing football in this country has increased significantly. I am sure that Neil will tell you a little about that. It is a key priority for us to ensure that we represent every single person in this country, and we give every opportunity for people to play football. That is of paramount importance to us. Neil runs several programmes, and I am sure that he will tell you about the programmes that he runs in BME communities and with other groups that we must ensure that we cater for in a proactive way.

[143] However, specifically on your question, you mentioned two things: racism and homophobia. We have a zero tolerance policy towards racism, and we have been a contributor to and financier of the Show Racism the Red Card initiative. I was here speaking with the Minister in support of its activities, recently. We also have a zero tolerance policy towards homophobia, and we have recently joined a new initiative to ensure that we do everything that we can to kick homophobia out of football.

[144] **Mike Hedges:** You did not have much time to give a full answer to question 14. Would it be possible to receive a longer written response to it?

[145] **Ann Jones:** That was the question on how central Government and local government in Wales could help in supporting the Welsh Premier League.

[146] **Mr Ford:** We would love to do that.

[147] **Ann Jones:** If you would like to add anything on racism and equality issues, that would be good. We have run out of time. I thank you both for coming. It is refreshing to see the open approach with which you have conducted yourselves in this inquiry: it is a far cry from where we were some 10 years ago, and I thank you for that. There is hope. For me to say that there is hope, you have achieved something; I have been a major critic, because I love the game of football. [*Interruption.*] Had you gathered that? That is good. [*Laughter.*] We should work together to see the best for our country in terms of football. I am sure that we will ask you to come back. We will want to tease out some more information from you.

[148] John, have a lovely retirement. I hope to see you at football matches, and I promise that I will buy you a pint or a pie.

[149] **Mr Deakin:** It is always a pleasure to see you, Chair. We may have had words at games in the past, but you cannot knock your enthusiasm.

[150] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. [*Laughter.*] I have been called 'tenacious'—I cannot say what else I have been called, because we are in public session. Thank you both for coming along, and thank you for your written papers.

10.36 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Uwch Gynghrair Cymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth
Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League: Evidence Session

[151] **Ann Jones:** We will now move on to the next evidence session, which is with Neil Ward. It is a pleasure to welcome Neil to the table. He is the chief executive of the Welsh Football Trust. You heard the back end of the previous evidence, so you will have had a flavour of how we do things. Do you have any brief opening comments to make before we go into questions?

[152] **Mr Ward:** I will just give some background to the trust, which will help. It is a unique situation in European football. The trust was formed by the Football Association of Wales in 1996 to ring fence funding for development. The FAW has equal membership of the board, but there are independent members on the board, which is 14 strong. Our broad aims are to give more people the opportunity to play football, to support and develop those with talent, to support the success of future national teams, and to provide more and better coaches in the system to further grow the game and raise standards. It is important to note, at the start, that the trust has no involvement in the governance and administration of the league, but its main involvement is through coaching, supporting Welsh Premier League coaches through the coaching licence process, and mentoring to improve standards. We work with the academies to support standards, and through our sister organisation, Welsh Grounds Improvements, which is a partnership with the FAW, we have also invested in grounds infrastructure projects.

[153] **Ann Jones:** I will start with the first question. Do you have any general views about the current standard of football in the Welsh Premier League? Would you say that those standards have improved since the league was first formed in 1992?

[154] **Mr Ward:** It is difficult to objectively assess standards, but I think that one of the indicators—as I mention in my evidence—is the coefficient, which is based on the performance of clubs in European competitions. That has obviously increased in the last five years. There was also testimony from Osian Roberts, who is the present assistant national team coach, who started coaching in the premier league. He feels strongly that the league does not receive the credit that it deserves for the standard of play and the approach that coaches are taking to the game. Although controversial, the reduction in the number of teams in the league will further raise standards, because we have a smaller number of teams playing competitively. I think that that has also helped. I would credit the FAW for the investment that it has made in coaching; the number of coaches who have licences up to Pro licence level in the league has increased over the last four years, which will also underpin standards. Overall, unobjectively, I think that standards are improving.

[155] **Peter Black:** The FAW told us that

[156] ‘more work is needed to continue to raise the standards and the profile of the WPL in the coming years’.

[157] Do you have any practical ideas of what action needs to be taken for this to happen?

[158] **Mr Ward:** Focusing on the standards of play is one thing. Actively engaging in the community is something else that clubs could be doing more often, through the Grow Your Club programme and through our focus club programme, which is about supporting a smaller number of focus clubs. Having that presence in the community—engaging with local schools and other local clubs, becoming the hub of the community, in effect—would attract more interest. I heard Jonathan speak earlier about third generation artificial pitches, and they would be a key conduit for that, because they allow you to group activity in one place.

[159] I have seen an example in Montrose in Scotland, where there are over 500 community participants as a result of having the 3G pitch. That has been transferred into supporters within the club and the voluntary infrastructure. That has increased turnover and support, and they have built on that. So, it is about engaging more of the community, getting that interest and raising the profile. Jonathan also spoke about media coverage. There is also the possibility of having some professional marketing expertise in clubs, to promote the club to the wider community. Clubs, on the whole, are based on volunteers, who are stretched. Having a dedicated staffing resource in clubs would also underpin that.

[160] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** A ydych yn credu bod fformat y cynghrair 12 clwb wedi bod yn llwyddiant hyd yn hyn? **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Do you believe that the 12-club league format has been successful so far?

[161] **Mr Ward:** The feedback that I have had is that it has. It was unpopular at the start, because some teams had to fall out of the league. However, it has been a success in terms of underpinning standards further and ensuring that there is competition throughout the season, rather than a situation where the league is a two or three club race into Europe. It has given clubs at the lower end something to fight for at the end of the season and a focus. It is early days, it is subjective rather than objective and there will be different feelings from different people, but, generally, the club league format has played a positive part in that respect.

[162] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Mae'r dystiolaeth rydym wedi ei derbyn yn gymysglyd; mae rhai pobl wedi dweud yr hyn rydych wedi ei nodi o ran agweddau cadarnhaol, ac mae pobl eraill wedi dweud bod elfen o ddiflastod mewn sefyllfa lle mae clybiau'n chwarae'n erbyn ei gilydd bedair i chwe gwaith y flwyddyn. Fel roeddech yn dweud, nid oes unrhyw fath o adolygiad gwrthrychol wedi ei wneud. A ydych yn meddwl bod angen y math hwnnw o adolygiad gwrthrychol o'r llwyddiannau a'r feirniadaeth a fu o'r system newydd? **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** The evidence that we have received has been mixed; some people have identified what you have identified as being the positive aspects, and others have said that there is an element of tediousness in a situation where clubs play each other four to six times a year. As you said, no objective review has been undertaken. Do you think that that type of objective review is needed of the successes and the criticisms that have been levelled at the new system?

[163] **Mr Ward:** Anything that is new, which represents advancement in the game, should be reviewed periodically. I know that the FAW, through its roadshows and the stakeholder engagement that it undertook with the strategy, has received those views. The format needs to be reviewed periodically; we should not just stick with one model if there are improvements to be made. I know that league officials, such as John Deakin and Andrew Howard, head of competitions, are looking at formats in other countries to see whether there is anything that could work in Wales and be developed through some form of consultation. The model should not stay as it is for its own sake; it could and should be reviewed periodically.

[164] **Bethan Jenkins:** Mae gennyf gwestiwn am y gynghrair haf a welir ar hyn o bryd yng Ngweriniaeth Iwerddon. A ydych yn credu y gallech dreialu hynny yng Nghymru? Roedd Jonathan Ford yn hyderus y gallai weithio yng Nghymru, ond mae llawer o bobl o fewn y timau yn credu na fydd hyn yn digwydd ac nid ydynt yn cefnogi pêl-droed yn yr haf. **Bethan Jenkins:** I have a question on the summer league currently held in the Republic of Ireland. Do you think that that that could be trialled in Wales? Jonathan Ford is confident that it could work in Wales, but many people within the teams do not believe that it will happen and do not support summer football.

[165] **Mr Ward:** Change is difficult, is it not? I talked earlier about advocating artificial pitches, and that polarises opinion. Summer football is another such issue. It could be a positive thing; summer football would help underpin clubs' presence in Europe, and make them more competitive, so that they are at their peak when they enter European competitions. However, there could also be problems around how you promote clubs in that structure, because of the way in which the season is structured. Again, it is something that you need to look at with people and consult on. It may need a brave decision and you may just need to go for it and trial it—it may work and it may not. Those are my personal views. The trust does not have any real input to the organisation of the competitive structures. That is a strategic decision that the FAW should have on its radar and look at as time goes on.

10.45 a.m.

[166] **Mike Hedges:** You spend a lot of money on getting people to gain UEFA licences. Have you undertaken any analysis of the success of that? Have you monitored whether it has improved coaching and the quality of performance and skills among players?

[167] **Mr Ward:** Playing standards are subjective. Gaining qualifications is one thing, but one of the advances we have made in the past couple of years has been to do with mentoring. It is not just about gaining a qualification. That is one thing, but it is a case of continuing to work on your professional development as a coach, becoming a student of the game and supporting coaches through that. We continually evaluate what we can learn from other countries. I have just come back from a student exchange on a Pro licence course; we have had premier league managers involved in that, where we are learning from countries such as Russia, Estonia and Moldova. It involves tutoring from people such as Andy Roxburgh, who is the technical director of UEFA.

[168] It is still early days for us to say what success that has had. I would like to see that investment continue because we are at the end of our term of investment from the FAW in that particular programme. Long may that continue because it will advance things and we will produce better players. That is what we are about. We are about ensuring, even at the academies, that we are developing players who can advance into the professional game and who can then advance into the development squads and then the intermediate squad and push on to the national team and really raise the standards and competitiveness of Wales in the international game.

[169] **Joyce Watson:** For the record, we are talking about coaches and I want to talk about equality. Do you have female coaches on those programmes?

[170] **Mr Ward:** We do.

[171] **Joyce Watson:** We do not have information on the breakdown of that. I would not necessarily expect you to have that with you, but can you provide information on the percentages of male and female coaches?

[172] **Mr Ward:** I do not have that in front of me, but I can submit it to you. Through support from Sport Wales, we have now appointed two regional female coaching coordinators. Part of their remit is to attract more females into coaching but, more importantly, we are finding that more women are coming into the game. It is the same situation with the men in that 90% stay at that very low level. We need to find ways to help them to progress through the courses. This year, we have doubled the number of C certificate and B licence courses and the number of coaches coming through those. We run female-only courses. We run a programme called Mums on the Ball: we are trying to get more mums involved because they are obviously good leaders and good role models. We need more women volunteers to help grow the female game. Probably the biggest challenge in growing the female game is

getting enough volunteers. There is a tradition of dads being involved with their sons, but there is perhaps not that tradition in the female game. That is something we are working very hard on. Part of the responsibility of those posts will be ensuring that we get more female coaches through. We are seeing that increase. I do not have the figures with me, but I will send them to you and I hope that they will provide you with some comfort that those positive steps are being taken.

[173] **Joyce Watson:** Would it be possible to get the same breakdown for coaching across the piece, for coaches from black minority ethnic communities as well? It would be useful for our inquiry.

[174] **Mr Ward:** Yes. That is another area where we have been successful. We now have eight coaches from the BME community through the UEFA B licence. That interest and engagement is growing ever stronger year on year.

[175] **Mike Hedges:** How successful do you think the academy system has been and how can it work with colleges? How do you see the Welsh Premier League academy system relating to academy system run by the clubs playing in the English pyramid system?

[176] **Mr Ward:** To start with your last point, the scale of the resources is completely different. I know that, last year, clubs received £19,000 a year to run their academies in Wales, and the head of recruitment at one club, while we were away recently, disclosed that he had spent £5 million on players. They have facilities that are world-class; we do not have those facilities. They have full-time coaches; we do not have full-time coaches. They are very much part-time volunteers or they might receive an annual fee for their input or an honorarium per year. So, with regard to the scale of resources being appropriated to those clubs, the difference is huge.

[177] The standards are rising; I do not think that they are where they could or should be, and we are working hard, through our development officers, to support the academies. We also now have regional performance centres for girls because there is not the critical mass at the moment for girls to have dedicated academies, but we now have six regional performance centres for girls. Again, we work very hard on coach education and supporting the coaches with the work they do. We do club visits, workshops and professional development to support them because that is obviously critical to help them develop further as players. Again, it comes down to resource. The professional clubs—Swansea, Wrexham Athletic Football Club and Cardiff—tend to Hoover up the bigger number of players, although Cardiff's catchment area is ever-growing, but we have shown that the number of players progressing from academies into professional clubs, or even indirectly into regional squads and national squads, is increasing and the standards are rising.

[178] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. We will move on to coverage of the premier league and media attendance at matches, with questions from Gwyn and Ken.

[179] **Gwyn R. Price:** Could the FAW or the WPL do anything, in your view, to address the lack of attendance at matches and their coverage in the Welsh media?

[180] **Mr Ward:** I think I have given one example of greater community engagement, having a higher profile in the community, actively engaging through outreach programmes with schools and local clubs, being the focal point of the community and initiatives that recruit them. Our officers have been involved in similar programmes in clubs like Aberystwyth that run promotional programmes and help and support them through that. The Grow your Club initiative has obviously been part of that, with regard to sharing best practice about what clubs are doing, where they are being successful, where they could improve and bringing outside experts in. I have already mentioned getting some specific professional

marketing resource in there, so that they have a higher profile, as it were. There is no easy fix. Part of the problem is that, particularly in north Wales, you have a catchment area that includes Manchester United, Manchester City Football Club and Liverpool Football Club and they will have a draw. Again, the clubs have worked hard at positioning themselves—there is Friday-night football and incentives for the season-ticket holders of professional clubs to get entry or reduced entry into the clubs. They are doing what they can, but there is no easy solution; if I had it, I would give it to them. A lot of good work is going on, and it is about having wider community engagement and perhaps having some dedicated resource around marketing.

[181] **Ann Jones:** We will now move on to club resources, infrastructure and community contribution. Mark has the next question.

[182] **Mark Isherwood:** How has the requirement for a domestic licence contributed to improving the infrastructure of the Welsh Premier League clubs?

[183] **Mr Ward:** It has had a dramatic contribution because it has given clubs benchmarks to work towards. I know that it has been very challenging for them, and hats off to them for what they have done. In the last four or five years, we have seen a dramatic improvement. That has been underpinned by some funding from the FAW via Welsh Grounds Improvements. That funding is less than it was, principally because we have taken a strategic decision to focus resource below tier 2 to ensure that we have clubs below the premier league that can meet the criteria. Then we will have a healthy position where clubs can be promoted into the league when clubs are relegated. If you do not have clubs that are ready or ambitious or have the infrastructure, then the league stagnates and it is not as competitive. It has been tough, but they have done extremely well and standards are improving. In the time that I have been involved in Welsh football—for the last 12 years—I have visited grounds and seen a dramatic improvement, but I guess that, in a lot of cases, we have been getting clubs into the twentieth century, not the twenty-first century. Jonathan has made a plea to you that he has put as much resource into this as he can, and we need more investment to help clubs to improve that further.

[184] **Mark Isherwood:** What work is the trust undertaking to support clubs with wider community engagement?

[185] **Mr Ward:** Part of what our officers do is work with the premier league clubs on areas around the clubs, certainly engaging with local schools, and supporting them in trying to identify whether they have a coach who could carry on with that activity, so they try to model best practice where they can. We have also looked at commercial models as well, where maybe the club or someone attached to the club could become self-employed, and do that activity on a commercial basis by charging children for the opportunity to take part. Then that money could be ploughed back in, either to retain that coach to do that work or to broaden that activity. It is about having that dedicated resource. To take junior clubs, there are over 500 clubs that we have an obligation to support, and we are narrowing those down to 40 clubs with more community significance, like the premier league clubs, which we are targeting to help more. The last few years have been about getting everyone to a benchmark where we are happy and comfortable that kids are going to be taking part in an enjoyable, fun environment. We have worked on smaller sided games, a variety of games, and safeguarding, ensuring that all the coaches are vetted. We have worked on getting basic standards that the clubs are working to through our accreditation programme. Once we have got everyone to that benchmark, we will be targeting a smaller number of clubs that we can work with, like the premier league, to improve what they are doing.

[186] **Mark Isherwood:** Beyond children, what wider community engagement across all generations and communities is there to make those people want to contribute to ‘their’ club?

[187] **Mr Ward:** That is a challenge for us because, obviously, we have limited resources. We are very much about getting more young people involved. Again, it is about what I mentioned earlier, that is, helping the clubs to put in place a resource that means that they can be part of that wider community engagement. I understand that it is not just about children; it is about other people in the community and what they do. I am aware of some initiatives that clubs have run through our officers about attracting more people into the game, but I think that we have such a broad range of activities that we are involved in that it is hard to target one particular area. That is the challenge that we have. We are involved across the piece in women's and girls' football, football inclusion, BME communities and coaching, so there is a wide range of activities that we are involved in, and we are quite stretched. We would need more resource to do that—that is what I am saying.

[188] **Mike Hedges:** How is what you talked about regarding youth football different from the Football League clubs' Football in the Community?

[189] **Mr Ward:** Their model is interesting and is something that we should look at. They obviously have the Football League Trust, and they have set up charities that are separate to the clubs, in effect. They are under the club umbrella, but they are separate limited companies and charities and they use their charitable status to attract other funding, rather like the trust, I suppose, in a mini version via the clubs. It had a varying degree of success across the board, but if you look at the likes of Cardiff, for example, it has a very expansive community programme, and we could look to adopt such a model. So, it is a good point: we should look at bringing that into premier league clubs. We have had that discussion; we have not moved that forward, but it is on the radar.

11.00 a.m.

[190] **Ann Jones:** The FAW Trust used to pay part of the wage, or the full wage in some areas, of the football development officers in local authority areas. Is that still the case? How do you monitor the effectiveness of that and whether that is a good way to spend money on football?

[191] **Mr Ward:** We pay for all the salaries of football development officers now. Previously, our model was that we developed relationships with local authorities and part funded the salaries of those posts. However, in light of the tough economic circumstances in which local authorities find themselves, those posts have now gone. The increased support that we have received from the FAW in recent years has enabled us to secure those posts. We have fewer than we had before: we only have 18 now, when we used to have 22 via the local authorities. However, it has meant that they are based within the football structures as opposed to the local authority boundaries, where they were, perhaps, pigeonholed.

[192] We have now enabled the officers to work more effectively as groups of teams within the boundaries of the football structures, particularly the area associations. We have changed the role slightly. Rather than having a generic role that tries to do everything, we have one role that looks at club development, another to look at the area of inclusion, including the greater involvement of girls and the BME community, and a role that looks at player development and coach education. So, we have adapted and changed that model, as we have seen fit, to enable us to be more effective in our activities. So, we are now employing all those posts.

[193] **Ann Jones:** So, they are employed directly by the FAW trust, and not by local authorities.

[194] **Mr Ward:** That is correct.

[195] **Ann Jones:** We will now discuss the FAW's strategic plan, Government funding, issues to do with equality and clubs playing in the English pyramid system. Janet has the next question, and Joyce has the final question.

[196] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Do you agree with those who have responded to the inquiry by stating that the FAW's recent strategic plan seems to focus on achieving success at a national level, with insufficient emphasis on the WPL and lower levels?

[197] **Mr Ward:** I heard Jonathan's answer to that, and I agree with him. The strategic plan is very broad in terms of the areas that it is looking to touch upon. There is a strong emphasis on the grass-roots game, particularly via the objectives the trust has to meet. You will always get this in football, because everyone has an area of interest, responsibilities and an involvement in the game, and they would like to see more emphasis and resource in those particular areas. That will always happen. However, the strategy as a whole was worked up correctly through the workshops that it undertook. It went through a thorough consultation process. Whether or not there needs to be a more focused plan from the Welsh Premier League under the umbrella of the FAW strategic plan is an issue that may be thought about at some point in the future, rather like the trust has done with its plan. Andrew Howard, head of competitions, has specific objectives, and the league fits into those objectives.

[198] **Joyce Watson:** What work is the Welsh football trust undertaking with respect to tackling racism and homophobia?

[199] **Mr Ward:** I am aware of initiatives such as Show Racism the Red Card, which we have been involved with, and we are still involved with that to some extent. We need to look at engaging the community in activity and get people working together through the medium of football to help break those barriers down. It is not just about selling the anti-racism message; it is about getting people from different communities to work and play football together. We have a dedicated football inclusion officer. He was appointed three years ago and, over the past couple of years, because it is a new area, he has tried and done things, worked away and been successful in some things but not in others. He has now put together a more strategic plan and that has focused very much on 16 to 25-year-olds, the next generation of parents. One of the biggest challenges for us, particularly in the Asian communities, has been the focus on the family business, on work and on education, with sport not really being valued. We have tried to encourage more from that age group to become involved so that it is easier for the next generation of people coming through. So, we have a strategic plan, which I am happy to share with you. I can forward that, if you would like to see a copy.

[200] **Joyce Watson:** Also, how do you reach out to more diverse footballing communities? You mentioned women and BME people, but we have not heard you mention LGB.

[201] **Mr Ward:** That is something that we have not become involved with. The trust's remit is principally to do with the under-16s. We do work across other areas. I suppose that it is something that we have not necessarily considered at this particular moment in time.

[202] **Mike Hedges:** You might want to consider giving a written answer to this question—I would be quite happy with that. What one thing would you like the Welsh Government to do to support the Welsh Premier League and football in Wales?

[203] **Mr Ward:** I did give it some thought, actually, and I think that it comes down to this: if we could have more investment in facilities, particularly in helping us to match fund any funding to do with artificial surfaces and the 3G plans that we are looking to put in place, it would have a significant impact. As mentioned before, it would enable more activity in the

community to be localised around the club and it would bring more people into the club, with more community engagement. I think that, with some professional expertise in the club to help develop and oversee the business plan and to support the volunteers in what they are doing, those one or two things would perhaps make the biggest difference.

[204] **Ann Jones:** Does anybody else have any more questions? I see that nobody does. Neil, thanks very much for your evidence and for the written paper. As I should have told Jonathan Ford and John Deakin, you will have a copy of the transcript to check it for accuracy. Thank you very much for your participation today.

[205] We will now take a break until 11.15 a.m., if that is all right.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11.07 a.m. a 11.15 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 11.07 a.m. and 11.15 a.m.*

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[206] **Ann Jones:** I welcome Members back to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. If you switched your mobile phone on during the short break, please ensure that it is turned off again now. We continue our inquiry into the Welsh Premier League. I am delighted to welcome Tom Morgan, as he is noted on the agenda. ‘Tomi’ is how he is known on the football field and in his managerial career. I apologise now, Tomi, for all the things I have said to you when we have been on opposing sides.

[207] **Mr Morgan:** Apology accepted. [*Laughter.*]

[208] **Ann Jones:** Tomi has a distinguished career in the Welsh Premier League as a player and a manager. We are delighted to have you here. Thank you very much for agreeing to come and for your short paper. Would you like to make any comments before we go to questions?

[209] **Mr Morgan:** Not really, other than to say that I have been involved in the league since its inception in 1992 and that I was a semi-professional player before that, so I have a bit of experience.

[210] **Ann Jones:** Good, thanks very much. I want to ask you about the general standard of football in the Welsh Premier League. Would you say that standards have improved since the league’s inception in 1992?

[211] **Mr Morgan:** Yes. In general, the standards of play and many other things have improved greatly since the league started. However, we have a long way to go before we are accepted as a league.

[212] **Ann Jones:** So you think that people do not accept the Welsh Premier League as a totally national league.

[213] **Mr Morgan:** From the league’s inception, the media was drawn towards not supporting it because, at the time, you needed a national league to have a national team, and the media in the south certainly did not ally itself to the league. The court battles that ensued did not help. However, since then things have settled down and there has been a vast improvement.

[214] **Ann Jones:** Thanks for that.

[215] **Peter Black:** The FAW told us that more work is needed to continue to raise the standards and the profile of the WPL in the coming years. Do you have any practical ideas on what action needs to be taken for that to happen?

[216] **Mr Morgan:** I listened to a couple of your previous witnesses and, as they said, investment is everything. Investment needs to be made in facilities. As a manager, I have been with several clubs. With regard to the quality of the training facilities, because clubs want their playing surface to be in prime condition, they do not train on the pitch, so that is a battle you have virtually every week and one that I have had at every club I have been with. At Porthmadog, for example, which is not in the league any more but would like to get back into it, we used to train behind the goal on a mud heap, including in the middle of winter. You travelled x number of miles to be there and you tried to improve the standards of the players you had and to integrate the younger players, but it was difficult when, even at the all-weather pitch where the academy trained, three or four of the lights did not work. It is all about the facilities. If you have good facilities, it encourages people to train and stops players making excuses, such as that they have a hamstring strain and cannot play on such a surface. It is a difficult situation for all my colleagues who manage. I know all of the managers and we talk and that is one of the problem areas. You try to find the best facilities but they are not to be had.

[217] **Peter Black:** We heard earlier about the greater investment in rugby there has been in Wales compared with football. Is there scope for sharing facilities to a greater extent than is the case at the moment?

[218] **Mr Morgan:** I live in Aberystwyth, where that would be ideal. There is a rugby club and a football club there. There are lots of other clubs in the area as well. There are no third generation artificial pitches in Aberystwyth. The university has an all-weather pitch. It has been there a long time and it is not ideal. I have to train my players on it. It is rock hard and it damages their joints. That sort of injury may not catch up with them for a while, but we seriously need something in Aberystwyth and in mid Wales in general. In fact, that is probably needed all over Wales. The facilities are not available. If you do not have the facilities, how do you encourage youngsters? It is a difficult quandary to be in. We want to improve our standards. I was listening to Jonathan Ford, and the FAW is probably looking for a national team, but, to get a national team, we have to have the youngsters coming through. So, we have to nurture them, and if we cannot give them proper surfaces on which they can improve their skills and give them on which to start their careers, we will lag behind on the international circuit.

[219] **Mike Hedges:** On that point, you have just answered my last question, I think. Perhaps you heard me put it to the previous witness. I was going to ask what the most important thing is to improve football in Wales, and I think that you are saying that we need better facilities.

[220] **Mr Morgan:** Absolutely.

[221] **Mike Hedges:** On the question that Peter Black just asked, do you agree that one of the problems that we have is the next level? The equivalent of the Welsh Premier League in rugby is the national league and its teams tend to come from different places compared with football teams, so you do not have that opportunity for sharing. Rugby teams tend to come from the south Wales Valleys, while the Welsh Premier League teams tend, mainly, to come from the south Wales coast or from north Wales, with a smattering from mid Wales.

[222] **Mr Morgan:** Yes, but looking at it geographically, we see that that is bound to happen, because that is where the population is. In the middle, there are a lot of sheep and

mountains. [*Laughter.*] Obviously, the road network infrastructure is not your ally when it comes to travelling.

[223] **Mike Hedges:** You have experience of that, have you not?

[224] **Mr Morgan:** Just the once or twice.

[225] **Ann Jones:** Okay, we will not talk about whether we can have a football team made up of sheep, so let us move on to the competitions format, with questions from Rhodri Glyn and Bethan.

[226] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Tomi, mae gennyt fwy o brofiad na neb, siŵr o fod, fel chwaraewr a rheolwr pêl-droed yng Nghymru. Beth yw dy farn am y strwythur newydd gyda chynghrair o 12 tîm? A fu'n llwyddiant hyd yn hyn? **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Tomi, you probably have more experience than anyone as a football player and manager in Wales. What is your opinion of this new 12-team league structure? Has it been a success to date?

[227] **Mr Morgan:** It has been a success in that it has generated a lot of interest at the bottom and at the top of the league, but I am not sure whether it is a fair system. A proper pyramid system should be put in place, because the clubs in the lower leagues, in the Cymru Alliance and the Welsh league south, do not want to participate or compete for a Champions League place. So, what we should find out, once and for all, is how many clubs want to get to the top. We would then have two or three divisions, maybe, and a proper structure would be in place. At the moment, you have clubs that are successful—although I do not know enough about them—such as Cambrian and Clydach Vale FC, which is at the top of the Welsh league. I do not know whether it wants to get a domestic licence, whether it has tried for it or whether it does not want to come up, but it looks as if it will be the champion. Over the past decade, Ton Pentre AFC has won the league two or three times but has refused to come up, because it had experienced the league of Wales as a club and did not see its future there, because the finance is greater. It is interesting, because it should really be in an amateur league, should it not? It does not want to compete with the top clubs.

[228] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Felly, o ystyried y profiad o ddau dymor o'r strwythur newydd hwn bellach, a yw'n bryd cael adolygiad gwrthrychol o'r hyn sydd wedi digwydd dros y ddau dymor, ac o'r llwyddiannau? Mae pobl wedi awgrymu inni fod elfen o ddiflastod yn dod i mewn i unrhyw sefyllfa pan fydd clybiau yn chwarae yn erbyn ei gilydd hyd at chwe gwaith y tymor. A oes angen adolygiad gwrthrychol arnom i weld beth yw'r llwyddiannau ac a oes angen newid y system? **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Therefore, bearing in mind that there is now two seasons' experience of this new structure, is it time to hold an objective review of what has happened over those two seasons, to see what the successes are? People have suggested to us that an element of stagnation creeps into any situation in which clubs play against each other up to six times a season. Is there a need for an objective review to see what the successes are and whether the system needs to be changed?

[229] **Mr Morgan:** Byddai'n syniad da cael adolygiad. Mae'n iawn, efallai, i'r timau sydd ar y brig, ond nid i'r clybiau sydd wedi chwarae ei gilydd saith neu wyth gwaith. Rwy'n credu bod Afan Lido wedi chwarae Port Talbot wyth gwaith y tymor hwn gyda gemau'r cwpanau. Roedd diddordeb yn y gornestau lleol o gwmpas Nadolig a byddai torfeydd mawr yn dod i weld y gemau hynny. **Mr Morgan** It would be a good idea to have a review. It is fine, perhaps, for those teams that are at the top of the league, but not for those who have played each other seven or eight times. I think that Afan Lido has played Port Talbot Town eight times this season, including the cup matches. There was an interest in the derby matches around Christmas, with large crowds going to see

Fodd bynnag, pan fyddwch yn chwarae eich gilydd chwe, saith neu wyth gwaith, nid yw'r diddordeb yno. Mae pobl yn dweud, 'Gallaf eu gwyllo yr wythnos nesaf'.

those matches. However, when you play each other six, seven or eight times, the interest is not there. People say, 'I can watch them next week'.

[230] Roeddwn yn Iwerddon gyda Bohemian Football Club Dublin pan gefais fy nhrwydded broffesiynol. Cefais sgwrs gyda'r prif weithredwr a'r rheolwr yno, ac un peth a ddywedwyd wrthyf oedd nad oes cymaint o ddiddordeb yn y gemau draw fynd am eu bod yn chwarae ei gilydd mor aml. Roeddent wedi chwarae Bray Wanderers AFC chwech neu saith o weithiau y tymor hwnnw, felly nid oedd y cefnogwyr yn mynd i wyllo'r gemau oddi cartref.

I was in Ireland with the Bohemian Football Club Dublin when I got my professional licence. I had a conversation with the chief executive and the manager there, and one thing that was said to me was that there was not that much interest in the games over there because the teams play each other so often. They had played Bray Wanderers AFC six or seven times that season, and so the supporters did not make the effort to go to the away matches.

[231] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Mae hynny'n bwynt diddorol. Dywedodd un o'r tystion cyntaf y bore yma, John Deakin, wrthym fod nifer y cefnogwyr ar y dechrau wedi cynyddu, ond ei bod bellach wedi gostwng. Mae hynny'n cyd-fynd, i raddau, â'r hyn y mae Tomi newydd ei ddweud wrthym. Felly, mae hwnnw'n bwynt i'w ystyried yn ein hadroddiad.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: That is an interesting point. One of the first witnesses this morning, John Deakin, told us that the number of supporters had increased at the outset, but that there had since been a decrease. That fits, to a certain extent, with what Tomi has just told us. So, that is a point that we need to consider as part of our report.

[232] **Ann Jones:** Yes, that is an important point. You are right that supporters will go to matches and to a derby match, but they will not go if they are held seven times a season. So, you are right, that is an area that we need to consider.

[233] **Mr Morgan:** A one-off cup game is fine, but not if they are repetitive games, particularly when there is some distance between the teams in the league. If they are close in the league, that generates interest, but playing each other repetitively does not always help.

[234] **Bethan Jenkins:** Rhaid imi gyfaddef imi fynd i wyllo tîm Aberystwyth yn chwarae tra oeddwn yn byw yno, felly, rwy'n dilyn yr hyn sy'n digwydd yn Aber yn eithaf aml. Hoffwn glywed eich barn am yr hyn sy'n digwydd yn Iwerddon, gan ichi ddweud y bu ichi weithio yno. A wnaethoch drafod treialu'r system o chwarae yn yr haf yma, neu a ydych yn anghytuno â Jonathan Ford, sy'n ffan mawr o newid y tymor, ac eraill o ran hynny?

Bethan Jenkins: I must confess that I used to watch Aberystwyth Town FC play when I lived there, so I follow what happens in Aber quite often. I want to hear your opinion about what is happening in Ireland, given that you said that you used to work there. When you were there, did you discuss trialling the system of summer football here, or is that something that you disagree with Jonathan Ford, who is a big fan of changing the season, and others about?

[235] **Mr Morgan:** Mae'r cwestiwn a fyddai chwarae yn yr haf yn cynyddu'r torfeydd yn codi o hyd yn y gynghrair. Yng Nghymru, dylem edrych yn ehangach na mynd i weld gwlad arall a dilyn ei strwythur. Dylem gael model ein hunain i ddilyn, yn hytrach na dweud, 'Mae hyn yn gweithio yno'. Nid yw hynny'n golygu y byddai'n

Mr Morgan: The question of whether summer football would mean an increase in attendance figures crops up time and again in the league. In Wales, we should look further than just visiting another country and following its structure. We should have our own model to follow, rather than saying, 'This works there'. That does not mean that it

gweithio yn ein gwlad ni. Credaf weithiau y dylem feddwl am beth allem ei wneud sy'n wahanol. Ni wn yn union beth y gallai hynny fod, ond weithiau y duedd yw i feddwl 'Mae'n gweithio yn Iwerddon'.

would work in our country. I sometimes think that we should think about what we could do differently. I do not know what that would be, but sometimes the tendency is to think, 'It works in Ireland'.

[236] Eto i gyd, rhaid cofio bod y Llywodraeth yn Iwerddon wedi rhoi miliynau i mewn i'r gynghrair. Yn wir, dywedodd Pat Fenlon, y rheolwr pan oeddwn gyda chlwb y Bohemians, sydd bellach wedi mynd at Hibernian FC yn yr Alban, fod ei chwaraewyr ef ar gyflog o ryw €2,500 i €3,000 yr wythnos.

Yet again, we must remember that the Government in Ireland has put millions into the league. Indeed, Pat Fenlon, the manager at Bohemians when I was there, who was since moved to Hibernian FC in Scotland, told me that his players were on a salary of some €2,500 to €3,000 a week.

[237] **Bethan Jenkins:** A roddwyd yr arian ychwanegol hwnnw oherwydd eu bod wedi newid i chwarae yn yr haf, neu a roddwyd arian ychwanegol beth bynnag?

Bethan Jenkins: Did they get that extra money because they moved to playing in summer, or was the extra money just given anyway?

[238] **Mr Morgan:** Yr oedd y Llywodraeth yno eisiau i'r gynghrair fod yn llwyddiannus, ac mae wedi gweithio. Roedd y Bohemians o fewn un gôl ac un funud o fynd i mewn i rowndiau terfynol Cynghrair Pencampwyr Ewrop. Bu i Shamrock Rovers FC chwarae yn White Hart Lane y llynedd yng Nghynghrair Europa. Felly, maent wedi cael llwyddiant. Soniwch am safonau, felly rhaid cofio i'r Seintiau Newydd, y tymor hwn, guro'r Bohemians o bedair gôl i un, dros ddau gymal. Mae hynny'n dangos bod gennym safon hefyd. Pwy a wŷr beth all ddigwydd yn y dyfodol? Mae'n amlwg mai'r hyn sydd ei eisiau yw mwy o fuddsoddi.

Mr Morgan: The Government there wanted the league to be successful, which has worked. The Bohemians were within one goal and one minute of getting into the knock-out stage of the Champions League. Shamrock Rovers FC played at White Hart Lane last year in the Europa League, so there has been some success. You talk about standards, so you must remember that, this season, the New Saints beat the Bohemians by four goals to one, over two legs. So, that demonstrates that we have quality as well. Who knows what can happen in the future? It is clear that what is needed is more investment.

[239] **Ann Jones:** We now move onto the development of players, coaches, including at grass-roots level.

[240] **Mike Hedges:** Around £100,000 is spent annually on supporting Welsh Premier League managers and coaches to gain UEFA licences. What impact has that investment had?

11.30 a.m.

[241] **Mr Morgan:** You cannot put a price on it. When I started out as a manager, I was just a 'manager', but I am now probably a coach as well, because I have gone through the coaching education programme. I have done my C, B and A licence, and then my Pro licence. What I learned from that process has been invaluable to me as a manager. Like me, several managers in the league also coach youngsters. If you try to build something, much like what I am doing in Aberystwyth, the local youngsters look up to people. The coach education part of it is not secondary. We have to give the youngsters the proper coaching. As I said earlier, if we do not have the facilities for it, and if they are playing on a bumpy pitch, how can you expect a youngster to improve his touch? It is virtually impossible. The coach educators in Wales and the FAW Trust have done a marvellous job. Previously, at Welshpool and Porthmadog, I had several assistant managers, and I have one now, who moved on to coach

sides in the premier league, and another is in the football league. They have done their coach education in Wales, moved on and are participating at the highest level, coaching youngsters at premier league level, which proves that the system works. However, we need more of it and more coaches. I have a couple of players from across the border who play for me and also coach. In England, they have moved further forward and they have specific coaches for specific ages. It is not always the case that someone who coaches an under-10 team can coach an under-16 team, because they are completely different. The kids have grown and the specifics are different. Again, that needs investment. I am sure that the trust would agree that we need to be following that, if we are going to improve as a nation. I think that we are improving slowly, but the other countries are moving a lot faster than us and we could get left behind.

[242] **Joyce Watson:** You said that there are specific coaches for specific groups, so do you agree that there is a need to bring women in to coach women and BME coaches to coach BME football? That is my question to you because you referred particularly to recognising the needs of different groups.

[243] **Mr Morgan:** That is not my expertise, coaching. If a lady coach is good enough to coach and has achieved a B, C or A badge, she can also coach men and vice versa. If you integrate it, that is all the better because you will improve standards.

[244] **Ann Jones:** Absolutely.

[245] **Joyce Watson:** Good, thank you.

[246] **Ann Jones:** Do you want to move on to the subject of academies, Mike?

[247] **Mike Hedges:** You talked about the pitches. I always found it better when the mud trapped the ball for me.

[248] **Mr Morgan:** So, you did not have a very good touch, then?

[249] **Mike Hedges:** The touch of a pit pony, someone once said. [*Laughter.*]

[250] To come to the academy system—specifically in Aberystwyth, which I am sure you know a lot about—how successful has it been and what can be done to improve it?

[251] **Mr Morgan:** Let me put it like this: I do not think that Aberystwyth would still be in the Welsh Premier League today if we did not have an academy. I had three players who played in the academy last season. One 16-year-old played nine games for me, and the other two played a significant part in the last six weeks, coming off the bench or playing from the start. So, having three players from our academy playing in the Welsh Premier League proves that it works. Not all clubs follow that model. With the rules as they are these days, you can sign players only during the transfer window, and so on, so we are strapped for players occasionally. Sometimes, you are forced into it. Over the past two decades, I could name you quite a few players who have moved on to the football league having come through clubs' academies. I was involved with Porthmadog, for example, and when there was the change to 12 clubs, we did not quite make it, so we lost our academy status. There was a parachute payment for a year, but that area definitely needs an academy. Money should be set aside for certain areas in Wales, such as Gwynedd.

[252] Porthmadog does not have an academy, so it does not get any income from that. It has to generate its own income, which makes it difficult. When I was there, the under-16s team won the national competition, and two or three of its players have gone on to play for Porthmadog FC first team. So, the academies are definitely working, but at a cost.

Aberystwyth Town FC must pay for the university facility, instead of having our own facility for coaching where we can be in charge. For instance, if every club had a 3G pitch, you could generate a lot of income from it. That is why some clubs are looking to move in that direction, because they can use the pitch seven days a week, 24 hours a day if needs be. However, at present, we have to do what we can with what we have, and we do not have a lot.

[253] **Ann Jones:** We will move on to questions on the coverage of the Welsh Premier League in the media and attendance at matches. Gwyn, do you want to take the next questions?

[254] **Gwyn R. Price:** Good morning. Could the FAW or WPL do anything to address the general lack of coverage in the Welsh media in respect of the WPL, and to address the low attendance at matches?

[255] **Mr Morgan:** S4C will show a live game this weekend and live games have been shown every week. Football fans can be quite fickle, as can rugby and cricket fans. It depends on how successful your team is and the weather. Nowadays, we are hit badly by Sky television. I might go for a drink after a game, and lads have been there since 12.45 p.m. watching Chelsea versus Arsenal, as happened last Saturday, and TNS versus Bangor City comes on after that and they do not have to move from their seat. It does not cost them £7, or whatever the admission fee is, and they are quite relaxed in that atmosphere. Sky probably has a lot to answer for. There is football on every night of the week on Sky, and fans who are on the fence about whether they should attend matches will take a look at the weather.

[256] With regard to the media, nothing has really improved in the media in south Wales since this league started. If you look at the coverage in the *Western Mail*, the Welsh Premier League is probably given one column whereas a second division rugby game will be given four or five columns. I find it quite ridiculous that a league that will send a representative to the Champions League is given less attention than a second division rugby club. I have nothing against any other sport, but that stems from the start of the Welsh Premier League, which was not particularly well handled. In north Wales, the *Daily Post* gives great coverage to the Welsh Premier League. I call it the 'Rugby Mail' rather than the *Western Mail*.

[257] **Ann Jones:** I asked Jonathan Ford earlier about the deal with *Sgorio* for live matches and he said that he was about to begin negotiations, so I do not want to get involved in that. When you are involved in live matches—I have watched Aberystwyth on the telly—are the clubs recompensed for that? The time of the kick-off is often moved to suit television schedules, so are you recompensed for that?

[258] **Mr Morgan:** At present, clubs do not get any compensation for that. That can affect attendances: a windy afternoon or a sunny day in Rhyl can make quite a difference in the numbers coming to watch.

[259] **Ann Jones:** There are also a lot of things involved when the television cameras come—they have specific things that they want when they cover a live game, such as a media room, but some clubs do not have those facilities. So, clubs have to cobble something together, which does not give a good impression. Do you think that there should be some recompense from the television companies?

[260] **Mr Morgan:** Yes. Most grounds have the facilities anyway—they have a broadcasting room. There is one in Aberystwyth, but they do not always use it, because it is better for television if you stand on the touchline and broadcast from there. In general, the Welsh Premier League has played second fiddle, but it is growing. Like everything else, you are talking about finance. If money is given to that club, it is hopefully invested properly.

[261] **Kenneth Skates:** Briefly, on attendance, do you think that enough is being done by football clubs in terms of collaboration and ties with universities and colleges, particularly on penetrating their media, such as university and college newspapers and so on?

[262] **Mr Morgan:** One of the biggest—I would not say problems—factors is that you do not have a team in the Welsh Premier League that is east of Port Talbot. Bangor is a university town and Aberystwyth has 9,000 students. The club has tried several initiatives to try to get them to come down; you do get some who follow up and come to the next game. Initiatives are being tried all of the time to try to improve attendance, but given the other factors that we have discussed today, such as Sky and so on, you sometimes have to drag them down. On Saturday, we had 650 people watching Aberystwyth because they were allowed in free of charge, but clubs cannot afford to let people in free of charge. However, that was a particular initiative because we needed that support to help us stay in the league.

[263] **Bethan Jenkins:** Rydym wedi siarad am S4C, y *Western Mail* a'r *Daily Post*, ond beth yw eich barn am sylw i'r gemau ar newyddion BBC Cymru ac ITV Wales? A ydych yn credu bod digon o gydbwysedd â rygbi o ran sylw ar y newyddion?

Bethan Jenkins: We have spoken about S4C, the *Western Mail* and the *Daily Post*, but what is your view on coverage of the games on BBC Wales and ITV Wales news? Is there adequate balance with rugby in terms of news coverage?

[264] **Mr Morgan:** Rwy'n credu dy fod yn gwybod beth yw'r ateb i hynny.

Mr Morgan: I think that you know the answer to that.

[265] **Bethan Jenkins:** Ydw, ond roeddwn am ofyn y cwestiwn.

Bethan Jenkins: Yes, but I wanted to ask the question.

[266] **Mr Morgan:** Nac wyf. Os wyt eisiau gwybod y canlyniad ar brynhawn dydd Sadwrn, yr unig ffordd o ddod o hyd iddo yw drwy droi Radio 5 live ymlaen am 5 p.m., gan ei fod bob amser yn rhoi'r holl ganlyniadau o gynghrair Cymru.

Mr Morgan: No, there is not. If you want to know the result on a Saturday afternoon, the only way of finding out is by turning on Radio 5 live at 5 p.m., because they always give all the results from the Welsh league.

[267] Un o'r prif broblemau sydd gan Gymru yw ein bod yn unigryw—ni yw'r unig wlad sydd â chlybiau yn chwarae mewn dwy wlad. Mae hynny'n amlwg yn cael *impact* mawr iawn ar bêl-droed yng Nghymru. Rwy'n cefnogi Abertawe—byddaf, mwy na thebyg, yn mynd i wyllo'r tîm dros yr wythnosau nesaf; mae'n wych beth mae wedi'i gyflawni—ond mae llwyddiant y clwb yn tynnu oddi wrth gynghrair Cymru oherwydd ei fod yn chwarae yn Lloegr ar y lefel uchaf posibl. Fodd bynnag, mae'n rhaid i bawb gofio, 20 mlynedd yn ôl, mai dim ond rhyw 3,000 a oedd yn mynd i Barc Ninian ac i'r Vetch—10 mlynedd yn ôl yn y Vetch, roedd hynny'n wir pan oedd Abertawe yn mynd allan o'r gynghrair. Mae pobl yn ei chael yn anodd credu hynny yn awr gan fod Abertawe yn y prif gynghrair.

One of Wales's main problems is that we are unique—Wales is the only country with clubs playing in two countries. That is clearly having a huge impact on football in Wales. I support Swansea—I will probably go to watch the team in the coming weeks; it is fantastic what it has achieved—but the success of the club detracts from the Welsh league because it is playing in England at the highest level possible. However, people have to remember that, 20 years ago, only about 3,000 people used to go to Ninian Park and the Vetch—10 years ago at the Vetch, that was true of Swansea as the club fell out of the league. People now find that difficult to believe because Swansea is in the premier league.

[268] Fodd bynnag, fel gohebydd, beth

However, as a correspondent, what would

fyddai'n well gennych ei weld—Lido Afan yn erbyn Port Talbot neu Abertawe yn erbyn Manchester United? Pan oeddwn yn gweithio i Radio Cymru roeddwn yn cael mynd i Goodison Park a Roker Park ac yn y blaen, ond roeddwn hefyd yn mynd i gemau eraill yng nghynghrair Cymru. Roedd yn gyffrous cael mynd i'r lleoedd hynny, ond ar ddiwedd y dydd, rhaid inni gofio mai Cymry ydym ni ac os ydym am gadw ein hunaniaeth Gymreig, mae'n hollbwysig ein bod yn rhoi'r gefnogaeth a'r arian i'r gynghrair genedlaethol inni allu datblygu mwy o chwaraewyr i chwarae i Abertawe ac i Gymru.

you rather see—Afan Lido against Port Talbot or Swansea against Manchester United? When I worked for Radio Cymru I got to go to Goodison Park and Roker Park and so on, but I also went to other matches in the Welsh league. It was exciting to go to those places, but at the end of the day, we must remember that we are Welsh and if we want to keep our Welsh identity, it is vital that we provide support and funding to the Welsh league so that we can develop more players to play for Swansea and for Wales.

[269] **Mark Isherwood:** How big is the problem that you highlight regarding Welsh Premier League grounds and playing surfaces? What do you think could be done to address that?

11.45 a.m.

[270] **Mr Morgan:** Things have definitely improved since 1992, since the league started. The playing surfaces have improved greatly at several clubs. However, our biggest problem is that clubs have to have two or three teams and have to play their youth team games and their ladies' games on the main pitch. We had a wet winter this year—I think that it rained continuously for 56 days in Bala—[*Laughter.*] That affected the pitch. At the start of the season, the pitch in Bala was like this table—it was lovely—but after a couple of bad Saturdays with the referee allowing a game to go ahead—because it is a live game and S4C wants to show it, which is fine—it is to the detriment of Bala and it looks as though Bala has not properly invested in its pitch. So, it would be of benefit if those games could be played somewhere else. However, it costs us £100 for Aberystwyth reserve team to play on the university pitch. So, it obviously costs us money.

[271] The grounds of some clubs, which get a domestic licence, are pretty dilapidated now, because they are not getting any more money to improve them. The dressing rooms at some grounds, even in the Welsh Premier League, are now poor. You must have two toilets, but, unfortunately, they are not well looked after in some places. If you compared the situation with some of the premier league clubs in England—I know that the difference in standard is miles apart—you would not believe what you saw. They are antiquated and they have not received any further investment that is needed.

[272] The gentleman before me said that they have moved into the twentieth century but not into the twenty-first century yet. We are playing catch-up, and until we get a major investment throughout the whole of Welsh football, we will still be lagging behind in producing a future Ryan Giggs, Gareth Bale or Craig Bellamy. They are out there, but we need to ensure that we capture and nurture them all the way, from the age of six or seven. If they are not good enough to play at the very top level, we need to ensure that they are playing at the top level in their own country. We must demonstrate that standards are really good at our level—not just a little bit better than three steps down in the pyramid system.

[273] **Mark Isherwood:** What role does corporate sponsorship, direct or indirect, have in this? I believe that the new ground in Bangor received funds as a result of fundraising through the local business sector. What role can that sector play in the future?

[274] **Mr Morgan:** Without businesses supporting certain clubs, those clubs would find it difficult to remain in the Welsh Premier League.

[275] **Mark Isherwood:** So, it already plays a significant role.

[276] **Mr Morgan:** A significant amount of money is raised by major sponsors at all of the clubs that I have worked with to pay the players' wages. It is the same in several other sports as well, as we have seen in the not too distant past in relation to Welsh rugby.

[277] **Ann Jones:** I am now going to blow the whistle, although we still have a couple of other questions. We have run out of time and we cannot go into extra time. Those are all of the footballing puns that I will use. Thank you for coming today to give evidence, Tomi. Your evidence is useful because you are still very much involved in the Welsh Premier League. Although I am a season-ticket holder for a team that is not in the Welsh Premier League, I am at liberty to say to you that I hope that next season brings Aberystwyth a little more than it has this season. I have certainly enjoyed my time at the Aberystwyth ground when I have been there. Thank you. Diolch yn fawr.

11.48 a.m.

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod**
**Motion under Standing Order No. 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from
the Meeting**

[278] **Ann Jones:** I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 17.42(vi).

[279] I see that the committee is in agreement.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.

Motion agreed.

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11.49 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11.49 a.m.*