

04 August 2021

Dear Jack Sargeant MS,

**RE: Petition P-06-1170 An immediate independent review of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 selection process in the WPWL**

Thank you for your email regarding the women's restructure. Please note that Noel Mooney begins his role as CEO on 31 August.

Developing women's football is an area of high strategic importance for the FAW and we have embarked on a transformative programme aimed at strengthening the player pathway, national league as well as raising awareness and visibility of the female game in Wales.

Our successful planning, investment and support mechanisms have led to a 50% increase in female participation over the last 4 years and significantly increased media coverage for the female game.

**Strengthening the Domestic Structure**

Since 2019, we have been working with the clubs in Wales to develop and implement a plan to enhance the competitiveness of our national league. There were a number of key challenges:

- **Elite pathway:** at present, only a very limited number of our clubs can provide a high-performance environment. Our national team players play outside of Wales and the domestic game in the past hasn't fully supported elite player development.
- **Retaining Youth Players:** Players reported that the gap between junior and senior football was too big, with many dropping out at 16 because of this.
- **Fragile structure:** the long-term competitiveness of a number of clubs has been inconsistent, with few prepared for long-term success in the current Premier League
- **International competitiveness:** the current system has not been successful in terms of the UEFA Women's Champions League with no club going past the first round, with the new financial model it is critical for clubs to progress to access further investment for the women's game.



We therefore began a transition at the beginning of 2020 to strengthen our domestic women's football pyramid in terms of playing standards as well as off-field criteria such as partnerships, financial support, staffing levels and qualifications, facilities, governance, and club structure.

Working with all the clubs, our new strategic leads and with reference to international comparisons and external, independent advice and support, we undertook a Women's Domestic Game Review in 2019, which included feedback by 400 players. The clear conclusion of the Review was to reform the domestic league with a competitive pyramid structure and a focus on development and resources across the clubs. The proposals were supported at all levels of the game.

The FAW have been supporting the Tier 1 clubs over the last two years to prepare for the re-structure through club development grants and club support workshops and introducing club licensing in 2020/21 for the first time.

We embarked on a thorough process, with an independent appeals provision. The core criteria included sporting, financial sustainability, and human resources, with additional criteria for facilities, partnership working, media and communications and overall club development. Full details of the process are attached to this email.

The new league pyramid will have a new league and cup format and an exciting new brand and name for the 21/22 season and will be based on a national Tier 1, and for the first time incorporate a Tier 2 level in North and South Wales and U19s league for the first time. The structure will have a promotion and relegation opportunities, with a play off between the winners of Tier 2, so that all clubs can have a potential pathway to Tier 1.

### **New Pyramid Development Process**

Following extensive research, we agreed on a robust, thorough and clear decision-making process to determine which clubs should be allocated to which tier and launched the process in April 2020. We have shared the process with other national government bodies, football experts and partners. We liaised with FIFA, who provided additional advice, supported our proposal, and provided a technical expert for the phase 2 panel.

The successful clubs needed to demonstrate not just success at a national level, but that they had a club development plan and the resources in place to support a successful, competitive team and contribute to the wider development of the women's game.



The decision-making process, the make-up of the expert panel (including an independent technical expert from FIFA), the scoring criteria and the independent appeals provision were published **and agreed with the clubs**.

A **thorough communications and consultation programme** was put in place to ensure that the clubs understood that their final league position in 2020/21 would not be a direct entry to the higher tier, that 'sporting' would make up 20% of the available score, and that clubs needed to demonstrate their strengths across multiple areas. It was also highlighted in the league rules for 2020/21 season that there would be no promotion or relegation for the 2020/21 season as the 2020/21 season was a transitional season and that teams would be selected for the new Tier 1 and Tier 2 leagues based on the application process attached to this email.

Alongside the many presentations and direct communications, webinars for clubs were held in December 2020 and April 2021 to help prepare applications and all clubs received additional funding in 2020 to support their plans and to invest in areas required including developing U19s teams, Medical, and Coach Education.

**During this time, all clubs agreed with the process, the criteria and decision-making.** No clubs raised concerns about the scoring for sporting merit, and a number of clubs used the process to make positive changes to grow and develop both their club and women's football in their area.

We have provided feedback to clubs on their own applications, though the full scoring matrix for all clubs will not be shared, following legal advice and as agreed with the clubs during the process. Unsuccessful clubs were able to take up the option of an independent appeals process.

### **2021/22 Season**

We are working with all Tier 1 and Tier 2 clubs to develop their structures, programmes and workforce with a holistic club development support programme for 2021/22 season including a place for each club on the FIFA Capacity Building programme. We are also providing direct feedback to the affected clubs.

There is a promotion and relegation system so that all clubs have a pathway to Tier 1 for the 2022/23 season, where promoted clubs will need to meet license criteria for the relevant leagues. Any changes to the license criteria for the 2022/23 season will be communicated to all clubs before the start of the 2021/22 season on the 5<sup>th</sup> September to ensure clubs are fully aware of what criteria they need to meet should they secure promotion.

The FAW has also established a player leadership group for Tier 1 and Tier 2 to improve the communication with players moving forward and we look forward to working with the players as to help shape the future of the women's game.



Kind regards,



**Paul Evans**  
**Interim CEO**  
**Football Association of Wales**

