

CELG(4) WPL 22

# Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

## Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League

### Response from Rondo Media

#### Rondo Media – General Presentation

Rondo Media is one of the main production companies in Wales and has offices in Caernarfon, Cardiff and Menai Bridge. The company produces programmes and online material in the fields of sport, drama, music and events, children's series, and entertainment and factual programmes. The company's recent productions include the youth drama series *Rownd a Rownd*, the drama series for BBC 1 *The Indian Doctor*, and the football series *Sgorio*. The company currently has an annual turnover of over £14 million.

Rondo won a substantial contract to produce a number of new series for young people, including the drama *Gwlad yr Astra Gwyn*, and the studio shows *Gwefreiddiol* and *Fi Di Duw*. Our drama series for BBC 1, *The Indian Doctor*, won Royal Television Society and Broadcast awards. The company has produced a film of Michael Sheen's dramatic interpretation of The Passion in Port Talbot: *The Gospel of Us*. The company has also secured its first commission with Channel 4, as part of the *Cutting Edge* series.

Rondo was established in April 2008 with the uniting of two of Wales's most experienced independent production companies, Ffilmiau'r Nant and Opus TF. The company's first substantial commission was a four-year contract to broadcast Welsh Premier League games and international football games. Since then, Rondo has doubled in size and doubled its staff numbers. The popular youth drama series *Rownd a Rownd* is now broadcast twice a week on S4C. We also co-produce S4C's events series and broadcasts from *Llangollen International Eisteddfod* for S4C and BBC Wales.

The company succeeded in becoming part of the Welsh Assembly Government's and Skillset's 'Talent Attraction Scheme', the BBC's XM25 scheme, and Channel 4's Alpha Fund scheme. Currently, the company employs over 60 permanent members of staff and up to 150 part-time and freelance staff. Recently, the company invested £650,000 in new post-production offices and facilities in Caernarfon and Cardiff.

Sgorio – 1988 – 2008

# Sgorio

The first *Sgorio* programme was broadcast on 5 September 1988. Although there was an emphasis from the start on games from Spain and Italy, the first few series included a wide range of different sports, including rugby 13, rallying, ice hockey, climbing, canoeing, rafting and much more.

Following several successful series, we decided to concentrate fully on football, with an emphasis on the leagues of Spain, Italy and Germany. The *Sgorio* brand became very important to S4C, and drew in non-Welsh-speaking viewers in Wales and viewers from over the border in England.

### Sgorio 2008 – present day

In 2008, Rondo won the rights to produce the broadcasting of Welsh Premier League games, the Welsh Cup, and the highlights of Welsh international home games, and a few away games, under the *Sgorio* brand via an open tendering process held by S4C.

From the outset, the *Sgorio* team's aim was to provide programmes with high production values whilst ensuring value for money for S4C. Under the BBC's previous arrangement before the 2008/09 season, Welsh Football League games were broadcast for half an hour on Saturday evenings under the *Y Clwb Pêl-droed* brand on S4C. The broadcast included one main game and goals from one or two other games.

The *Sgorio* team felt strongly that, if the league was to be taken seriously in terms of television production and general credibility, every league game needed to be recorded, so that a record of every main event would be recorded and that an archive of historical value and of the league's development would be created. The aspiration was that *Sgorio*/Rondo would achieve this before the end of the four-year rights period. In reality, much more than this was achieved through the encouragement and support of S4C, Welsh Premier League officials and the clubs.

Since the beginning of the 2010 season, one game from the Welsh Premier League or the Welsh Cup is broadcast live on Saturday afternoons, and the highlights of every league game played over the weekend are broadcast in an hour-long *Sgorio* programme at 10pm on Mondays. (*Sgorio* was moved to Tuesdays at 6.30pm for 30 minutes a week between March and mid May 2012).

In addition to three hours of live broadcasting on Saturday afternoons and the Welsh Premier League being given prominence on the hour-long *Sgorio* programme on Monday evenings, a 10-minute version of *Sgorio* is now broadcast every week as part of S4C's provision for children and young people under the *Stwnsh* banner.

Despite the changes made during this period, *Sgorio* on Mondays and *Sgorio Stwnsh* have kept an international element and flavour to the series by continuing to show highlights from La Liga, the main Spanish league, as part of the coverage. This has ensured continuity, which enables viewers to see some of the best players, clubs and stadia in the world, alongside the Welsh Premier League, and, to the amazement of some, the two elements sit together very comfortably.

## Sgorio – the future

*Sgorio* welcomes the opportunity to improve and expand the service from the Welsh Premier League. We are now in the multi-platform age in terms of content, and it is important that our content reflects the changes in user viewing patterns and the ways in which they find content. Our aspiration next season is that a few games that are played on Friday evenings (in addition to the main live game) will be broadcast live on the web, and we have already trialled this successfully. Our content production team is already working on providing a *Sgorio* App, which will be an additional portal for followers of the league. We are also developing a “widget” system that will allow clubs to access videos of their games for their own purposes (training, websites, etc).

These developments are dependent, of course, on ensuring that enough funding is available, but they give the viewer a full opportunity to use the latest technology in order to promote the series and the achievements of the clubs and the league throughout Wales. We believe that the recent developments of broadcasting a live game on S4C every week have been a big step for the league. Having a broadcaster and the popular characters who contribute to the programme are intrinsic to the Welsh Premier League and will increase its profile.

One essential development is to ensure that league club areas have suitable high-speed broadband systems. This would allow broadcasters to broadcast on the web, and for the clubs to distribute relevant information to media agents and so on, be it news, scores, results, and so on, in a reliable and consistent way.

In terms of producing television and multi-platform output of the highest standard on the Welsh Premier League, an injection of funding would:

1. Ensure that there are facilities of a high standard to broadcast from pitches – e.g. television gantries of the required standard.
2. Ensure that there are appropriate places to set up cameras around the pitches and specific areas for presenters.
3. High-speed broadband connectivity for broadcasting, which will, of course, benefit the club and the whole local community.
4. General maintenance work and the development of the club’s facilities for the use of the team and the community.

The main other general concerns

1. The Welsh Premier League clubs’ consistent lack of success in European competitions. The results of every league club in European competitions are noted in a table showing the success of all countries. Currently, Wales is forty-sixth on a list of 53 clubs, while Cyprus, which is a much smaller country and has a population of 1,099,341, is sixteenth. The other countries that have a smaller population than Wales but whose leagues are higher than Wales’s on the UEFA list are Latvia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Malta, Iceland and Liechtenstein.
2. The lack of crowds at games. The lack of feeling in communities that games are social events.

3. The lower league clubs' lack of general ambition to improve their facilities and to apply for a domestic licence in order to secure promotion to the main league. The lack of variety in the league clubs' constitution from season to season, which leads to a lack of variety in games.

4. The condition of pitches. The standard of the football games is dependent on the condition of the pitches, and although the condition of the pitches of some clubs has improved substantially over the past years, in general, the condition of pitches in Wales needs to be greatly improved.

5. Football over the summer – a sufficient number of comments have been made on this enterprise, which is being considered, but there is a lack of evidence/detailed research regarding the maintenance and practicality of the enterprise.

Emyr Davies Rondo Media May 10, 2012