

Dawn Bowden AS/MS  
Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip  
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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Delyth Jewell MS  
Chair  
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee  
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3 March 2023

Dear Delyth,

Thank you for your letter of 3 February following my evidence session regarding the Welsh Rugby Union. In your letter you ask several follow-up questions.

**Could you explain how the Welsh Government interacts with Sport Wales to raise concerns and address matters of concern in a national governing body which is subject to such toxic allegations?**

As with other Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies in my portfolio, the working relationship between the Welsh Government and Sport Wales is managed according to the principles set out in the Framework Document. This includes formal bi-annual meetings with the Chair and Chief Executive of Sport Wales, and formal Quarterly Monitoring Meetings between my officials and the Sport Wales Executive Team. There are also more regular informal discussions on a weekly basis.

Issues of the nature raised in the BBC Wales Investigates programme are seldom, if ever, raised directly with me or my officials, as they are usually resolved between the NGB (National Governing Body) and complainants themselves. To be clear, Sport Wales did not raise any concerns relating to the WRU or the issues raised directly in the BBC Investigation with either myself or my officials.

If an issue requires escalation, then I, or my, officials will raise it directly with Sport Wales and the NGB themselves, where appropriate, depending on the nature of the issues raised. This is the course of action I have taken since the BBC Wales Investigates programme on 23 January in convening a group and working alongside the WRU and Sport Wales to initiate the external investigation now being chaired by Dame Anne Rafferty.

Of the matters highlighted in the BBC documentary, I was aware of allegations involving Ms Wathan (though not by name and without any details) that was subject to an ongoing employment tribunal. I was also aware of the comments made by the outgoing WRU Board member, Amanda Blanc, that were reported in the press and in the public domain. I was not

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

aware of the other allegations highlighted in the documentary and no other formal allegations or complaints were made to the Welsh Government, other than unspecific and unnamed allegations raised by Tonia Antoniazzi MP with me directly and her comments made in the UK Parliament.

**Are you able to outline any power you may have to restrict funding, including any Welsh Government sponsorship, to a national governing body where you have serious concerns about activity that has alleged to have happened, especially when those concerns have also been raised in formal correspondence with you?**

There is an expectation that organisations in receipt of Welsh Government funding through Sport Wales will meet the principles of its Capability Framework. The Capability Framework is built around key governance areas and focuses on the importance of behaviours, ethics and integrity within an organisation. Organisations which do not comply with the Framework may have their funding withdrawn or curtailed by Sport Wales. A link to the Capability Framework is available [here](#).

Following an assessment against the Sport Wales Capability Framework that had highlighted areas for improvement at the WRU last year, I was aware that the WRU had been prompted to undertake a review of its governance last summer which was aimed at addressing important issues, such as the composition of its Board. I have not had sight of this assessment or the governance review but these did not identify the scale of the issues covered by the BBC Investigation. I am aware that a recent audit by Deloitte into Sport Wales's partner compliance methods, including its Capability Framework, received 'significant assurance' rating, but I will be discussing with Sport Wales how further additions or improvements could be explored in ensuring the process and oversight is as robust as possible.

**Could you provide us with a breakdown, in chronological order, of when issues were raised with you and when, and any actions taken including all meetings with the WRU? We would be grateful if this could include information relating to the meeting when your official was allowed to read a copy of the Review into Women's Rugby for twenty minutes, and what actions resulted from this.**

It is important to reiterate again that the BBC Wales Investigates programme on 23 January was the first time I, or my officials, were aware of the extent and the detail of the issues raised and the named individual involved. I was aware of matters that were in the public domain (as outlined above, the ongoing Wathan case and the Amanda Blanc comments) but I was unaware of any detailed allegations, other than unspecific and unnamed allegations raised by Tonia Antoniazzi MP with me and in the public domain.

The table in Appendix A sets out the information you request, including several matters relating to the women's game and governance at the WRU which were already in the public domain. The Committee is already aware of the meetings I have had with the WRU since 23 January.

For completeness, there were two additional emails sent by Tonia Antoniazzi MP to my constituency address on the same subject that were of part of our ongoing informal discussions at the time.

The Committee should note that, alongside these formal meetings, there were other informal discussions between the WRU and myself / officials when attending events (e.g. Women's World Cup in New Zealand) about the development of the women's game, investment in its development, transgender policy, and governance (independent chair, Board composition etc.).

The Committee should also note that during the time that these matters were in the public domain:

- I had only one formal communication on the issue, which was from Tonia Antoniazzi MP in May 2022.
- I had no tabled oral questions, written questions or correspondence on the issues from any Members of the Senedd
- No statements on the issues were requested of me by any Member of the Senedd during Business Questions
- No oral questions on the issues were tabled for the First Minister
- No MPs (other than the one from Tonia Antoniazzi) wrote to me about the issues
- No rugby clubs, rugby regions or members of the public wrote to me about the issues
- No questions were raised of me or the WRU by the Senedd CCWLSIR, nor, to my knowledge, were there any discussions in the CCWLSIR about all the issues that were in the public domain prior to the BBC investigates programme on 23 January 2023.

**We would welcome copies of the correspondence you received from Tonia Antoniazzi MP in relation to this matter, and any formal response issued. Could you also outline what advice was provided to you by officials when you received this correspondence?**

A copy of the e-mail I received from Tonia Antoniazzi MP is attached as an Appendix B to this letter, along with my response.

The advice from my officials set out the key points in the e-mail, which were concerns about a culture of sexism within the organisation and archaic governance structures which prevented accountability of the NGB. The advice also noted that no specific allegations had been made in the correspondence, and that a sex discrimination case was ongoing through an employment tribunal and due to be heard in autumn 2022.

Finally, for the record, I would like to add a point of clarification to one of my answers given in the evidence session. Having reviewed the transcript, I realise that did not fully answer the question you asked.

At paragraph 274, you asked "...could you confirm Minister, did you have any contact with Amanda Blanc before her resignation about these issues?" In the following paragraph I answered "No".

It was correct to say that I did not speak to Amanda Blanc about any of these issues, but in the interests of completeness, I would like to add a point of further clarification. Following a conversation with Tonia Antoniazzi MP, I did attempt to speak with Ms Blanc in April 2022, but failed to reach her. I left a message explaining the limitations of any discussion with her unless her contact was made formal. She responded with a message to advise that she did not wish to take up the offer of a conversation. I had no further contact with her.

Yours sincerely



**Dawn Bowden AS/MS**

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DATE	ISSUE
25/11/2021	Amanda Blanc announced her decision to resign from the Board of the WRU, and as Chair of the Professional Rugby Board. No reasons were given for her resignation.
16/12/2021	I met with the former Chief Executive of the WRU, the WRU Community Director, WRU Performance Director and captain of the Women's National Team to discuss Women's rugby in Wales, the report into match-day experience following the 2021 Autumn Internationals and the proposed CLBILS loan
02/02/2022	I met with the former Chief Executive of the WRU to discuss the match-day experience ahead of the 2022 Six Nations, the proposed CLBILS loan and travel issues relating to fixtures in South Africa.
03/03/2022	Tonia Antoniazzi MP raised the WRU's report into the women's game during the St David's Day debate in the House of Commons, and called for its publication.
24/03/2022	<p>The Daily Mail published an article referring to allegations of sexism and misogyny, and to an ongoing Employment Tribunal. The story is picked up the following day by the Western Mail.</p> <p><a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/sportsnews/article-10645119/Welsh-Rugby-Union-turmoil-rape-joke-Hitler-jibe-amid-claims-misogyny-sexism.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/sportsnews/article-10645119/Welsh-Rugby-Union-turmoil-rape-joke-Hitler-jibe-amid-claims-misogyny-sexism.html</a></p>
29/03/2022	I met with Tonia Antoniazzi to discuss a range of issues relating to the loan we had agreed with the WRU, the progress in the women's game/report and improvements still needed and the recently published transgender guidance from the sports councils across the UK and the potential issues rugby faced with it.
30/03/2022	I met with the former Chief Executive of the WRU to discuss the CLBILS loan, the women's game/report, the consultation on mixed rugby and a review of the match-day experience following the conclusion of the 2022 Six Nations.
17/04/2022	<p>The former Chief Executive of the WRU responded to the allegations raised in the Daily Mail article.</p> <p><a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/61126215">https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/61126215</a></p>
29/04/2022	My official was handed a paper copy of the report into the women's game for around 20 minutes whilst attending a meeting with the former Chief Executive at the Principality Stadium. His summary of the report, whilst acknowledging he did not have sufficient time to read the report in full, was that the primary focus of the report and its recommendations was on the management and the playing side of women's rugby and did not relate to cultural issues more generally at the WRU.

09/05/2022	I received formal correspondence from Tonia Antoniazzi MP, which raised in general terms, her concerns about deep-rooted sexism and misogyny at the WRU, and an outdated governance model which was hindering accountability. Two emails raising the same issue were sent to my constituency address and were not responded to as I was responding in full to the formal correspondence.
28/05/2022	I responded to Tonia Antoniazzi MP by letter notifying her I hadn't received specific details of any cases and that stated that any individual or groups wishing to raise complaints or concerns should follow the organisation's complaints or whistleblowing processes in the first instance, before deciding whether or not to escalate matters further.
15/06/2022	Amanda Blanc expanded on her decision to resign from the Board of the WRU and as Chair of the Professional Rugby Board, saying that she was not being listened to and that the governance of the WRU needed modernisation.
13/12/2022	The BBC reports that the WRU and its former general manager of women's rugby, Charlotte Wathan, have reached an "amicable resolution" regarding claims of sexual discrimination, leading to the employment tribunal case being withdrawn.
11/01/2023	I met with the former Chief Executive and recently elected Chair of the WRU for a wide-ranging discussion which covered governance and the review, funding, matchday experience, WRU Transgender policy, Sport Wales Investment model, Investment in women's rugby, and Business Rates revaluation.

## Letter from Tonia Antoniazzi MP



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## Response to Tonia Antoniazzi MP's Letter



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