

9 March 2023

Dear

ATISN 17148 – Correspondence regarding the WRU

Thank you for your request which I received on 13 February 2023. You asked for:

Tonia Antoniazzi MP's letter to Dawn Bowden MS sent on 9 May 2022, and the subsequent response.

Any and all communication between Ministers and officials regarding both letters or relating to issues raised in the letters and anything relating to the WRU since May 2021.

Following your response to my clarification letter I sent on 16 February; you emailed an amended request that narrowed the scope to all correspondence between the WRU and the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport on equality and diversity matters since May 2021.

Our response

The requested correspondence between Tonia Antoniazzi MP and Dawn Bowden MS is attached in the Annexes below. For reference I have included a table with links to each item:

Annex 1	Email – Tonia Antoniazzi MP to Dawn Bowden	9 May 2022
Annex 2	Letter - Dawn Bowden MS to Tonia Antoniazzi	23 May 2022

All correspondence between the WRU and the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport on equality and diversity matters since May 2021:

Annex 3	Letter – DM to WRU - Trans inclusion policy	19 October 2022
Annex 4	Letter – DM to Ieuan Evans	27 January 2023

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office,

Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely

Annex 1: Email – Tonia Antoniazzi MP to Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport – 9 May 2022

From: ANTONIAZZI, Tonia <tonia.antoniazzi.mp@parliament.uk>
Sent: 09 May 2022 21:30
To: Correspondence mail - DB <Correspondence.Dawn.Bowden@gov.wales>
Cc: HART, Estelle <estelle.hart@parliament.uk>
Subject: Concerns regarding the WRU

Dear Dawn,

I am writing to you formally, in your capacity as the Minister for Sport to raise grave concerns I have about the Welsh Rugby Union. There is a deep seated culture of sexism within the WRU which I am afraid will soon become public and that will paint the Welsh Government and those that fund the WRU such as the sponsors and Sport Wales in a negative light. I am concerned that the WRU are not held to account for their behaviour and for their actions as their governance system is archaic and this has resulted in problems within the institution not being dealt with properly and transparently. We have seen this in the review of women's rugby which was completed last year. This document has not been published and there has not been an apology to women who have played and that are playing currently for the way in which they have failed to be the custodians of the game that they had set out to do when they took over the management of the women's game.

My concerns are reflected in the resignation of Amanda Blanc from the WRU Executive Board, after only seeing out 2 of her 6 year tenure. Amanda is the current CEO of Aviva and one of the United Kingdom's high achieving women. Concerns also have been raised anonymously in the media, you may have seen the report in the Daily Mail in March regarding a sex discrimination case which is to be brought in front of a judge in the early autumn. These are only two of a number of cases that have been brought to my attention. I have been unable to speak to and contact the other women myself, but I am very aware of someone in the media having built a comprehensive list of women who are all prepared to go public. From within the WRU, I have spoken to 3 people who have shared my concerns and more concerningly confirmed what I already knew about the organisation.

This is not just a case of one or two people having a spat with the WRU, this is a huge problem on the scale of racism in Yorkshire cricket. I am asking you to speak to these individuals in confidence in order to collaborate the concerns I have raised in this email. As an ambassador of a local girls hub, I have a duty as their MP to ensure that the mistakes of the past and present do not hinder the future careers of women and girls in rugby, and that they are safe to work in the world of rugby and play the sport that they love.

I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Best wishes,

Tonia

Tonia Antoniazzi
Member of Parliament for Gower / Aelod Seneddol dros Gŵyr



Tonia ANTONIAZZI MP
Member of Parliament for **Gower**

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View privacy notice - <https://www.toniaantoniazzi.co.uk/privacy-policy.html>

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**Annex 2: Letter - Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport to Tonia Antoniazzi MP –
23 May 2022**

Ein cyf/Our ref DB/00277/22
Tonia Antoniazzi MP
Member of Parliament for Gower

tonia.antoniazzi.mp@parliament.uk

May 2022

Dear Tonia

Thank you for your correspondence dated 9 May 2022 raising a number of concerns regarding the Welsh Rugby Union.

There have been recent positive developments in the women's game in Wales to address longstanding issues. However, I am very clear that this is only the beginning of the journey. The WRU still has much to do and I expect them to continue to build on this progress leading to this year's World Cup and beyond. It will be an area I will continue to press for improvements in my discussions with the Chief Executive, and others.

My understanding is the foundation for many of these recent changes we have seen in the women's game have been driven by the review undertaken last year. Whilst I have not seen the report directly, I recognise the concerns raised about the report not being made public and I have engaged with the WRU to understand their approach. It is my understanding that it was always intended to be an internal report to allow consultees and the authors the freedom to be candid in their views of the issues and the changes needed in the women's game. A public-facing report may not have reached the same conclusions and to release the report now may betray the confidences of those involved. However, in moving the game forward, it is critical that the WRU demonstrates that the approach it is taking is being developed with players and stakeholders and that their actions reflect that partnership working.

Whilst I am unable to comment on an ongoing employment tribunal, we should be very clear 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.

I have not received any direct representations on any such concerns you highlight.

Yours sincerely

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip

Annex 3: Letter – DM to WRU - Trans inclusion policy

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

**Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip**

Hannah Blythyn AS/MS

**Y Dirprwy Weinidog Partneriaeth Gymdeithasol Deputy Minister
for Social Partnership**



**Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government**

Ein cyf/Our ref DB/767/22

Rob Butcher
Chair
Welsh Rugby Union

[Personal details redacted]

19 October 2022

Dear Rob,

We are writing to you regarding your recently published transgender policy from our respective ministerial portfolios for social justice (including LGBTQ+ equality), and sport. We are concerned by the blanket exclusion of trans women and girls from rugby that your policy recommends. The Welsh Government believes that decisions on transgender people's participation in any part of society should come from a starting point of inclusion. LGBTQ+ rights, including trans rights, are human rights. Sport should be for everyone. A place where everyone can take part and where everyone is treated with kindness, dignity and respect. Our preferred position is to follow a case-by-case approach, rather than a blanket exclusion of transgender people.

We acknowledge that you have engaged with officials in both our departments to advise that this policy was in development. It would be useful to understand why the WRU feels it needs a policy of this nature, one that does not start from a point of inclusivity or use a case-by-case approach, and why at this time, given there are no registered transgender players in the community game in Wales. It would also be useful to know why the policy has a different approach for the treatment of trans men and trans women.

You have said that in coming to your stated policy position you engaged across the community. We would like to understand which organisations or communities you consulted with during the development of this policy, and what their respective views were.

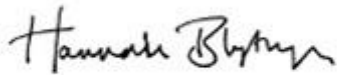
If it would help, we would be happy to meet prior to receiving a formal response to this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip



Hannah Blythyn AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Partneriaeth Gymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Partnership

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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.

Annex 4: Letter – DM to Ieuan Evans – 27 January 2023

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

Ein cyf/Our ref DB/PO/26/23

Ieuan Evans
Chair
Welsh Rugby Union

27 January 2023

Dear Ieuan,

This has been a distressing week for Welsh rugby with significant implications for former and current WRU staff as well as players, clubs and communities across Wales. The details in the testimonies provided in the BBC Wales Investigates programme were devastating and I recognise the courage it takes for anyone to speak out after experiencing abuse, harassment, or bullying.

The Welsh Government will not be a bystander to abuse, and we are committed to tackling harassment, bullying and all forms of violence against women head on. Women and girls should be and feel safe in all aspects of their lives, including the workplace. We expect the same level of commitment from all our partners, stakeholders and citizens, including the WRU.

The WRU occupies a special place in Wales' sporting, economic and civic life. Its history is interwoven with the nation's story and the game is a vehicle for unique Welsh expression on a global scale. The institution reaches into villages, towns and cities across Wales and has the power to bring people together.

All of us have an interest in seeing a well led, modern WRU that supports grassroots and elite level success while protecting the rights and wellbeing of its employees and promoting Wales to the world.

It is important that the WRU's status as an independent business is clear and well understood. While the Welsh Government will play an active role in addressing the serious issues in hand, I am clear that it is for the WRU to take the necessary action to ensure that the business emerges with the governance, policies and culture that are fit for the future.

I would like to set out our expectations as you develop what must be an urgent, transparent and comprehensive response to these incredibly serious challenges and allegations.

As I stated in the Senedd, a healthy workplace would not be subject to complaints of the scale and nature exposed in the BBC Wales programme. Our firm view is that victims

should be believed when they come forward. In the interests of employee welfare, I urge you to ensure that all WRU staff are now provided with information on the support that is available to them.

Live Fear Free is a free, confidential helpline for anyone experiencing any form of violence against women, harassment or abuse.

Live Fear Free

Call: 0808 80 10 800

Text: 07860077333

Live Chat: www.gov.wales/live-fear-free

Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales

Employees who require advice on their rights at work can also access information and advice via ACAS and their trade union. Where there is no trade union representation, employees may wish to access the union finder [tool](#) hosted by the TUC.

In addition to providing clear signposting for all employees, the organisation should work urgently to assess what immediate actions are required to support staff wellbeing and address incidents and behaviours that require interventions that cannot be delayed by any external review. Where disciplinary action – including dismissal – is necessary, such proceedings should not be postponed until the outcome of a broader review. It is crucial that these matters are acted on in a robust and consistent manner.

My recent discussions with the WRU have not provided me with a reassurance that such action has been taken and I remain concerned that the issues raised by complainants are not being acted on in a manner that upholds workplace policies and employment protections.

Looking ahead, any external review ought to address the workplace culture and support WRU to implement the necessary changes to allow women, and all employees, to enjoy a safe workplace free from harassment, abuse and bullying of all forms.

I note the commitment made by the Chair in the press conference earlier this week to undertake an 'external investigation' and the need for close engagement with partners, including the Welsh Government.

I welcome the opportunity to meet earlier today to hear about your intended next steps and reiterate here the need for a process that is truly independent, transparent and informed by partners to help restore trust within a plan that ensures positive and lasting change.

I must stress that openness and transparency are paramount, and I would expect to see the findings and recommendations made public.

In the same spirit of openness and transparency, I am repeating my request for you to publish the review you conducted into the women's game in 2021.

If individuals have concerns that they may be identified as a result, there are well-established methods you can employ which would maintain their anonymity. I would further request a public statement from the WRU on how you have responded to the review and how you are planning for the further development of the women's game. I have seen for myself that the WRU has made positive recent progress in developing the women's game in Wales with professional contracts for the national team and a newly formed development team, to outline a few examples, all increasing the opportunities for women and girls in rugby.

As the Deputy Minister for Sport, I am taking the matters raised in the BBC documentary extremely seriously and will continue to press in the strongest possible way for immediate and transformative reform in the WRU, to restore trust in an organisation that has a truly unique contribution to make.

I am ambitious about the future of Welsh rugby and I pay tribute to all those who continue to dedicate so much to the game with a passion that does Wales proud. The volunteers who give their time to invest in the game at a local level help to sustain local communities and fuel a system that produces the talent has seen Wales teams, clubs and regions reach incredible feats.

This a bad moment for Welsh rugby but my hope is that we can now work together – alongside wider partners – to restore trust and confidence in an organisation that is capable of bringing pride and, at times, sheer joy to the lives of so many across Wales. They deserve better and we are truly invested in this opportunity to help everyone feel positive about the future of Welsh rugby.

I am grateful for the way you have communicated with me in recent days and would be grateful for a further meeting with you next week.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, International Relations and Sport Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip

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