

Joint Supporters Group meeting with the Welsh Rugby Union

Monday 8th April 2019, 5pm

Principality Stadium, Cardiff

Attendees:

Cardiff Blues Supporters' Club	Sarah Hopkins, Catherine Smart, David Elsmere
CRYS16	Barrie Jones, Ian Lewis, Gareth Payne
Dragons Official Supporters' Club	Dan Hallett, Ryan Price
Ospreys Supporters' Club	Nigel Jones, Grant Berni, Lynne Jones
Welsh Rugby Union	Martyn Phillips, Mark Killingley

Agenda:

1. Update on Project Reset and the way forward
2. Player retention/pay bands
3. Communication from this meeting
4. Any Other Business

SH thanked MP and MK for meeting with the JSG so soon after the last meeting. It was acknowledged that things had changed reasonably substantially since the last meeting and that updates from PRB statements had confirmed the change in position.

1 – Update on Project Reset

The MP said that it was no longer deemed to be 'Project Reset' any reference should be made to the Professional Rugby Strategy which covered the five Professional Entities (the four regions and the WRU).

PRB were focussed on doing right thing for the game and whilst it was agreed that the current position was 'business as usual', the facts remain that a long-term status quo was not deemed to be an option as it doesn't generate enough income to be sustainable.

JSG asked whether consideration had been given to the appointment of a Supporter Director on the PRB. MP said that this wasn't really on the agenda and that the focus was on appointment of non-exec Directors as they can bring required skills to the board. In addition, it was not possible to make room for all stakeholder representatives on the PRB – e.g. the players also wanted representation. He confirmed that members of the PRB have fiduciary duties.

However, it was noted that PRB wanted and needed to take the views and feedback from supporters into account, and that the JSG would be the preferred option to do this more formally and on a regular basis.

MP went on to say that since 2016, there had been an increase in funding from WRU to the regions from £10 to £20m (graph attached). This totally around £32m to the four regions in addition to the clubs' commercial and ticketing income.

There was a detailed discussion in respect of the supporter experience and ticketing. MK said that the research seemed to suggest that the price of season tickets were too low but that the overall price point on match tickets was about right. One of the key requirements for all regions was to drive attendances up. There was agreement from all that regions could and should do better – but under resourced in commercial departments.

JSG representatives raised some frustrations about regional teams not using players to better leverage their brand and start to build on international successes back in the local areas.

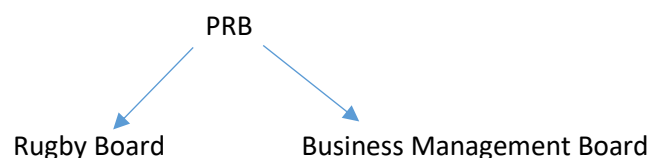
JSG and WRU agreed that a lot of the media articles written about the regions seemed to have a negative spin – intended to 'create a good headline' – which was undermining the hard work being undertaken by the regions and not encouraging people who were not already committed to regional rugby to have a desire to attend.

MP reminded JSG that there were seven agreed key indicators of success for the regions, including:

- Welsh International players
- Youth Development and Academy
- Management structure / coaching / governance
- Community
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Work is ongoing on a formula based funding model going forward to better link funding to these areas of success.

A question was asked about the commercial structure:



Rugby Board – Team Managers from regions and Head Coaches

Business Board – tasked with reducing costs, leveraging economies of scale and increasing income.

2 – Player Retention and Pay Bands

JSG asked about the recent departures of promising young players and whether the changes to the pay bands were preventing the retention of key talent. MP said that, whilst he was not prepared to

discuss individual players, some wanted to seek a different experience and that pay bands were not a factor in their decisions.

JSG asked whether regions were able to 'top-up' the pay bandings offered to individual players – thus encouraging players to choose one region over another. MP confirmed that this was allowed, but only to the top of the relevant banding. There was a further discussion about the perceived value of a player being different to different regions based on their depth in that particular position.

The discussion moved onto whether the first season of working with Premier Sports had been deemed a success for the Pro 14. MP said that feedback seemed positive and that he understood viewing figures for the coverage to be broadly in line with that experienced by the BBC. He reminded JSG that BBC did not bid to cover the Pro 14. JSG members said that the coverage was good and it was encouraging to see decent exposure on regional rugby, as national media outlets traditionally focused on Team Wales.

MP agreed that the focus from the media on Team Wales did not help the regions and that he would prefer to see more balanced coverage. He said that there was work to do to educate many people attending Wales games that the team were successful because of, and not in spite of, the regional teams.

3 – Communication from this meeting

Notes of the meeting would be produced by JSG and circulated to the group prior to publishing to members.

4 - AOB

There was no other business and it was agreed that the group would meet again in a few months – date tbc.