

The Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League

Response by Anthony Oldfield

INQUIRY INTO THE FUTURE OF THE WELSH PREMIER LEAGUE

The Welsh Premier League (WPL) has a standard of play that is, in my opinion, some of the lowest in Europe. The crowds are low, with the highest so far for 2011/12 being 804, and the overall average being 319. If Bangor City were not in league, these figures would be worse than they are already. The standards of the grounds is consistently poor with one or two notable exceptions.

The big name clubs in Wales compete in another country's league-Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham. Other clubs in Wales such as Newport, Merthyr and Colwyn Bay play in the English non-league because they see the WPL as a dead end.

The standard of refereeing is consistently low. The quality of the game's administrators is also of an extremely low calibre as reflected by the sad state of the WPL. The change of format to 12 clubs at the last minute, instead of the projected 10, being a prime example of how botched the recent re-organization was. The administrators built a new headquarters in Cardiff at a large cost whilst the game in Wales is dying on its feet for lack of investment, especially at the grass roots. The awarding of domestic licences is another bone of contention with a seeming bias against some clubs who do not seem to fit into the FAW's plans.

The WPL and the pyramid need drastic re-organization to change its image and perception with the media and public.

- Bring back the clubs from English exile to ensure that the league has a decent standard of football and make the English exiles compete in the FAW cup.
- Make the competitions more exciting so that clubs do not play each other 6 to 8 times per season with competitions such as the BBC floodlit competition .
- Consider summer football along the lines of the League of Ireland playing from March to November.
- Revamp the FAW hierarchy to make it more accountable to the member clubs

- Ensure that cash is invested at grass roots level to fund academies and the development of young talent.
- Invest more cash in the WPL clubs infrastructure so that they can compete in Europe- with TNS providing a role model of how a development programme should look.

Conclusion

Welsh football has been in the doldrums for far too long. It is depressing to see the sad state of Welsh football with poor attendances and the main clubs not playing in their country's league at all. Urgent action is needed to see that the game at the grass roots and the WPL does not die on its' feet. Something drastic needs to be done. Unfortunately it really is that bad!