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**S4C submission to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee  
inquiry into the Welsh Premier League**

13 April 2012

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 S4C is a public service broadcaster that provides a range of high quality Welsh language programmes on many platforms, including television and broadband.
- 1.2 In partnership with the production company Rondo Media, S4C is proud to be the main broadcast partner for domestic football in Wales and has been the primary broadcaster of the Welsh Premier League (WPL) and the Welsh Cup for the past 10 years.
- 1.3 The nature of this coverage has developed during that time and this season saw S4C broadcast a live Welsh football match every Saturday afternoon during the season. This was in addition to the highlights programme *Sgorio* which offers weekly coverage of the WPL, Welsh clubs and European football. The *Sgorio* website has also been enhanced and now carries full highlights of all WPL matches.
- 1.4 S4C is about to conclude its negotiations with the Football Association of Wales (FAW) on a new content agreement and is confident that through this agreement it can again expand its coverage of Welsh football. S4C's coverage of WPL clubs has extended to their European campaigns. The partnerships with the FAW and the WPL show S4C's commitment to high quality coverage of football and represent a significant investment in the game in Wales.

## 2. S4C Response to the inquiry questions

- 2.1 S4C believes that the standard of football in the WPL has improved considerably over the last few seasons. Better players are being attracted to the League. However, there is concern about the standard of playing surfaces which vary from ground to ground.
- 2.2 The new WPL format, with a mid season split between the top and lower six teams and the inclusion of play off matches, is appealing to a broadcaster because meaningful fixtures are guaranteed through to the end of the season. The financial constraints at club level are well documented and increasing the number of teams participating in the WPL may not necessarily provide a long term, sustainable answer to increasing interest and attendances in the League.
- 2.3 S4C understands that the FAW is consulting with the clubs regarding restructuring the League Cup format and that the clubs have expressed a desire to play the competition in the early part of the season. This could diminish any perceived repetitive element in the second part of the league season.
- 2.4 S4C does not believe that a move to summer football will greatly enhance the viewing experience. Such a move may attract higher quality players who want to play outside of the traditional season and offer better playing surfaces, but S4C doubts that it would raise the profile of the League within local communities as fewer people watch television during the longer summer evenings.
- 2.5 As regards the WPL's standing within the Welsh sports landscape and media, S4C is proud of its own investment and coverage of the League. This television coverage is the main media outlet for the game in Wales and there is no doubt that greater coverage in other media outlets (for example Welsh daily and weekly newspapers) would further enhance the profile of the League.
- 2.6 The FAW have told S4C that they are hoping, with the co-operation of the clubs, to offer media outlets access to match reports which will be cost neutral to them. It may also be worth the FAW considering seeking a dedicated sponsor for any additional coverage in the print media.
- 2.7 S4C has expressed an ambition to extend the present WPL coverage to include the webcasting of live matches on Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons. This would be in addition to the broadcasting of the live match on Saturday afternoons. S4C is the only UK broadcaster that shows live football on a Saturday afternoon. This slot reaches a wide audience. During its discussions with the FAW for the next domestic television agreement, S4C has agreed to allow BBC Wales access on a Friday night to share highlight clips of the previous weekend's League matches. Working in partnership with BBC Wales and the production company in this way, S4C could help increase League attendances and television audiences.

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- 2.8 Over recent years clubs have striven to improve their facilities and the current FAW licensing system too has led to improvements. More work needs to be done in this field in partnership with S4C and the Channel's production suppliers. The main concerns are the standard of floodlighting and television gantry access.
- 2.9 S4C and the WPL are committed to involving communities in football. S4C understands that the FAW's long term goal is to have a '3G' artificial pitch attached to all WPL grounds. The availability of an all-weather pitch at clubs across Wales could help develop the game of football and put clubs at the sporting heart of their communities. S4C would support such a move.

### **3. Conclusion**

- 3.1 S4C greatly values the WPL and recognises the role that it plays in the development of football in Wales. Improving playing surfaces at certain clubs should be made a priority and S4C would also support initiatives to ensure better attendances at matches.
- 3.2 In conclusion, S4C believes the WPL is, and has been, a force for progress in Welsh football. The format of the League works well and there have been real developments in clubs and facilities across Wales as a direct result of the League's success. But there are areas which the WPL could seek to improve and S4C would suggest prioritising the following:
- Raising the profile of the WPL throughout Wales and beyond.
  - Improving playing surfaces.
  - Raising attendance figures.
  - Improving media facilities.
  - Placing the clubs at the heart of communities.