



INDIGO GROUP & WELSH RUGBY UNION

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# A Strategic Partnership Framework for Community Rugby in Wales

*Strengthening Clubs. Supporting Schools. Developing Players.*

*Securing the Future of Welsh Rugby.*



Discussion Draft • Prepared for the Welsh Rugby Union and interested partners

# Contents

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|                                                                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Executive Summary</b> .....                                                              | 3  |
| <b>The Case for Change</b> .....                                                            | 3  |
| <b>Why Indigo?</b> .....                                                                    | 4  |
| <b>Shared Vision</b> .....                                                                  | 4  |
| <b>Guiding Principles</b> .....                                                             | 4  |
| <b>What We Are Asking the WRU</b> .....                                                     | 4  |
| <b>Partnership Framework</b> .....                                                          | 5  |
| Strategic Pillar One: Strengthening the Rugby Ecosystem .....                               | 6  |
| Strategic Pillar Two: Player Registration, Welfare & Safeguarding .....                     | 8  |
| Strategic Pillar Three: Competition, Calendar & Player Development Pathway .....            | 9  |
| Strategic Pillar Four: Talent Identification, Relative Age Effect & Player Development..... | 10 |
| Strategic Pillar Five: People Development.....                                              | 12 |
| Strategic Pillar Six: Athlete Development, Education & Wellbeing .....                      | 13 |
| Strategic Pillar Seven: Clubs, Schools & Community Growth .....                             | 14 |
| Strategic Pillar Eight: Commercial & Community Growth .....                                 | 15 |
| Strategic Pillar Nine: Indigo Rugby Benevolent Trust .....                                  | 16 |
| Strategic Pillar Ten: East vs West Wales Representative Programme & Festival .....          | 17 |
| <b>Governance &amp; Delivery</b> .....                                                      | 19 |
| <b>Three-Year Implementation Framework</b> .....                                            | 19 |
| <b>Measuring Success</b> .....                                                              | 20 |
| <b>National Legacy</b> .....                                                                | 20 |

## Executive Summary

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Welsh rugby is built upon one of the strongest community sporting traditions in the world. For generations, rugby clubs, schools, volunteers and local communities have provided opportunities for young people to participate, compete and develop. That heritage remains one of the game's greatest strengths.

The environment in which grassroots rugby now operates, however, is changing rapidly. Clubs face increasing financial pressures, volunteers carry greater responsibilities than ever before, participation patterns continue to evolve, and families face rising costs associated with youth sport. At the same time, young people have more sporting and recreational opportunities competing for their attention than at any point in recent history.

This Strategic Partnership Framework proposes a collaborative approach between the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) and Indigo Group that strengthens, rather than replaces, the existing rugby ecosystem. The partnership combines the governance, technical expertise, safeguarding standards and national player pathways of the WRU with Indigo Group's capability in operational delivery, commercial development, digital innovation and local academy support.

Rather than creating a competing structure, Indigo Academy Franchises will operate as locally licensed delivery partners working alongside community clubs and schools to increase participation, improve player development and strengthen local rugby communities.

The partnership has five primary objectives: strengthen community clubs and school rugby; improve player development and long-term athlete outcomes; create a transparent and nationally aligned player pathway; build sustainable commercial income that is reinvested into grassroots rugby; and remove financial barriers that prevent children from participating.

Success will not be measured solely through match results or representative selection. It will be measured by stronger clubs, healthier communities, better coaches, more volunteers, increased participation, improved player retention and a sustainable future for Welsh rugby. This document is intended as a working framework for discussion between the WRU and Indigo Group. It provides a basis for collaborative development rather than a fixed proposal, recognising that the strongest long-term outcomes will be achieved through partnership.

## The Case for Change

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Welsh rugby possesses enormous strengths. Its club network remains one of the most recognisable sporting communities in the world. Thousands of volunteers dedicate their time every week to coaching, officiating, administering and supporting players of every age. Schools continue to introduce young people to rugby while regional and national pathways provide opportunities for talented players to progress to the highest levels of the game.

These strengths provide an excellent foundation. However, the environment surrounding grassroots sport has changed significantly. Participation habits are changing. Volunteer capacity is reducing. Family finances are under increasing pressure. Competition from other sports and activities continues to grow. Many clubs face increasing demands without equivalent increases in resources.

The challenge facing Welsh rugby is therefore not preserving what already exists. It is ensuring that community rugby remains sustainable for the next generation. The question is not whether change is required. The question is how change can strengthen, rather than disrupt, the existing game.

This partnership seeks to answer that question by connecting people, organisations and resources that already exist across Welsh rugby. The opportunity is not to rebuild the game. The opportunity is to better align clubs, schools, academy delivery, commercial investment and WRU governance within one national framework delivered locally.

## Why Indigo?

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The WRU already possesses outstanding expertise in governance, safeguarding, coach education and national player pathways. The purpose of this proposal is not to duplicate those strengths. It is to complement them.

Indigo Group has been established to deliver the operational, commercial and technological capability required to support a modern grassroots rugby ecosystem. This includes academy operations, commercial partnership development, a digital membership platform (the Indigo Hub), community engagement, franchise support and quality assurance, athlete development programmes, marketing and communications, data and performance reporting, and financial sustainability initiatives.

By combining these capabilities with the WRU's governance and technical leadership, the partnership creates a model where each organisation focuses on its areas of greatest expertise. The WRU governs the game. Indigo strengthens the delivery of the grassroots game. Together they create greater value than either organisation could deliver independently.

## Shared Vision

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*To create the UK's leading grassroots rugby ecosystem by combining the governance and heritage of the Welsh Rugby Union with Indigo Group's innovation, investment and delivery capability to strengthen clubs, support schools, develop better athletes and provide every young person with the opportunity to reach their potential within Welsh rugby.*

## Guiding Principles

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- Player First - long-term development and welfare underpin every decision.
- Club & School First - Indigo exists to strengthen, not replace, existing rugby environments.
- One National Pathway. Delivered Locally.
- Competitive Excellence Through Development - winning matters and is achieved through excellent coaching and player development.
- Evidence-Led Decision Making - modern coaching, sports science and talent identification inform delivery.
- Inclusive & Sustainable Growth - every child should have the opportunity to participate regardless of background.
- Commercial Success Supporting Rugby - revenue exists to strengthen grassroots rugby.

## What We Are Asking the WRU

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This document is not seeking to replace existing structures or create a parallel pathway. Instead, Indigo Group invites the Welsh Rugby Union to establish a strategic partnership that combines the strengths of both organisations to achieve shared objectives.

- Recognise Indigo Group as an approved academy delivery partner operating within an agreed national framework.
- Establish a Joint Steering Group responsible for overseeing the partnership, monitoring performance and ensuring delivery remains aligned with Welsh rugby.
- Work collaboratively to align registration processes, safeguarding standards, eligibility guidance and player welfare procedures wherever practical.
- Recognise a transparent player development pathway linking community clubs, schools, Indigo Academies, East vs West Wales, regional observation and professional pathways.

- Collaborate to strengthen the coaching, volunteer and referee workforce through shared education, mentoring and professional development.
- Work together to establish a commercial ecosystem capable of generating recurring investment into grassroots rugby.
- Recognise the Indigo Rugby Benevolent Trust as a strategic partner supporting equality of opportunity within Welsh rugby.
- Develop an evidence-led approach to participation, player development and programme evaluation through agreed performance measures and appropriate data sharing.

## Partnership Framework

The proposed partnership is founded on a simple principle: every organisation should focus on what it does best. The WRU has responsibility for governing and developing the game nationally. Indigo Group provides additional operational capacity, commercial capability and digital infrastructure. Community clubs and schools remain the foundation of player participation and development. Indigo Academy Franchises become the local delivery mechanism that connects these organisations together.

Rather than operating independently, every academy franchise will work within an agreed national framework, supporting local clubs and schools while maintaining consistent standards across Wales. The partnership therefore creates one connected ecosystem where national strategy is delivered locally without compromising the identity of individual communities.

## Partnership Responsibilities

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | The WRU remains responsible for the governance and long-term strategic development of Welsh rugby. Within this partnership the WRU will provide governance and quality assurance, set safeguarding standards, maintain oversight of player welfare, lead national coach accreditation, oversee competition regulations, maintain the national performance pathway and participate in strategic governance.                            |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Indigo Group becomes the national delivery partner responsible for implementing the agreed operating model. Indigo will develop and support the academy franchise network, maintain national operating standards, deliver digital infrastructure, manage commercial partnerships, coordinate the Indigo Hub, deliver athlete development programmes, coordinate Representative Weekend and operate the Indigo Rugby Benevolent Trust. |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Every Academy Franchise operates under licence from Indigo Group and forms part of the national partnership framework. Each Franchise will deliver academy programmes locally, work collaboratively with clubs and schools, recruit and support coaches, maintain safeguarding compliance, support local commercial partnerships and report against agreed quality standards.                                                         |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Community clubs and schools remain the primary environments in which young people experience rugby. The partnership exists to support them, not replace them. Clubs and schools continue delivering regular participation opportunities, work collaboratively with academy franchises, support player welfare, encourage player development and help create lifelong participation in rugby.                                          |

## Strategic Pillar One: Strengthening the Rugby Ecosystem

### Strategic Intent

To establish a nationally aligned partnership that strengthens every level of grassroots rugby by clearly defining the respective roles of the WRU, Indigo Group, Academy Franchises, Clubs and Schools.

### What

The WRU and Indigo Group will establish a nationally recognised partnership that provides consistent governance, operational delivery and community engagement across Wales. The partnership will formally recognise Indigo as an approved academy delivery partner operating within an agreed national framework.

Every Indigo Academy Franchise will become a participating delivery partner operating under licence from Indigo Group and working within the standards agreed jointly between Indigo and the WRU. Community clubs and schools will remain the primary environments in which young people participate in rugby. The partnership exists to strengthen these environments by providing additional coaching, athlete development, coach education, commercial investment and community support.

### Why It Matters

Welsh rugby already possesses an outstanding network of clubs, schools and volunteers. The challenge is not replacing this network. The challenge is ensuring it remains sustainable.

Parents should experience one connected rugby system rather than separate organisations operating independently. Players should experience one development journey rather than multiple competing programmes. Clubs should receive additional support rather than losing players. Schools should have greater opportunities to connect pupils with local rugby. Commercial partners should understand how their investment directly benefits communities.

By clearly defining responsibilities and creating one nationally aligned operating model, the partnership removes duplication while increasing opportunity.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Provide national leadership through governance, safeguarding, player welfare, coach accreditation and technical standards; recognise Indigo as an approved delivery partner; establish agreed operating standards; participate in the Joint Steering Group; support quality assurance and annual review; and ensure alignment with national participation and pathway strategies. |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Develop and maintain the national academy operating model; support and quality assure every Academy Franchise; provide digital infrastructure including the Indigo Hub; develop commercial partnerships that benefit grassroots rugby; coordinate national events; manage the Indigo Rugby Benevolent Trust; and lead innovation while aligning with WRU standards.               |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Operate under licence from Indigo Group, deliver academy activity within an agreed territory, work collaboratively with local clubs and schools, provide additional coaching and athletic development, support community rugby initiatives, maintain safeguarding and governance standards, and participate fully in the national quality assurance framework.                    |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Remain the principal environments in which young people train, play and compete; continue to lead weekly participation; work collaboratively with academy franchises; support player welfare; share opportunities for coach development; and benefit from increased coaching, investment and community engagement.                                                                |

**PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT**

*Together the WRU, Indigo Group, Academy Franchises, Clubs and Schools commit to creating one connected rugby ecosystem that increases participation, strengthens local communities and develops better players while preserving the identity and heritage of Welsh rugby.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** *Participation, governance, safeguarding, club sustainability, school engagement, coach development, commercial sustainability and long-term player development.*

## Strategic Pillar Two: Player Registration, Welfare & Safeguarding

### Strategic Intent

To create a player-centred environment where every young person can participate safely, confidently and consistently, supported by aligned registration, safeguarding and welfare processes across the partnership.

### What

The partnership will develop a nationally aligned framework for player registration, eligibility, safeguarding and welfare that reduces duplication whilst maintaining the highest possible standards of player protection. Where practical, administrative processes should be streamlined so that families experience one connected rugby system rather than multiple independent organisations.

This framework will ensure that participation remains simple, safe and accessible without compromising governance or safeguarding responsibilities.

### Why It Matters

Parents entrust rugby with the care of their children. That trust must never be taken for granted. As young players increasingly participate across schools, community clubs, academy programmes and representative rugby, the systems supporting them must become equally connected.

Separate registration systems, inconsistent welfare processes and duplicated administration create unnecessary complexity for families and volunteers. More importantly, they increase the risk of important information not being available when it is needed. A collaborative approach enables everyone supporting a player to work from consistent standards while respecting confidentiality, safeguarding legislation and data protection requirements.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Maintain responsibility for national safeguarding policies, eligibility regulations and governance standards; provide safeguarding guidance, training and compliance frameworks; support alignment with existing WRU systems wherever practical; and continue to lead on player welfare standards across Welsh rugby.               |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Develop operational systems that align with WRU standards; provide digital registration capability through the Indigo platform where appropriate; support academy franchises with safeguarding training, compliance monitoring and guidance; and provide regular reporting to the Joint Steering Group.                             |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Ensure every player is appropriately registered before participating, maintain safeguarding compliance, appoint a designated Welfare Lead, follow procedures for attendance, medical information, injuries and incident reporting, and work collaboratively with clubs and schools when player welfare requires coordinated action. |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Continue to fulfil safeguarding responsibilities within their own environments, support player wellbeing, share appropriate welfare information where consent and safeguarding requirements permit, and encourage families to understand safeguarding standards and reporting procedures.                                           |

#### PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

*Every organisation involved in this partnership accepts that player welfare takes precedence over performance, competition or commercial considerations. Safeguarding is not simply a compliance requirement. It is a shared responsibility that underpins every aspect of the partnership.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** Player welfare, safeguarding, governance, participation, volunteer support and family confidence.

## Strategic Pillar Three: Competition, Calendar & Player Development Pathway

### Strategic Intent

To create a coordinated rugby calendar and transparent development pathway that allows players to benefit from clubs, schools and academy activity without unnecessary conflict or duplication.

### What

The partnership will establish a nationally coordinated development calendar that complements existing club and school competitions while providing additional opportunities through Indigo Academy activity. Alongside the calendar, the partnership will establish a transparent player pathway that clearly illustrates how players can progress through the rugby system based on ability, commitment and development.

Every player should understand that opportunities are earned through performance rather than circumstance.

### Why It Matters

One of the greatest frustrations for players, parents, coaches and teachers is uncertainty over competing commitments. Club fixtures, school rugby, representative opportunities and additional development activity should complement one another rather than compete for player availability.

A coordinated calendar improves communication, protects player welfare and enables organisations to work together towards shared objectives. A clearly defined player pathway gives young people meaningful goals throughout their rugby journey and reassures families that participation in an Indigo Academy enhances opportunities within Welsh rugby rather than creating an alternative pathway.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Coordinate national competition priorities, provide guidance on fixture planning, support alignment with regional and national player pathways, recognise the East vs West Wales Representative Programme as a development opportunity, and provide technical advice to support progression.                                                 |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Coordinate the national academy calendar in consultation with clubs, schools and the WRU; ensure academy activity complements existing rugby commitments; manage the East vs West Wales Representative Programme; provide player profiling and development reviews; and support consistent talent identification across the academy network. |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Deliver local development programmes within agreed calendar windows, monitor player workloads, maintain communication with clubs and schools, recommend players for representative opportunities based on agreed criteria, and support long-term development for every player.                                                               |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Continue to provide the primary competitive environment, communicate fixture commitments, support appropriate player release for agreed development opportunities, and celebrate player progression while maintaining strong community connections.                                                                                          |

#### PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

*Competition is fundamental to rugby. Winning matters. Performance matters. Representative honours should be earned. However, competition should be delivered within an environment that protects player welfare, encourages lifelong participation and develops better athletes and better people.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** Competition, player development, long-term athlete development, player welfare, club and school collaboration and representative pathways.

## Strategic Pillar Four: Talent Identification, Relative Age Effect & Player Development

### Strategic Intent

To establish a transparent, evidence-led approach to player identification and development that recognises both current performance and long-term potential, ensuring every player has a fair opportunity to progress.

### What

The partnership will adopt a nationally consistent talent identification framework that combines technical, tactical, physical and behavioural assessment with contemporary research into athlete development. Selection for Indigo Academy programmes, East vs West Wales Representative honours and progression opportunities will be based upon objective assessment criteria rather than subjective opinion alone.

The framework will recognise that young people develop at different rates and that long-term potential is often a better predictor of future success than early physical maturity. The partnership therefore commits to identifying talent rather than simply selecting early developers.

### Why It Matters

Research across rugby and many other sports consistently demonstrates the impact of the Relative Age Effect. Players born earlier within the selection year are often overrepresented within representative teams because temporary advantages in physical maturity can be mistaken for greater potential.

Without recognising this bias, rugby risks losing talented young people who simply develop later. Modern talent identification therefore requires coaches to look beyond immediate performance and consider technical ability, decision-making, game understanding, coachability, resilience, attitude and commitment. Recognising these characteristics creates a broader and more inclusive talent pool while improving the quality of long-term player development.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Provide strategic oversight of talent identification principles, ensure alignment with regional and national pathways, support coach education relating to biological maturation and talent identification, and review annual progression data to support continuous improvement. |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Develop and maintain a national player profiling framework, provide coach education on objective assessment and Relative Age Effect, coordinate player reviews, monitor birth-quarter representation and produce annual reports identifying trends and recommendations.           |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Assess players using agreed profiling criteria, recognise long-term potential alongside current performance, monitor development throughout the season, provide meaningful feedback and identify players who may benefit from additional development opportunities.               |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Provide the primary competitive environment through which player development is observed, share appropriate performance information where agreed, support players regardless of representative selection and encourage long-term participation.                                   |

#### PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

*Representative honours should always be earned through merit, but the process by which players are identified should be transparent, objective and informed by contemporary evidence. The partnership commits to creating opportunities for players to remain engaged and earn future opportunities regardless of when they physically mature.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** *Long-term athlete development, talent identification, Relative Age Effect mitigation, inclusion, evidence-led practice and national player pathway.*

## Strategic Pillar Five: People Development

### Strategic Intent

To strengthen Welsh rugby by investing in the people who shape the player experience every week: coaches, volunteers, teachers, administrators and match officials.

### What

The partnership will establish a coordinated approach to developing coaches, volunteers and match officials across Wales. Rather than creating separate education programmes, Indigo will complement existing WRU provision by providing additional mentoring, practical learning opportunities and ongoing professional development.

Every Academy Franchise will become a local learning hub supporting coaches from clubs and schools within its community.

### Why It Matters

High-quality coaching improves every aspect of the player experience. Better coaches develop better players. Better volunteers create stronger clubs. Better referees improve the quality, safety and enjoyment of competition.

Many volunteers enter rugby with enormous enthusiasm but limited opportunities for mentoring beyond formal qualifications. The partnership therefore seeks to create continuous learning rather than isolated courses. Coach education should become an ongoing relationship rather than a single accreditation event. The same philosophy should apply to volunteers, administrators, teachers and match officials.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Continue to lead formal coach accreditation, referee qualifications and national workforce strategy; provide educational frameworks and recognised qualifications; and support alignment between Indigo CPD and WRU development priorities.            |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Provide practical mentoring, peer learning, workshops and continuous professional development; develop a national resource library through the Indigo Hub; coordinate leadership programmes; and recognise excellence through annual workforce awards. |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Deliver local CPD events, support coaches from community clubs and schools, encourage volunteer recruitment, develop relationships with local referee societies and create opportunities for aspiring coaches to gain practical experience.            |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Encourage coaches and volunteers to participate in development opportunities, share facilities and learning opportunities, recognise volunteer contributions and support succession planning.                                                          |

#### PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

*Developing people is every bit as important as developing players. Investment in coaches, volunteers and officials creates lasting benefits that extend far beyond any individual player or season.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** Coach development, volunteer development, match official development, club sustainability, school rugby and workforce planning.

## Strategic Pillar Six: Athlete Development, Education & Wellbeing

### Strategic Intent

To develop complete athletes by integrating rugby coaching with physical literacy, athletic development, education and wellbeing, ensuring young people are equipped to succeed both on and off the field.

### What

The partnership will adopt an Athlete First philosophy that prioritises long-term athletic development before early specialisation. Alongside technical and tactical rugby coaching, every Indigo Academy will provide age-appropriate programmes that develop movement, speed, coordination, strength, decision-making, nutrition, recovery, mental wellbeing and leadership.

Parents and carers will also be engaged through education sessions that help them understand long-term athlete development, appropriate expectations and how best to support their children throughout their sporting journey.

### Why It Matters

Children who develop broad athletic skills before specialising enjoy longer sporting careers, experience fewer injuries and are more likely to remain physically active into adulthood. Developing physical literacy at an early age creates athletes who move better, make better decisions and adapt more effectively to the demands of rugby.

Equally important is the development of confidence, resilience, leadership and emotional wellbeing. Young people face increasing pressures both within and beyond sport. Rugby has an opportunity to become one of the environments in which they feel supported, challenged and encouraged to grow.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Provide strategic guidance on long-term player development principles, align athlete development with national coaching philosophy, support wellbeing and safeguarding resources and encourage consistency across pathways.                                                                               |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Develop a nationally consistent athlete development curriculum, provide coach education and resources covering movement, speed, strength, nutrition, recovery, leadership and wellbeing, deliver parent education through the Indigo Hub and monitor player development using age-appropriate indicators. |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Deliver structured athletic development alongside rugby coaching, provide wellbeing support and signposting where appropriate, promote multi-sport participation during younger age groups, encourage leadership opportunities and maintain regular communication with parents.                           |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Provide regular playing opportunities, promote positive coaching behaviours and player welfare, support balanced participation and encourage healthy lifestyles and lifelong participation.                                                                                                               |

#### PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

*Success is measured not simply by the number of representative players produced, but by the number of young people who enjoy rugby, develop confidence, remain physically active and become positive contributors to their communities.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** Long-term athlete development, player welfare, physical literacy, mental wellbeing, parent engagement, injury prevention and lifelong participation.

## Strategic Pillar Seven: Clubs, Schools & Community Growth

### Strategic Intent

To strengthen the relationship between clubs, schools and local communities by creating one connected participation network that increases opportunities for every young person to experience rugby.

### What

The partnership will establish a collaborative approach to participation that positions community clubs and schools as the foundation of Welsh rugby while enabling Indigo Academy Franchises to provide additional coaching, development opportunities and community engagement.

Every academy will actively support local recruitment, retention and transition between school rugby and community clubs. The objective is to grow the overall rugby population rather than compete for existing players.

### Why It Matters

Healthy clubs create healthy communities. Schools introduce thousands of young people to rugby every year. Volunteers dedicate countless hours to supporting local teams. These organisations should never feel that academy activity threatens their role. Instead, they should experience tangible benefits from the partnership.

Those benefits include additional coaching support, shared facilities and expertise, improved transition between schools and clubs, volunteer development, community festivals, greater commercial investment and improved retention throughout adolescence. By supporting clubs and schools first, the partnership creates stronger foundations for the entire Welsh rugby pathway.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Champion collaboration across the community game, support initiatives that improve participation and retention, promote alignment between schools, clubs, regions and academy activity, and recognise clubs and schools as equal partners within the grassroots ecosystem. |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Coordinate community engagement programmes, support school-to-club transition initiatives, provide coach sharing and educational resources, deliver festivals and recruitment campaigns, develop commercial partnerships and measure participation growth.                 |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Build long-term relationships with every club and school within its territory, provide additional coaching where requested, help recruit new participants, promote inclusive opportunities and celebrate local club achievements alongside academy success.                |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Provide the weekly rugby experience at the heart of player development, identify young people who would benefit from additional support, encourage participation across all ability levels and work collaboratively to ensure rugby remains welcoming and accessible.      |

#### PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

*Every academy franchise will be expected to leave its local rugby community stronger than it found it. Success will be measured by stronger clubs, healthier schools, increased participation and more young people enjoying rugby.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** Community rugby, club sustainability, school engagement, inclusion, participation growth and volunteer development.

## Strategic Pillar Eight: Commercial & Community Growth

### Strategic Intent

To create a commercially sustainable grassroots rugby ecosystem that generates long-term investment for community rugby while reducing financial barriers for players and families.

### What

The partnership will establish a nationally aligned commercial ecosystem that supports grassroots rugby across Wales. Rather than operating as separate commercial initiatives, sponsorship, memberships, digital engagement, rewards programmes, events and fundraising will form one connected system that creates value for every stakeholder.

Income generated through the partnership will be transparently reinvested into player development, club support, coach education, participation initiatives and community programmes. Every commercial decision should ultimately strengthen grassroots rugby.

### Why It Matters

Many community clubs continue to operate with limited financial resources despite the extraordinary commitment of volunteers. Participation costs continue to rise. Facilities require investment. Coaches need development. Families increasingly face difficult financial decisions regarding youth sport.

Traditional fundraising remains important but is unlikely to provide the long-term sustainability required for the future. The partnership therefore proposes a diversified commercial model that creates multiple recurring income streams while maintaining rugby's community values. Commercial partners increasingly seek measurable social impact alongside brand exposure. The Indigo model offers both.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Support national commercial alignment where appropriate, ensure commercial activity complements existing WRU partnerships, promote opportunities that strengthen grassroots rugby and provide strategic oversight to ensure alignment with Welsh rugby's values.                                                                                            |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Develop and manage the national commercial ecosystem, including the Indigo Hub digital platform, Friends & Family Membership Programme, national and regional sponsorships, Indigo Rewards & Cashback delivered through a partnership with Bolst, merchandise, events, digital media, corporate partnerships, community fundraising and impact measurement. |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Develop local commercial partnerships within agreed national standards, support local businesses wishing to invest in community rugby, promote membership growth, deliver local events and create opportunities for sponsors to engage directly with clubs, schools and families.                                                                           |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Benefit from commercial investment through coach education, community events, equipment support, facility improvements, recruitment initiatives, shared marketing and increased participation. Where appropriate, they will also participate in local commercial initiatives.                                                                               |

#### PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

*Every pound generated through the commercial ecosystem should strengthen community rugby. Commercial sustainability should reduce financial pressure on families rather than increase it.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** Club sustainability, participation growth, community development, financial sustainability, commercial innovation and social value.

## Strategic Pillar Nine: Indigo Rugby Benevolent Trust

### Strategic Intent

To ensure that no child is prevented from participating in rugby because of financial circumstances.

### What

The Indigo Rugby Benevolent Trust will operate as the partnership's charitable vehicle, providing targeted financial assistance to children and families who require additional support to access rugby opportunities.

Support may include membership fees, playing kit, boots and equipment, travel assistance, representative costs, hardship grants, wellbeing support and emergency financial assistance where appropriate. The Trust will operate transparently with clear governance, eligibility criteria and annual impact reporting.

### Why It Matters

No young person should lose the opportunity to enjoy rugby because of financial hardship. Economic pressures affect families differently across Wales. For some, the cost of membership, travel, equipment or representative opportunities can become a barrier to continued participation.

Removing those barriers benefits not only individual families but the wider game. It broadens participation, strengthens communities, creates greater equality of opportunity and ensures that talent and commitment, not financial circumstance, determine a player's opportunity to participate and develop. The Trust also provides an important mechanism through which commercial partners can demonstrate genuine social impact.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Recognise the Trust as a strategic community partner supporting participation objectives, support collaboration with clubs and schools to identify appropriate referral pathways, and receive annual reports demonstrating community impact.             |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Manage the Trust, raise charitable funding, develop partnerships with corporate supporters and grant providers, administer funding fairly and transparently, and publish annual impact reports.                                                          |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Identify local families who may benefit from support, promote the Trust within their communities, support local fundraising initiatives, ensure families understand the assistance available and maintain confidentiality throughout referral processes. |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Work collaboratively with academy franchises to identify appropriate referrals, encourage participation regardless of financial circumstances, support fundraising activity where appropriate and celebrate positive community impact.                   |

#### PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

*Access to rugby should never depend upon a family's financial circumstances. Together, the WRU, Indigo Group, Academy Franchises, Clubs and Schools commit to removing barriers to participation wherever possible.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** Equality of opportunity, community impact, participation, inclusion, social responsibility and player welfare.

## Strategic Pillar Ten: East vs West Wales Representative Programme & Festival

### Strategic Intent

To establish the East vs West Wales Representative Programme & Festival as the flagship annual development event within Welsh grassroots rugby, recognising excellence, celebrating achievement and providing a nationally aligned showcase for players, coaches, clubs and schools.

### What

The partnership will establish an annual East vs West Wales Representative Programme bringing together the highest-performing players from across the Indigo Academy network. Selection will be earned through performance, commitment and consistent development throughout the season.

The programme is not intended to replace existing representative structures. Instead, it provides an additional opportunity for players to demonstrate their ability within a nationally recognised development environment that complements the WRU player pathway. The East vs West fixture will become the showcase event of the Indigo calendar, celebrating not only representative rugby but the wider achievements of grassroots rugby across Wales.

### Why It Matters

Young players need aspirations. Representative honours create goals. Goals create motivation. Motivated players train harder, remain engaged for longer and continue striving to improve.

The East vs West Wales Representative Programme provides a prestigious honour that players earn through consistent performance. At the same time, the programme provides the WRU with an additional opportunity to observe talented players within a high-quality competitive environment. Importantly, this event is about more than representative rugby. It is an opportunity to celebrate clubs, schools, volunteers, coaches, referees, parents and communities who contribute to Welsh rugby throughout the year.

### How It Will Work

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The WRU</b>                | Recognise the programme within the national development calendar, support talent observation aligned to the national pathway, provide governance oversight, support match official appointments and ensure alignment with wider player development objectives.                                          |
| <b>Indigo Group</b>           | Plan and deliver the Representative Festival, coordinate player nominations and selection processes, manage communications and event operations, provide live streaming and digital engagement, coordinate sponsor activation, deliver the awards programme and integrate Benevolent Trust fundraising. |
| <b>Each Academy Franchise</b> | Identify and nominate eligible players, prepare selected players, support coaches and volunteers, promote representative honours within local communities and celebrate every player selected to represent East or West Wales.                                                                          |
| <b>Clubs &amp; Schools</b>    | Support player availability, celebrate representative selection, continue supporting players regardless of representative honours, and recognise that representative selection reflects the quality of local coaching and player development.                                                           |

#### PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

*The East vs West Wales Representative Programme will become one of the highest honours within the Indigo Academy pathway. It will celebrate excellence while reinforcing competition, respect, development, community and opportunity.*

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** *Player development, talent identification, representative rugby, community rugby, coach development, referee development, commercial sustainability, community engagement and social impact.*

## Governance & Delivery

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The partnership should be overseen by a Joint Steering Group responsible for strategic leadership, quality assurance and continuous improvement. The Steering Group should meet quarterly and include representatives from the WRU, Indigo Group, the Indigo Academy Franchise Network, community clubs, school rugby and independent safeguarding expertise where appropriate.

The Steering Group should review participation, player welfare, coach development, community engagement, commercial performance, representative pathway activity, financial transparency, strategic risks and annual priorities. Its purpose is to ensure that the partnership remains aligned with the long-term interests of Welsh rugby.

### The Indigo Rugby Ecosystem

The partnership operates as one connected ecosystem. The WRU provides governance, standards and pathways. Indigo Group provides commercial capability, digital infrastructure and national delivery support. Academy Franchises deliver locally. Clubs and schools remain the foundation of participation. Young players benefit from a clearer pathway, additional development and stronger community support.

Supporting the entire system is the commercial ecosystem: the Indigo Hub, Indigo Rewards & Cashback (delivered through a partnership with Bolst), memberships, sponsorship, events, merchandise, digital media and the Benevolent Trust. Every element exists to strengthen grassroots rugby.

## Three-Year Implementation Framework

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### Year One — Build the Foundations

- Partnership agreement and Joint Steering Group established.
- Pilot Academy Franchises launched.
- Governance, safeguarding and quality assurance framework agreed.
- Coach education and workforce development initiated.
- Commercial platform and Indigo Hub launched.

### Year Two — Expand Delivery

- Academy Franchise network expanded.
- Membership growth and commercial partnerships developed.
- First East vs West Wales Representative Festival delivered.
- Benevolent Trust fully operational.
- Participation and community engagement increased.

### Year Three — Embed Sustainability

- National delivery embedded.
- Independent evaluation completed.
- Commercial reinvestment expanded.
- Participation, retention and progression reviewed.
- Future strategic priorities agreed.

## Measuring Success

The partnership deliberately avoids measuring success solely through league tables or representative selection. Winning remains an important part of rugby. However, lasting success should be measured through the strength of the wider rugby ecosystem.

- Participation growth across boys, girls and underserved communities.
- Improved player retention through adolescence.
- Stronger club and school engagement.
- Increased coach, volunteer and referee numbers.
- Fairer talent identification and reduced Relative Age Effect bias.
- Greater progression into representative, regional and national pathways.
- Families supported through the Indigo Rugby Benevolent Trust.
- Sustainable commercial revenue reinvested into grassroots rugby.
- Player, parent, club and school satisfaction.

## National Legacy

Welsh rugby has never been defined solely by elite performance. Its greatest strength has always been its communities: its clubs, schools, volunteers, families and players.

This Strategic Partnership Framework has been developed with one ambition: to strengthen those foundations. The partnership does not seek to replace what already exists. It seeks to connect it, invest in it and help it grow.

By combining the governance and heritage of the Welsh Rugby Union with Indigo Group's operational capability, commercial innovation and locally owned Academy Franchises, the partnership creates an opportunity to establish one connected grassroots rugby ecosystem across Wales.

An ecosystem where clubs become stronger, schools are better supported, coaches receive greater development, volunteers are recognised, families face fewer financial barriers, young players enjoy more opportunities, talent is identified fairly, competition remains meaningful and commercial success benefits communities.

The opportunity before us is not simply to create another academy programme. It is to create a new operating model for community rugby that protects Welsh rugby's traditions while equipping it for the future.

**One National Pathway. Delivered Locally.**

*One Pathway. Eight Academy Franchises. Endless Opportunity.*

**Together, strengthening Welsh rugby for generations to come.**