



Welsh Netball High Performance Structure

Aim

The aim of the new high performance structure is to provide a progressive pathway towards success, development and support while at the same time ensuring that there are opportunities for the identification of players with the potential to represent Wales. A key goal is not only to increase the selection pool within Wales but also to raise the bar in terms of the overall calibre of these players. Running parallel to this is the desire to provide development opportunities for high performance coaches, team managers and umpires.

Our four-year objective is to have a sustainable top ten World Ranking. Wales is currently ranked 17th. We are targeting a 12th place finish at the 2011 World Championships in Singapore and, through playing additional international matches during the course of the 2010/11 season we hope to end the season with a ranking of 14th. Longer term, we are also aiming to qualify for the 2014 Commonwealth Games and we are committed to improving the Celtic Dragons' finishing position in the domestic Superleague competition.

In order to achieve these challenging targets we are making some changes to the performance structure. One of the key elements of that structure in recent years has been the use of the Welsh Netball Academy, based at U.W.I.C. in Cardiff. We have decided that a more regionally-focused structure is better suited to delivering our objectives.

The Academy, whilst highly beneficial to the small number of players working within it, is arguably biased towards players who are living, working or studying within the Cardiff area. It is also restrictive in terms of the number of athletes it can accommodate, and it is unlikely to help solve one of Welsh Netball's particular challenges in recent years: that of a perceived lack of engagement with the eight Area Associations across Wales.

We are proposing the introduction of eight Area 'Hubs', one in each of the member associations. Each Hub would provide the focus for the better players – of all ages – and would enable a wider group of players to be seen. It would also

ensure that young players do not have their education interrupted by having to travel to frequent national squad get-togethers in Cardiff. The younger players would immediately be exposed to working with role models. The better players will be selected for Wales Under-17 and Wales Under-19 squads for participation in the annual Netball Europe events, but squad sessions for these will start later, will be more intense and fewer in number.

In due course there will also be an inter-Hub tournament and we can go some considerable way to addressing the acute shortage both of coaches and umpires by developing more of them on a regional basis, identifying the more talented ones and, in time, providing a fast track for their development.

One final advantage is that we can work more closely with the Area Associations on a number of different levels, assisting with the development of their key personnel and empowering them much more in certain ways.

Providing support and development for coaches, managers and umpires is key to our high performance structure. The potential to progress with the help of our mentor programmes while supporting ongoing development is fundamental.

National Squads

The four levels of the High Performance structure are:

1. Wales National Team
2. Wales A
3. Young International Squad
4. Wales Emerging Pool.

There is also the presence of the Celtic Dragons in the Netball Superleague. This is the Welsh 'franchise' which competes with seven of the nine English regions and one team from Scotland.

Please see High Performance Pathway Diagram below.

These players are identified through the official Welsh Netball Association tournaments and netball leagues across Wales. Players are recognized through a 'Top 20' identification and announcement process at every domestic event.

Other players will be identified through Welsh Netball Roadshows, Urdd events and any other netball tournaments being played throughout Wales. In the medium term we are aiming to develop a network of scouts across the eight Areas and there will always be room for individual recommendations to be made

and for 'late developers' missed from the mainstream to be identified and brought into the system.

Once these players are identified they are then eligible to be part of our **Wales Emerging Pool**. This is the very first step for players on our high performance pathway and entitles the player to become a part of one of the Hubs. There are expected to be eight such Hubs covering the eight Areas:

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| 1. Afan/Nedd/Tawe | (Swansea, Neath Port Talbot) |
| 2. Cardiff & District | (Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan) |
| 3. Glamorgan Valleys | (Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly (West)) |
| 4. North East Wales | (Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham) |
| 5. North West Wales | (Anglesey, Conwy, Gwynedd) |
| 6. South East Wales | (Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Newport, Torfaen, Caerphilly (East)) |
| 7. Powys | (Powys) |
| 8. West Wales | (Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire) |

These are based on the old eight counties of Wales.

The longer term aspiration is to expand the number of Hubs each year until we have 22 of them, with one in each of the local authorities in Wales. By ensuring that there is a Hub in every authority we will widen our selection pool and give us more players to choose from.

At this point the players will begin to have access to the sports science support team. This means they will be subjected to at least two screenings per year for our Hub players, with three per annum (in addition to advice on podiatry, nutrition and psychology) for our Young International squad and Wales A players. The National Wales squad will receive three screenings per year, as well as attending elite workshops and being provided with private medical insurance.

Each Hub will have a workforce comprising Coaches, Team Managers and Umpires. The aim is for the workforce to deliver a development programme to the players under the direction of Welsh Netball's High Performance Coach. The target for the 2010/11 season, for example, is to have 150 – 200 players along with 16 Coaches, 13 Team Managers and 20 Umpires in our Hubs. The goal is to maintain and develop this workforce team through education, practical experience and mentoring.

Currently Welsh Netball has just a handful of active UKCC Level 3 coaches. By the end of the 2010/11 season, through our mentoring system and Hubs, two coaches will have been identified and invited to attend the UKCC Level 3 taster session. In

addition, we aim to identify eight coaches who will be UKCC Level 2 qualified, thus providing us with a Head Coach in each Hub. Quality and excellence are high priorities for Welsh Netball but we recognize that we need to generate the numbers first.

At the beginning of each year a filter or trial process will ensure that players from the Hubs are selected from their attendance, performance and attitude during the season. This process will ordinarily take place at the Sport Wales National Centre in Cardiff and will provide the players for the **Young International squad**.

This 24-member squad will be made up of the Under-17 and Under-19 players who will be representing Wales at Netball Europe. These players will also make up the outline Wales Under-21 squad which will go on to represent Wales at the next World Youth Championships, to be held in Scotland in 2013.

The Young International squad will benefit from monthly Hub training as well as screenings and elite workshops, while also gaining huge experience from working alongside Wales and Wales A players. This interaction with the elite players will not only facilitate a better learning environment but create a successful 'buddy' system for our younger players. Our aim is to create stronger players, physically and mentally, to ensure success for Wales at every international event.

The **Wales A** team will be made up of the players who have just missed out on selection for the national side and the players who are too old to compete at Under-21 level. The development of this particular team is a crucial element of the development of the senior national team as it will contain players with experience whilst also offering a good, strong competition base, thus ensuring that our national team stays focused and motivated all the time as others close behind them push them for places. It also gives the Young International players something to strive for as they learn and acquire more experience.

The Wales A team will play matches off the back of any international countries which travel to Wales, or indeed to anywhere else in the UK, and we will, budget permitting, be seeking to play as many international matches at senior level as possible.

Having full cap international matches for the Wales national team is a high priority if we are to improve, and then maintain, a better world ranking. We will not improve that ranking without exposure to such regular competition. We will also be celebrating the successes of our international players. We want the achievement of playing for Wales to be seen as "a big deal" within the sport.

The aim of the Hubs is to provide development opportunities for anyone, anywhere in Wales who aspires to play netball for Wales. To achieve these goals

we need to have an honest and open communication with all Area Associations, local authorities, leisure centres and other facility providers, clubs and schools throughout Wales that are currently running netball leagues or who have teams. We need to ensure that all these players, coaches, team managers and umpires are aware of the Hubs, where they are, what they do and the vital part they will be playing in providing a vehicle for the development of players and officials.

The **Celtic Dragons** is perhaps the most important elite player development vehicle we have. It provides the most intense competition currently in the UK and is the only netball league that will expose our better Wales players to strong and regular competition below international level. The Celtic Dragons' presence in such a prestigious league provides a valuable opportunity for us to try to attract import, or overseas, players from other top netball countries. Their presence will benefit our own players by allowing them to gain invaluable and successful court knowledge and to see the type of attitude required to make it as an elite player.

Currently the ANZ Cup is the only semi-professional netball competition in the world and these are the players that we would need to attract. We want the prospect of playing for the Celtic Dragons to be an attractive proposition for such players. This can be done; however we need to provide resources for the imported players like flights, visas, accommodation, food, local transport costs and, potentially, employment. Ensuring part time coaching work in schools will create a regular income which will also help support them while they are here in Wales. With the right import players we believe the profile of the Celtic Dragons will improve and bring success to this team and, in due course, to Wales.

Conclusion

In order to ensure top success for Wales both at home and on the international stage we have to be confident that we have good management, strong communications and good working relationships. Talented players will not be enough for us to be able to sustain that success. This High Performance Pathway will, we believe, be a more effective vehicle in addressing the interface between development and performance, and in building healthier relationships with our eight Area Associations.

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Welsh Netball High Performance Pathway

