

CASE STUDY: WELSH ROWING

Author: Amanda Bennett, FairPlay Ltd



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Welsh Rowing is the National Governing Body (NGB) for rowing (on rivers, the sea and indoors) in Wales. Welsh Rowing works with Sport Wales to raise the awareness of, and participation in, rowing across Wales, as well as aiming to develop athletes for GB squads.

Welsh Rowing has made a public commitment to good governance and is always looking to improve in order to be a sustainable, high performing governing

body of sport. Ensuring the organisation is well run and fit for purpose as a modern Governing Body is vital to ensuring continued public funding and to generate additional sources of revenue.

Welsh Rowing is also committed to both equality and inclusion throughout all its practices, including recruitment and Board appointments.



WHY DID YOU NEED TO CHANGE THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR BOARD?

In 2014 we moved away from club representation on the Board as this didn't provide us with a cohesive decision-making body, with each person facing conflicts of loyalty and discussions centred on gains or losses for their constituent groups.

Directors were not able to ask the questions of executives that would constructively challenge and add value to proposals. There was a focus on operational matters, in particular rowing clubs and events, with limited knowledge of business matters or how to drive strategy. Whilst the rowing community was comfortable with rowers on the Board, this did not necessarily mean the NGB's leadership was balanced or skilled in all the required areas including finance, communications and governance.

The Board lacked diversity of thought and also reflected a perception of the sport as white and dominated by privately educated individuals. We wanted to move away from stereotypes and promote a much more diverse and inclusive sport.

We realised that, whilst the Board members were dedicated and passionate about rowing, we needed to change Board composition if we were going to be build a successful future.



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WE EXPENDED A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY CONSULTING WITH THE ROWING COMMUNITY, AS WE DID NOT WANT THEM TO FEEL CHANGES WERE BEING MADE WITHOUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT MAKING THESE CHANGES?

By 2014 we realised we needed to create a skills-based Board and adjusted our Articles of Association to enable this to happen. The Articles state that:

- The Board shall implement an objective recruitment process in order to identify suitable candidates and directors of the Company
- The aim will be to draw at least 50% of such candidates from the rowing community in Wales and the remaining candidates from outside the rowing community in Wales to encourage an objective, balanced and skilled Board.
- A recruitment panel may be established by the existing Board in order to identify candidates.
- Each Board position shall be advertised and a short-listing and interview process conducted.

The members still have the final say in Board appointments, which is important as they continue to feel connected and involved in selection of the NGB's leadership. When they vote at the AGM, members can have greater confidence in the candidates being put forward for election as they have first been through a rigorous and transparent recruitment process. We also removed the possibility of Directors being faced with conflicts of loyalty as Nominated Representatives (individuals who are nominated by their clubs to vote at the AGM) must resign this position if they seek appointment to the Board.

We expended a lot of time and energy consulting with the Rowing community, as we did not want them to feel changes were being made without

their involvement. It was important to gain their understanding and commitment if the new structures were going to work for everyone. Although this required a lot of effort, it was time well spent as the constitutional changes were approved.

We have created a priority skills list and undertaken a skills audit so we know what our Board strengths are and also what gaps in skills or knowledge we need to fill when vacancies arise. We can plan for Board appointments with relative confidence as we also introduced terms of office and limits on terms with the new Articles. No Director can serve for more than two consecutive terms of three years, so we are able to regularly refresh the Board with the skills we need at that time. The role description and person specification are under constant review so we can be explicit about our priorities when advertising.

We also regularly undertake a diversity audit so we have a good understanding of the profile of our Board and the degree to which it provides vital insight and reflects our aspirations for the sport, i.e. widening access to rowing.

When advertising, we try to be as open, creative and inclusive as possible. We advertise through the Sport and Recreation Alliance and UK Sport, but have also involved Chwarae Teg and Acorn Recruitment. We use all of our social media channels and make contact with partners and wider networks to encourage people from all backgrounds and sectors to consider applying. We specifically mention in all our adverts that we encourage and welcome applications from underrepresented groups, for example those from BAME communities.



WE WILL ACTIVELY WORK TOWARDS A MINIMUM OF 40% FEMALE/MALE, AS WE BELIEVE THIS WILL ADD TO BOARD PERFORMANCE.

WHAT DIFFERENCE HAVE THESE CHANGES MADE TO YOUR BOARD?

Firstly, the discussions, questions and decisions at Board are all of much higher quality. Board members are far less operational, do not interfere with staff and now ask questions that previous Board members would not have thought of. Directors are now much more strategic and conceptual in their thinking, and also much more vocal, all of which creates a more dynamic environment in which to make long-term decisions.

On the few occasions when a Director may seem to be representing a club or rowing discipline, there is much more visible challenge to potential conflicts. Previously, this would have been allowed to happen unhindered and Directors would have continued to protect their areas of the sport.

In terms of profile, we now have a Board which has 30% women, 10% BAME and people from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds. We will actively work towards a minimum of 40% female/male, as we believe this will add to Board performance.

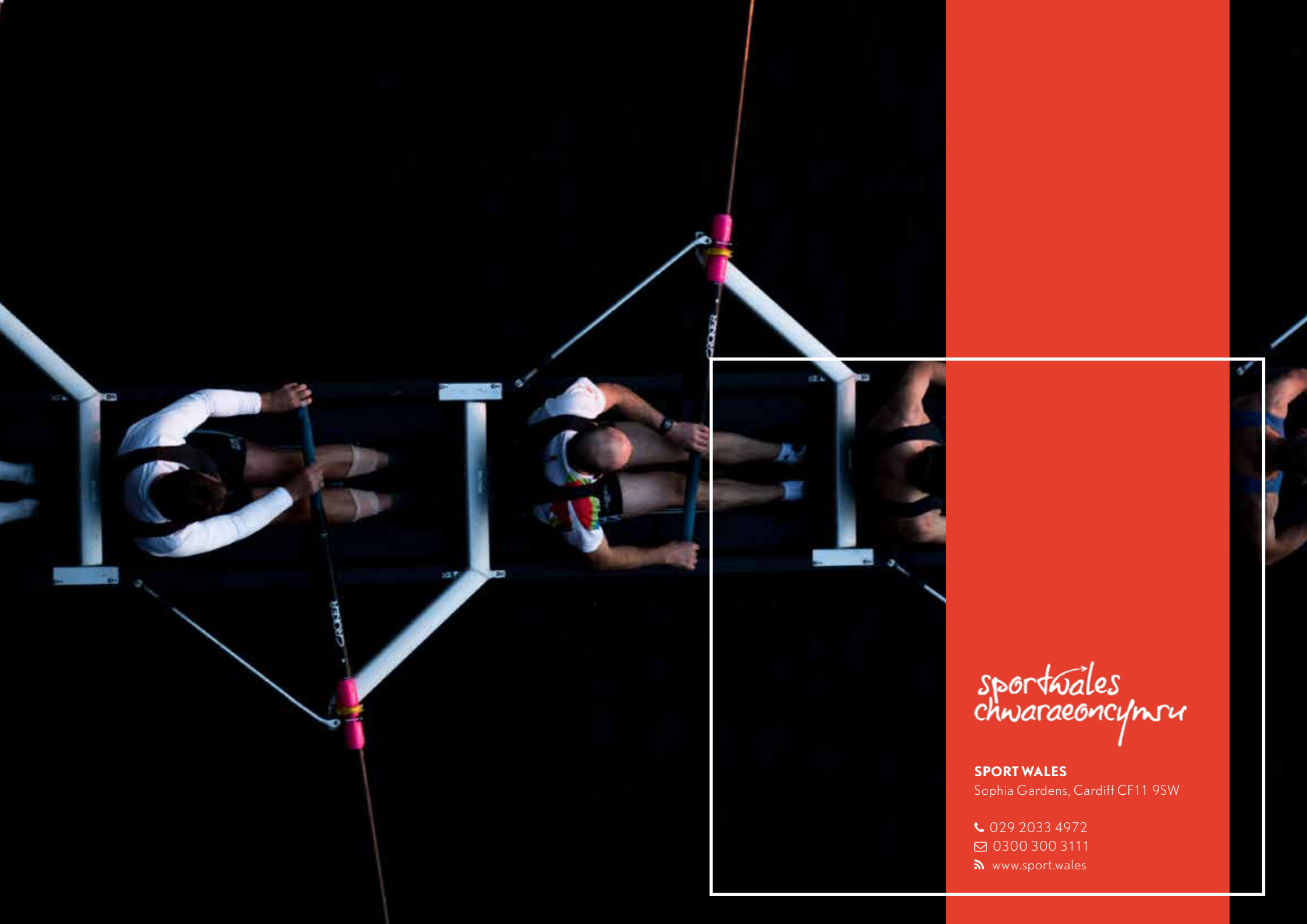


WHAT IMPACT HAS THE NEW BOARD STRUCTURE HAD ON THE ORGANISATION?

We have also found that as we present equality impact assessments to the Board they have become much more engaged and informed on equality issues across the whole organisation, from workforce to rowing programmes. This strengthens our inclusion strategies and also means our Board is continuing to learn and develop.

Relationships with staff are professional and supportive, with Directors offering expertise and ideas but without interfering in the operational detail of what staff members do day-to-day. Our regular review of strategy, Board composition and recruitment means we can adapt Director appointments to our priorities..

Overall, Board and organisational performance have both improved significantly and yet we recognise this is a continuous process. Board learning and development activities will continue, and we will maintain regular oversight on our Board skills, diversity and knowledge.



sportwales
chwaraeoncymsu

SPORT WALES

Sophia Gardens, Cardiff CF11 9SW

☎ 029 2033 4972

✉ 0300 300 3111

🌐 www.sport.wales