

Trustee Profile

Damian Phillips | Partner



- **Non-Executive Director, Welsh Sports Association**
- **Trustee, Welsh Sports Foundation**

Describe your journey and what motivated you to take on these roles?

My first appointment was as a Board Member of Newport and Monmouthshire Young Enterprise between 2011 to 2018. I subsequently served as an elected Parent Governor of Ysgol Gymraeg Pwll Coch from 2015 to 2021.

In 2018, I applied to be the Independent Chair of the Welsh Sports Association's Audit & Risk Committee and was appointed to the role following a competitive recruitment process. After a year, I was appointed a Non-Executive Director (NED) of the WSA, and I am currently in my second four-year term. In early 2024, I was also appointed as a trustee of the Welsh Sports Foundation.

I took on these roles to develop my communication and business skills and to give back to the local community. Being part of a diverse group of people from different backgrounds and industries offers a fantastic opportunity to learn from their skills and experiences, whilst helping to benefit others, many of whom are less fortunate.

Can you describe the mission of your charity and its impact?

The **Welsh Sports Association** is the membership body for the sport and leisure industry in Wales, charged with the task of providing leadership, advocacy and a gateway to business & governance services for the sector. It represents numerous NGOs and local community organisations. It helps communities to engage by participating in the activities of those organisations. In turn, it is hoped that this participation will improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing. [Welsh Sports Association](#)

The **Welsh Sports Foundation** is a recently formed charity whose purpose is to support children and young adults to participate in sport and physical activity by removing financial barriers that would otherwise prevent them from doing so. Its hope is to enrichen the lives of these people, including improving their physical and mental health. [Welsh Sports Foundation](#)

What's your primary role and what skills or experiences do you bring to it?

My primary role as an NED of the WSA is to attend board meetings to ensure good governance and to support the executive team in implementing WSA's strategy and developing its business and commercial activities. The same is true in my role as a trustee of the WSF. Fundraising will also be an important aspect of this role.

As an employment lawyer, I offer HR and employment law support. As a partner of Darwin Gray, I offer experience of running a commercial law firm, including financial, compliance and business development issues.

How do you balance your trustee responsibilities with your professional and personal life?

It is necessary to be organised and prioritise demands appropriately, which can be challenging at times.

Good communication with your fellow executive and non-executive colleagues is key. As with my work as a solicitor, it is important to manage people's expectations (both colleagues and clients) and be realistic when agreeing deadlines.

It is essential to ensure that you are able to switch off when appropriate and spend time doing the things that you enjoy and that help you unwind.

What lessons have you learned along the way?

- 1 Don't bite off more than you can chew** - this may result in rushing, poor performance and be an unnecessary stressor.
- 2 It can be challenging and extremely rewarding** - Rome was not built in a day. These are voluntary roles. It generally takes time to make progress. You will be competing with many other organisations, particularly in the charity sector. The wins outweigh the losses.
- 3 Be open-minded** - There is much to learn from others who work in different industries. Take the time to understand and listen to other opinions and perspectives. Be objective and don't assume that you know better.

What advice would you give your young self?

Don't try to run before you can walk. It can be a chicken-and-egg situation when applying to boards. Don't get disheartened if you are not successful with applications straightaway. Make sure that you pitch to the right organisation and at the right level, to reflect the skills and experience that you offer.

What are your hopes for the future of your charity? How do you see your role evolving?

I hope to see the continued growth that we have enjoyed in recent times, along with the development of some of the exceptional talent that we have in the executive team. I see my role as being more of the same, though, as part of good governance, I will have to step down on the expiry of my current term and then look for a new opportunity/challenge.

