

John F Brown – Personal Statement/ Letter of Application.

I have thought long and hard about making this application and as to whether I possess the background, skills and knowledge to ensure that I could maximise my contribution to the success of the SRU over the next few years. My philosophy is simply that rugby is the greatest game with core values that enhance and improve society.

I have decided that the simplest way forward is to answer the questions posed within the application.

What do I need to succeed? I believe that if I can answer these questions positively, I will demonstrate that I could add meaningful value to the Scottish Rugby Union. I am certainly able to commit to attending and contributing to the appropriate SRU Board meetings, committees and working groups for the full six-year term. Importantly, my wife understands the commitment that this involves and that this commitment will include more than the time given to attending meetings but time given to networking, research and communication. Professionally in previous positions with Lloyds TSB and in my consultancy roles, I have contributed positively to board level meetings and with Chief Executives of Banks. To be an effective ambassador for Scottish Rugby requires communicating in a positive way that builds confidence, inspires others and supports the delivery of our ambitious plans for growth both on and off the pitch. All those involved in rugby have a responsibility for this, no matter their role within a club or within the SRU as the parent body. The clubs have wonderful people with vast experience from a myriad of occupations. If we can harness that experience, community rugby can flourish as they are truly creative in finding solutions for their needs. Mapping and recognising these successes can help establish best practice which then can be shared appropriately. Clubs should not need to re-invent the wheel! For as long as I can remember, clubs have asked for money from the SRU for this and that and while financial help can certainly ease some of the burden, applying and using quality principles of sharing best practice and working smarter not harder will release time. The vast majority of people involved with rugby in Scotland are volunteers. Time is probably the most valuable commodity and if we can communicate and share best practice, we can be of considerable benefit. Additionally streamlined processes bring efficiency and can aid financial pressures.

Facilitating effective solutions and outcomes on challenging topics, through an inclusive and collaborative approach where there are differing perspectives, would be a useful ambition. In my view, good communication involves asking and answering the correct questions. Involving the appropriate people allows potential solutions. Clubs all over Scotland can experience similar issues and a two-way advisory approach with good communication, could help to create a supportive environment for all.

What are some of the challenging topics in Scottish Rugby at present? In my view, there are two pressing issues. Firstly the transition between youth and senior rugby is not as seamless as it could be. Secondly allowing our young talent game time by playing regular rugby must be a priority. This could involve a pathway system although currently this doesn't appear to be working. Any approach needs to be inclusive for all. One approach might be an active role for selectors and scouts independently going out and watching rugby matches. In Scotland we are not blessed with the large playing numbers of some other nations and so we need to be able to capture more young quality players. A player in Moffat, Oban or Highland Rugby Clubs should have the same opportunities as a player in the Central Belt or at a private school. What do the youth set ups at Boroughmuir and Stirling or Strathallan or any of the Edinburgh Private Schools do so well? Why are the private schools so far ahead? Is it simply down to fitness, conditioning and effective coaching? Could investigation and sharing of methods narrow the gap and allow community based kids develop to expand the player base with the emergence of a bigger pool of talent. We have an effective Development Officer system with some very able DO coaching talent. Bench-marking both in Scotland and elsewhere, notably but not exclusively, Ireland and the sharing of information would be a good start. Quality coaches with regular inspirational visits from professional players and coaches would also help. Such an approach must strive to establish outstanding habits and drive-up standards for all.

I certainly bring a curiosity and creative approach that might challenge current thinking constructively and could support effective oversight of decision-making. In my consultancy roles, my interview approach was to ask each person interviewed three simple questions. What do you actually do? What is the biggest hassle in your job? What are you doing to be replaced? The first question focuses the mind on the task at hand and makes sure that the individual knows exactly how they fit into the organisation. Setting their role in the context of what has gone before and what might happen going forward can help them understand how problems may come about. If you understand

the hassles in a job, those hassles can be mitigated which in turn leads to a happier, healthier and less stressed colleague and a more efficient organisation. The last question about being replaced ensures that there is an awareness of the importance of succession planning. As an individual in work, I believed strongly in this concept. As I am training the person that reports to me, I would hope that my boss was doing the same for me! Within the last six months at Murrayfield there have been changes in very senior management positions and it is unclear whether there has been appropriate succession planning. Such planning and principals can and should still be relevant in the club environment. Getting young active committee members is one of the problems in clubs. How many more volunteers would you get if they knew exactly what they were being asked to do, had no hassles in the role and knew exactly who was going to succeed them and when?

To my mind the biggest non-financial issue is Scottish Rugby is getting players playing at an appropriate level. Rugby is a game for all sizes. Yes, but more rugby is a game for all. How can we make it easier for this phrase to be true? In order to grow the game, we need to provide more options. We have a number of variations on a theme, tag, touch and walking rugby provide options. We need to have a plan in place to maximise the potential of everyone associated with our wonderful sport. Players, referees and administrators, with the latter two being frequently forgotten about, are as important as anyone else in the game.

In order to create a successful environment for our U20s, game time is necessary. Until the league programme settles down, these young players need to be playing in the top two divisions of our men's leagues, not reserve rugby. In order to enjoy the game, matches need to be evenly contested at all levels. A fresh, flexible approach needs to be considered when putting matches on. Is the league structure correct? I am talking purely about providing competitive, enjoyable and challenging games involving mainly second and third XV games. In the North and Midlands of the country, second and thirds XV sides will join the league programme and they may play another club's first XV. My son plays rugby in England and they operate a similar league programme. From a distance this seems to work. So why is it a problem for the West and East of the country where a reserve league fixture can create a huge mismatch which is no fun for either team?

The women's game is constantly evolving in terms of organisation taking the opportunity to find the balance between opportunity, challenge and enjoyment without the concept of "it's aye been!" That is an advantage.

Another question relates to the role of Glasgow Warriors and Edinburgh Rugby. Is it performance or development or both? The links between the Professional and Community game need to be optimised. No clear plan exists for the new A games and I suspect that club players will need to step up. This raises questions related to training time, strength and conditioning to ensure that club players taking this step are fit to compete. Should there be an interface between club and professional rugby? Many URC games kick off in the evening. How can the club training routine interface with the professional game?

It is proposed that a new international rugby competition will start in 2026. If the URC leagues stay the same, where are Glasgow Warriors and Edinburgh Rugby going to get players to fulfil their league programme? The number of internationals will increase and so a regular Scotland player might only turn out for their pro team in European matches and not in league games. Any solution will necessitate closer ties with the club game. Exactly how this will occur will be open to debate! If a pro team signs a "journeyman" foreign player, this will add little to the international standing of our national side. Should the pro teams be asked to work more closely with the top end of the club game to develop Scottish players? This would certainly be more cost efficient and would be better facilitated by closer working between the community and professional games.

I and everyone involved with rugby must take personal responsibility for maintaining high standards for themselves and others, driving a culture that does the right thing, not the easy thing. When I worked at TSB Homeloans, I was on the group that created our company values and one of those values was "people listen to what you do, not what you say!". Not only did I create the phrase within our group, I believe in it. Anyone who knows me, and has attended the various SRU courses, conferences and meetings knows that I never take the easy option and always try to take the right option.

A natural influencer and relationship builder listens to those of expertise in a particular area, with collaborative leadership ability to ensure credit is given when due. Visibility and honesty provides gravitas to engage and inspire key stakeholders both within Scottish Rugby and across the wider stakeholder ecosystem. I am a comfortable public

speaker and networker, with an ability to connect people through story-telling and engagement. Indeed, I have put together this application on my own with support from those in the game that I know!

My main strength is that I possess the rugby knowledge as a player, coach and Director of Rugby as well as committee experience. If successful, I would bring this experience to the role of VP. This can only be augmented by my business background working at senior levels in the banking world where I worked in governance as a consultant with the National Australia Group in Compliance, capability and a level of curiosity that supports the Boards, committees and working groups across Scottish Rugby.

Scottish Rugby needs to embrace change as it's inevitable for growth! I am honest and open enough to freely admit that I do not have the solutions to all of the challenges the game here in Scotland. Indeed, I don't pretend to even know what all of those problems might be. However, I would welcome the opportunity to ask questions of and communicate constructively with the myriad of wonderful people at clubs across Scotland although I have deliberately avoided money solutions, trying to control the controllables! Scottish rugby can only move forward by working together to find our own solutions and share our knowledge and experience. I am certainly committed in trying to leave Scottish Rugby in a better place than I found it and leave you with the thought that runs throughout the application document. *"Together, we create unforgettable experiences, grow thriving communities and make memories to last a lifetime."*