

## **S4C Authority Bulletin - February 2000**

This bulletin reports on the Authority's January business meeting in Cardiff. The following matters were discussed:

### **Commercial Agreement between SDN and ONrequest**

The Authority had earlier approved the involvement of S4C, through its partnership with United News and Media and NTL in SDN Limited, in an agreement with ONrequest to provide pay-per-view television across the United Kingdom. This is possible because of S4C's earlier success in bidding for half of the digital capacity on Multiplex A. The Authority received with approval the terms of the 24-year deal which had now been concluded. This investment is part of S4C's strategy to supplement its public funding with significant commercial income, under the powers made available to it by Parliament in the Broadcasting Act 1996. The intention is to use this income to sustain and improve its public services in the future.

Under the deal S4C will use some of its additional digital terrestrial capacity to continue to broadcast live coverage of the National Assembly for Wales on S4C2, and will be able to extend this were the Assembly to meet on additional days. Also, as digital compression makes it possible for more services to be provided on the same digital capacity, S4C will have the option of further extending its services.

### **Review Arrangements for Personnel and Other Systems**

The Authority considered whether it should establish a committee to oversee senior staff appointments and terms and conditions of employment. As with all other matters of oversight and monitoring, the Authority would retain ultimate responsibility. However, the question arose whether it would assist the Authority were a smaller group of members to take specific responsibility for this particular area of its work, as was already done for other matters by the Authority's Audit and Complaints Committees.

The Authority noted that it was now accepted best practice to have a remuneration committee but asked for further consideration to be given to whether the remit of such a committee should extend to personnel systems generally. It also wished further thought to be given to the relationship of the work of such a committee and that of the Audit Committee. It agreed that it should consider this and other issues concerning the Authority's oversight and monitoring of control systems in the context of its consideration of the Turnbull Report on corporate governance. It will do this at its next meeting.

## **Digital College**

As part of its continuing programme of presentations and discussions on key issues facing S4C and broadcasting generally as it develops its corporate strategy, the Authority received a presentation from Elen Rhys of the Welsh Digital College.

The Digital College is creating a partnership with further and higher colleges, the training and enterprise councils, employers, broadcasters and others, including NTL, to use the new digital technologies, (including television and the internet,) to provide new, more accessible opportunities for lifelong learning throughout Wales. The Authority has supported the proposal for the initiative from the outset, which it sees as a unique contribution which S4C, with others, can make to help ensure a prosperous and successful Wales. It was glad to reaffirm S4C's commitment to make digital broadcasting capacity available to the Digital College. It was also pleased that it had been possible to provide funding again this year to help set up the Digital College. The Authority welcomed the wide range of partners who were eager to work as part of the venture. It also welcomed the considerable success of the Digital College in attracting major European funding to develop the necessary software and to pilot it in the months ahead. It saw this as an important recognition of the potential of the Digital College to be a model for the delivery of distance learning in exciting, new and accessible ways across the UK, in Europe and beyond. The Authority looks forward to the Digital College's formal launch later this year.

## **Children's Programmes**

The Authority also welcomed a presentation from S4C's Commissioning Editor for Children's Programmes, Meirion Davies. The Authority reaffirmed the importance it attaches to children's programmes, not only as of value in themselves to children and parents throughout Wales, but also as vital to building new audiences for Welsh language programmes in the future. It recognised the massive challenge of broadcasting Welsh language children's programmes of a standard which could compete successfully with the enormous and growing competition on digital television, the internet and from computer games. It sees this as a challenge not only for S4C as a broadcaster but also for Wales' distinctive culture and language, not least bearing in mind the huge weight of competition from American programmes.

It therefore welcomed the continuing popularity of S4C's children's programmes and the new round of programmes which have been commissioned for 2000 and 2001. Despite the extent of the competition and the challenge, the recent award of a BAFTA to Tecwyn the Tractor, as the best pre-school programme in the UK, showed that S4C was well able to compete with the best.

**Other Matters**

The Authority also considered regular reports on

- programme performance
- audience research
- S4C's financial situation

The Authority's assessment of the performance of programmes and the results of audience research in 1999 will be included in the Authority's Annual Report, which it plans to publish in June. The Authority's annual accounts for 1999 will be published at the same time.

**New on this Site**

Readers may wish to note that a detailed description of the Authority's role, as well the Code of Practice adopted by the Authority, are now available on this site.

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