

S4C Authority Bulletin - July 2002

OPEN MEETING – Barry

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Thursday evening, 27 June 2002 in Barry where some 15 people were present. The Meeting was chaired by Cefin Campbell, a Member of S4C Authority, and the Chief Executive, Huw Jones, and the Director of Programmes, Huw Eirug took part in the discussion. Other Members of the Authority were also present to listen to the discussion and for an informal chat with the public both before and after the meeting. The issues discussed included the following:

Drama Programmes

It was felt that *Talcen Caled*, *Pen Tenny* and *Tipyn o Stad* were too alike and involved the same actors. This was somewhat confusing. Several members of the audience agreed with this. Also, with regard to *Pen Tenny* in particular, an observation was made that it contained far too much violence, sex and hatred - hardly anyone was happy there, with broken marriages and so much cruelty being featured. Although the story was criticised, it was felt that the actors and the production should be praised. Following on from this, a request was made for a series similar to Forsyte Saga in Welsh, which would be in contrast with the above programmes.

Huw Eirug responded by accepting the criticism concerning the similarity between the three serial programmes mentioned above. In retrospect, and if he were to be granted the time again, he would have broadcast them in a different order. From the point of view of classical serials on S4C, mention was made that filming had begun on adaptations of Daniel Owen's novels - Rhys Lewis and Enoc Lewis. The series *Y Dreflan* would be broadcast around the end of the year, and it was hoped that S4C would have three series in all over a period of three years.

Viewing Figures

Enquiries were made about the possibility of publishing viewing figures in *Y Cymro* every week. Rumour had it that *Pobl y Cwm* was not as popular as it had been in the past, but figures were no longer available in *Y Cymro* or elsewhere. Neither did criticisms or discussions of programmes appear in *Golwg* or similar papers.

Huw Jones replied that it was true that S4C used to publish figures in *Y Cymro*. The viewing figures were based on a sample of 450 homes. This was meant to represent everyone in Wales. The sample throughout Britain was completely changed at the end of last year which meant that the homes now were completely new ones. The figures which had been supplied by the new sample had been very unreliable and were incredulous. The present figures asked S4C to believe that viewers in west Wales had halved in number overnight from the end of December to the beginning of January. This was not possible whatever events had taken place. S4C was holding regular discussions with the individuals responsible for measuring viewing patterns and it was hoped that S4C, by September, would have figures in which it believed; it would then be possible to publish them once more.

Pobol y Cwm

The weaknesses of *Pobol y Cwm* lately were mentioned. Reference was made to the fact that this was a topic which was discussed in every public meeting, quite naturally, since the programme was broadcast five times a week (with an omnibus edition on Sundays). S4C had been, and was still holding regular discussions with the BBC which produced *Pobol y Cwm* for broadcast by S4C. Efforts were being made at present under the auspices of a new producer to try and strengthen the programme. Because of the nature of producing a soap opera such as *Pobol y Cwm* it would take a while to see its influence on screen. It was unlikely that any changes would be seen before September, but in the meantime, S4C was eager to see *Pobol y Cwm* re-establishing itself as one of S4C's most popular dramas.

During discussion of what the audience believed was going wrong with *Pobol y Cwm*, it was suggested that the ideas in the stories at present were too sad and that there was not enough humour. In the early years, *Pobol y Cwm* contained much humour; by now it was thought that everyone was constantly bickering and quarrelling. There was much immorality too, especially considering how early in the evening it was broadcast, with families or children expected to be watching. It was believed that the soap opera on the whole was not a true portrayal of life in Wales. It was true that some horrific events take place, but not on a daily basis, but that was the impression given by *Pobol y Cwm*.

Another member of the audience mentioned that she worked with 400 children from 3-11 years old and parents who were learning Welsh. In the past, she had been encouraging them, every day nearly, to sit their children down to watch programmes such as *Pobol y Cwm*. It was customary too for her to discuss the soap opera with the children, especially pupils in years 5 and 6, and for them to consider it as homework. She was not prepared to do that now. There were things happening which she could not suggest that children should watch at that time of night. Naturally, the children live in a world where all these things do happen, but she believed that it was not a responsible thing for her to encourage them to watch them - that was a matter for their parents.

Children's Programmes

S4C was congratulated on its children's programmes. Some of these were excellent - the animated ones for younger viewers in particular. However, there was a distinct lack of programmes of which the teacher could say 'go home, sit down with your child and watch these programmes'. For example, *Hapus Dyrfa* was humorous and it had a story which children could watch and not be confronted by vulgarity. So many children come from unfortunate backgrounds and from very sad homes these days and they actually live with some of these situations - they don't want to sit down and watch them too. Consequently, an appeal was made for more programmes suitable for the whole family. The fact that the *Tweenies* are available in Welsh for the younger children was also commended. It was felt that serial programmes such as *Tweenies* and *Teletubbies* in Welsh were a good thing, along with programmes such as *Ffeil*, and also *Planed Plant*.

Digital

The subject of digital television was touched upon. Huw Jones stated that the digital world gave S4C an excellent opportunity to have its own channel rather than having to share a channel with Channel 4, as happens with analogue. The problems of trying to squeeze the

best of Channel 4 into S4C's programmes schedule as well as providing Welsh language programmes at peak times were endless. For example, should S4C broadcast the 'Derby' or the Urdd Eisteddfod. Lately, Channel 4 had been broadcasting the cricket, and of course, people in Wales also wanted to see it. This over-ran, from time to time, and a question was raised the previous week whether *Pobol y Cwm* should be interrupted or not? A digital channel, therefore, was the answer to this problem. However, S4C had not received more funding from the government in order to fill those hours with new programmes every hour of the day as S4C would have wished. Consequently, there were a fair number of repeats on the digital channel, although this too had its advantages when people wanted to have a second chance to watch the best programmes. Reference was also made to the fact that a digital box was now available for £100 which allowed people to receive S4C digital along with around twelve other channels. By now, around 43% of homes in Wales, and a little more than that in the case of Welsh speaking homes, receive digital television. This was quite similar to the numbers across Britain.

S4C Digital was at its best, perhaps, during the Eisteddfodau and the Royal Welsh - when it was possible, for example, to broadcast from the Eisteddfod Pavilion throughout the day. S4C's comprehensive coverage of festivals in Wales drew many people to watch on digital television. Added to this, a digital channel gave a chance for S4C to offer original programmes to the service; an opportunity to watch some of its best programmes over the years; and also an opportunity to watch a programme which perhaps had been broadcast previously during that particular week.

Rugby

One person expressed dissatisfaction that S4C was broadcasting rugby at 5.30 on Saturdays and was of the opinion that it would be better if the rugby was broadcast during the afternoon. Huw Eirug explained that it was a part of the contract with the Rugby Union that no broadcaster was permitted to broadcast a live game at 3 o'clock because the attraction of a televised match could effect the crowd numbers which were going to watch another match.

The viewing figures of *Clwb Rygbi* since its broadcast by S4C at 5.30 pm had been very good. People were watching at that time, although they may not be people who go to watch the game live. It was also suggested that some enjoyed going to watch a game, and then coming back home to watch another live game on the television - it was quite likely that there were many others who couldn't get enough rugby!

Religious Programmes

The question was asked if S4C had a Religion Department, because the only programme offered was *Dechrau Canu Dechrau Canmol* on a Sunday evening. Huw Eirug replied that there was no Religion Department as such but that S4C had a new religious series which was scheduled to begin at the end of August/beginning of September. The series *Llwybrau Paul* also had been broadcast earlier in the year. *Hanfod* was broadcast on digital every Sunday afternoon; this was a magazine programme which discussed various aspects of religion.

Scientific Programmes

A similar question to the above was raised with regard to scientific programmes in Welsh. It was understood that the national scientific society and the Cardiff scientific society had contacted S4C several times asking for programmes with a scientific flavour. Despite this,

nothing had been seen for some three or four years. The question was asked whether this was a matter of lack of finance or resources, or was it because they were not popular.

Huw Eirug replied that the challenge for S4C was to deal with subjects such as science in an interesting and entertaining manner. The Channel had recently broadcast programmes discussing 'asprin' and space travel. Having said that, the production companies who offered scientific ideas were very few in number. And even if the number of suggestions rose, the fact that something was available in Welsh was not sufficient in itself - it must be of a standard which is as good as anything else which people are going to see on any other channel. People were not going to watch something because it was a new subject; the treatment of it was vitally important.

Programmes on Foreign Countries

It was suggested that there was a need for programmes on other countries, including perhaps small countries in Europe and beyond, with some Welsh dimension, with possible comparison between them and the situation in Wales. It was believed that people were very ignorant of foreign countries. It was felt that it would be possible to achieve a Welsh viewpoint by giving attention to other countries and by looking at their history, their economy, politics and culture.

Huw Jones and Huw Eirug responded by referring to programmes such as *Byd Pws* and *Ewropa* which had been broadcast by S4C. S4C had produced programmes similar to those mentioned above now and then throughout the years – an example was given of a programme which was broadcast where Russia was viewed through the eyes of a young girl. Before long, too, an excellent programme, bought from French television and which outlines the history of the Breton language, the likes of which will not be shown by any other channel in Britain, would be broadcast. Consequently, whilst taking note of what had been said, S4C did touch upon these subjects, but the comments were noted.

Welsh Programmes for Learners

Questions were asked about the provision for learners in the future. Huw Eirug referred to the fact that the programme *Yr Wythnos* is being broadcast at 2.00 o'clock every Sunday afternoon at present. This was acknowledged and it was believed that the programme's language was of a very high standard, the pace was good and it was being enjoyed - despite the fact that the broadcast time was rather awkward with it being scheduled after Sunday lunch.

Hwoever, it was believed that there was a great void in the provision for learners. It was difficult to go from watching programmes for learners to watching programmes for fluent Welsh speakers. *Yr Wythnos* is one thing, but there are no other programmes, such as plays, for example.

Huw Eirug mentioned that S4C had been considering drama again and he was of the opinion that it was high time to develop a situation where a learner was the main character with not too large a cast etc. During the autumn, *Welsh in a Week* would be returning to the screen, followed by another series, *Cariad at Iaith*, which shows people learning Welsh - but it was acknowledged that these would not fill the gap referred to.

The importance of television was felt as people began to learn the language, and that through personal experience where no family member nor work colleague spoke the language. S4C and Radio Cymru were the only places where a person could hear the language outside Welsh

classes. It was essential, therefore, that these media were available in order to try and develop the language between classes.

Non-Welsh speaking Viewers

A non-Welsh speaking member of the audience mentioned that from time to time he would watch programmes using the sub-titles on the 888 service. He enjoyed the sports and music programmes which, in his opinion, overcame every linguistic obstacle. He did not agree with comments which appeared in the press complaining about commentaries in Welsh on sports - it was good that this was available. As a non-Welsh speaker he watched a fair amount of S4C, he was aware of a number of people in the same situation who did likewise, and that was his main interest in this meeting.

The evening was brought to a close with a word of thanks to all present for coming and contributing to S4C's charity appeal - Shelter Cymru. Cookery booklets by Dudley were for sale at £1 with the profit forwarded to the appeal and any support for the campaign to raise money would be greatly appreciated.

BUSINESS MEETING – 28 JUNE - BARRY

Sky

A report was given on the developments in the discussion with Sky since the last meeting of the Authority. It was noted that Sky had responded by rejecting S4C's request. A number of possibilities concerning S4C's position on satellite television were still being discussed.

The Chairman

Janet Lewis-Jones reported on the latest news concerning the Chairman's health. The treatment which she had received had been successful but she was now required to have a course of chemotherapy. She mentioned that Elan Closs Stephens would be seeing a specialist later on that day to discuss the treatment which she was to face during the next few months. The Chairman was fully intent on continuing to undertake a number of activities during this time but it was difficult to say which ones at present.

Urdd Eisteddfod

With regard to S4C's activities on the field, it was stated that there had been much activity at the S4C tent throughout the week and that it had been very successful. It was felt that this was the centre of attraction for young children.

Management Team/Commissioners' Away-Day

It was reported that the day was considered as being beneficial by all who had been present. The work of concentrating more and more on 'must see' programmes was going ahead. The intention was to hold a similar day in September before reporting back to the Authority. The task then would be to draw all this together with the corporate plan and the budget for the

coming year, with consideration given to priorities etc. It was noted that this meeting was a further step in the process which had begun with the Authority's away-day at the beginning of the year and receiving the enhanced report was an event to be looked forward to later on in the year.

BAFTA Wales Awards

The Members noted with pleasure S4C's resounding success at the BAFTA Wales awards this year and congratulations were extended to all involved with the winning programmes.

Viewing Figures

Attention was drawn to the discussions which were ongoing with BARB with a view to moving on to a dependable system of measuring audiences. Some specific ideas had been mentioned in order to reduce the inconsistencies in the figures received by S4C at present. The system was facing some problems on a British level but because of the comparatively small size of S4C's target audience, these problems posed an even greater problem in the case of S4C.

In making note of the situation, it was suggested that one could ask if it was worthwhile paying for such an expensive service if the information provided was unreliable. Perhaps it would be worthwhile looking further afield at other systems which were available. It was agreed to return to the matter in September and to consider whether S4C actually believed the latest figures available from BARB. If it did not, further consideration would have to be given to what the Channel should do concerning the situation, bearing in mind the importance of BARB figures to S4C Masnachol from the point of view of advertising and sponsorship.

Presentation to Dysg

The Chief Executive gave a report on a presentation given by him during a two day conference on the promotion of lifelong learning. The theme of the presentation was S4C's wish to add value to life in Wales within its broadcasting remit and the way in which the material available to the Channel could be further used for education.

The Communications Bill

S4C had already forwarded evidence to the Joint Scrutiny Committee on the Communications Bill. The next step was to respond to the DCMS on the Bill by 10 August. Some of the clauses which dealt with, and affected, S4C had yet to be drafted but S4C was discussing their content with the Department. The main issues which required attention included the following:

- the need to extend the Authority's powers to set up new services. This would mean that an ITC/OFCOM license would not be necessary for S4C2 as is the case at present.
- ensuring that any changes to the commercial powers of S4C reflected S4C's special circumstances.
- re-introducing the arguments for a review by the Secretary of State every ten years rather than every five years

- the need for continued discussion with the DCMS regarding the change in the funding formula with regard to an increase in the baseline. (Members noted that it was hoped that information would be available concerning the Chancellor of the Exchequer's decisions regarding the public spending round by the next meeting.)
- Programmes policy statement. There was a need for further discussion with regard to the need that S4C should publish such a declaration when similar information appeared in its Annual Report.

It was noted that a further opportunity would be granted in the next meeting for Members to comment on the response that communication should be forwarded to DCMS. The Measure would then be brought before Parliament for a period of around a year.

Compliance

Nwci –

- (a) Consideration was given to a matter referred by the Compliance Group which asked Members to consider whether such a series was acceptable for broadcast by a public service broadcaster and also whether it devalued women? Three clips chosen from one programme in the series were viewed.
- (b) **Agreed:** In order to reach a full and fair decision, that discussion on this matter be postponed until the next meeting so that the Members, in the meantime, would be able to watch the series in its entirety. It would also be useful if some form of context could be set, against which Members could measure the series *Nwci* (e.g. programmes of a similar nature which were shown by other broadcasting channels). As well as this, a copy of the relevant compliance guidelines should be included with the papers for the next meeting.

Standard of Language used by Factual Programme Presenters

- (a) The Authority gave consideration to the Monitoring Unit's research work on the standard of language used by presenters as well as a paper which made some recommendations concerning the way ahead following the research findings. Members appreciated the detail of the research work and were pleased to note the positive evidence which it offered with regard to the standard of language used in a range of factual programmes which had been the subject of detailed monitoring. Members also were in agreement with suggestions concerning the next steps. However, it was noted that young presenters were chiefly to blame for the majority of errors and it was felt that this was a matter to which officers should pay attention. Differentiation was also made between considerations of dialect and mutations. The opinion was voiced that there was no room for any incorrect examples of mutations and that this was something which should be followed up. It was important to emphasise to the production companies that they had a responsibility to ensure the use of correct Welsh. However, it was also believed that it was necessary to ensure that the need for refined use of the Welsh language should not be interpreted as the most important factor to the detriment of creativity. It was also necessary to bear in mind that there was room to develop staff and that presenters were not expected to be perfect in every aspect of their work at the outset.
- (b) **Agreed:** While research work offered encouraging evidence with regard to the correctness of presenters' language, there was, however, room for improvement. On the

basis of comments and guidance given by Members of the Authority, therefore, the Management Team/Broadcasting Panel should consider the steps which need to be taken and to relate these to the production companies.

Sponsorship

The Authority considered two applications for sponsorship and a discussion was held on the recommendations made by the report after it had been circulated.

Agreed:

- (a) *Ysgol Gerdd Geiman* – that a sponsorship of £2,000 be given to this school in Patagonia, Argentina, in recognition of the fact that S4C had benefited from the co-operation and goodwill of the inhabitants of the country during the production of several series and programmes which had been filmed there.
- (b) Archbishop of Wales Prize for Church Music - That the application for sponsorship be rejected because this would extend too widely the principles behind the sponsorship policy.

Other Business

The following issues were also discussed or noted:

- Chief Executive's Report – Matters for information
- Financial Report
- Budget - Ten Year Plan
- S4C Business Managing Director's Report
- Viewers' Hotline - Relocation
- Complaints Report
- Minutes of Compliance Group held on 14 June 2002.
- Viewers' Hotline Report
- Research Report
- Programmes Report