

S4C Authority Bulletin

- October 2003

OPEN MEETING – CIVIC CENTRE - NEWPORT

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Thursday, 23 October 2003 at Newport. The meeting was chaired by Elan Closs Stephens, Chair of S4C, and the Chief Executive, Huw Jones, and Director of Programmes, Iona Jones, also took part in the discussion. Amongst the issues discussed were:

Comedy

A member of the audience referred to the preponderance of comedy in the Channel's provision in its early days, and asked why there now seemed to be much less. Huw Jones responded by saying that he shared this concern, but said that it was not due to any lack of effort. Significant sums of money had been spent on developing comedy, but it was proving very difficult to sustain and provide comedy on a regular basis. Nevertheless, a number of programmes broadcast by S4C contained an element of comedy, although they were not comedy programmes as such. He went on to say that this is not a problem confined to Welsh language broadcasting, and that genuinely successful comedy productions were also in short supply on the English channels. He said that this was a very difficult area. He acknowledged that if there were any one area in which S4C would wish to have more successful programmes, it would be comedy. S4C was doing its best to get more programmes in this area.

The Director of Programmes referred to the fact that *Cnex* (an animated satirical programme) would be returning to the screen following the success of the pilot programme. A new series would be broadcast in the New Year. It was hoped that other satirical and comedy programmes would also be available for broadcast in the next year.

Programmes for Younger Children

A member of the audience referred to the situation of her 3-year-old child living in a highly anglicised area. She said that it would be very useful to have programmes for very young children to help them to develop their Welsh and to make basic use of it before going to a Welsh medium school. Huw Jones said that the Channel was trying to make some provision for very young children, but that it was perhaps true that such programmes were not necessarily available throughout the year and accepted the point that was being made. The parent added that programmes on Saturday and Sunday mornings would also be very useful. The Director of Programmes noted this, and referred to the fact that S4C offered extended hours of children's programming during school holidays, and hoped that such provision would be well received.

Programming Clashes

A member of the audience referred to the occasional clashes between events such as the Eisteddfod and cricket matches. The questioner asked why the clash could not be resolved by making use of the second channel. Huw Jones replied by saying that this was only a problem on analogue, and that there were no clashes on digital. In terms of the second channel, he said that the Channel did have ambitions for developing further the use of S4C2 in addition to the current Assembly coverage, but that there was in reality no funding available to pursue this at the moment.

Clwb Garddio

A member of the audience said that *Clwb Garddio* was very popular, even amongst non Welsh-speakers. It was said that it was one of the best gardening programmes on any channel. The experts were very good and the prize of £1,000 for the competition also attracted non Welsh-speakers to take part.

Sub-titles

Reference was made to the lack of consistency with regard to sub-titling on S4C. It was said that a person had watched a programme in a series which contained sub-titles, only to find that in the next programme no sub-titles were available. Elan Closs Stephens replied by saying that S4C had a policy of providing sub-titles for repeat broadcasts of all programmes. The key factor as to the availability or otherwise of open sub-titles was whether the programme in question was being broadcast for the first time or was a repeat. S4C also offered a sub-titling service on page 888 on teletext for 76% of its programmes, and it was likely that sub-titles would be available on this service even if open sub-titles did not appear on screen.

Learners

A Welsh Learner in the audience said that it was difficult to make use of the Welsh language in the community because it was not obvious who was able to speak Welsh, and that this was exacerbated by lack of confidence. It was said that there had been good programmes for learners, such as *Welsh in a Week*, but that current programmes such as *Cariad@Iaith* were not as good. More programmes such as *Welsh in a Week* were needed. Iona Jones responded by saying that S4C was currently looking at learners' programmes for the next year, and that feedback such as this was very useful. In terms of making use of Welsh in the community, reference was made to the fact that organisations such as the Mentrau Iaith organised events to give Welsh speakers and learners opportunities to socialise through the medium of Welsh.

Pobol y Cwm

Reference was made to the changes in the broadcast times for *Pobol y Cwm*. Iona Jones responded by saying that lengthy consideration had been given to *Pobol y Cwm* and the feedback received on the scheduling changes. She was coming to the conclusion that the soap opera needed a regular slot in the schedule. One consideration was the competition of the soap operas on the other channels, but it was felt that the Channel should have sufficient faith in *Pobol y Cwm* to go head to head with the other soaps. However, it was necessary to ensure that viewers knew at what times it was being broadcast. It was also hoped that placing *Pobol y Cwm* in the right slot would lead to people staying with the Channel to watch its other programmes. Another member of the audience said that although he enjoyed *Pobol y Cwm*, the sub-titles on 888 were slow to appear on screen and that they did not keep up with what was being said in Welsh.

Pam fi Duw

Reference was made to the *Pam fi Duw* series. This was a highly successful and popular series amongst young people, and a questioner asked whether it was intended to give repeat showings and to broadcast the series that had not yet appeared on screen. It was acknowledged that the report on the investigation of the Children's Commissioner had not yet been published, but it was suggested it might be appropriate to broadcast the series next year. Huw Jones was happy to acknowledge the undoubted popularity of *Pam fi Duw* amongst young people. He felt that the challenge for S4C was to find another series that would be equally appealing. S4C had no current plans to re-broadcast the series.

Viewing Figures

A question was asked as to how S4C calculated its viewing figures. Huw Jones explained the BARB system that measured which channels were being watched in some 540 homes in Wales and some 10,000 homes across the UK. The published viewing figures were therefore based on a sample of all viewers. The BARB system was the independent system used to calculate the viewing figures of all broadcasters in the UK. He said that S4C published comprehensive information about its viewing figures in its Annual Report. S4C also published weekly figures on its 'top twenty' programmes, although little coverage was given to the fact that 900,000 different people watch S4C every week.

The National Eisteddfod

Reference was made to the fact that the Eisteddfod would be visiting Newport next year. It was said that it would be good if S4C could give some screen coverage to Newport. The idea was welcomed and it was confirmed that consideration would be given to producing a programme about the area for a timely broadcast in relation to the Eisteddfod.

BUSINESS MEETING

The following is a summary of the main points raised during discussions at the meeting of the S4C Authority held on Friday, 24 October 2003 at the Civic Centre, Newport.

Authority Membership

The Chair reported that interviews had been held for the successor to Huw Wynne-Griffith on 3 October 2003. A recommendation was now being submitted to the Secretary of State, and it was hoped that the appointment of a new Member could be made by 1 November 2003.

S4C Review

It was reported that two further meetings had been held in relation to the S4C review, one with the Urdd and the other with the Arts Council. Both meetings were positive and constructive, and a number of ideas were discussed.

Rugby World Cup

Everyone involved with the rugby broadcasts were congratulated. It was worth noting the viewing figures for the Wales v Tonga game, which showed that people had been able to find their way to the Channel to watch the game on the Sunday morning (especially given that S4C was the only broadcaster showing the game live on analogue).

S4C Events at the Political Party Conferences

The Chair noted that S4C had held an event at each of the main political party conferences. Whilst acknowledging that this year's arrangements should be reviewed, the Chair said that she was satisfied that important messages had been conveyed at all four events.

TAC and the Code of Practice on Programme Commissioning

Members noted the current situation in relation to the negotiations with TAC on the Code of Practice. The negotiation process with TAC was ongoing and officers would report back to the Authority at the next meeting.

Skillset/Ofcom Working Party

The Authority noted that industry training was one of the areas for which Ofcom would have monitoring responsibilities. The Skillset/Ofcom working party had been producing recommendations on the kind of training commitment that should be expected of all broadcasters. An outline code of practice had now been presented to Ofcom and Authority Members were apprised of its main elements. The intention was that S4C and the BBC would come under this arrangement on the same basis as licensed companies.

S4C Review

The Authority considered a paper promoting further debate on S4C strategy for the future following Members' discussions during their special meeting held on 13 October. A draft report of the paper to be published on the review would be presented to the Authority at its next meeting.

2003-2005 Corporate Plan Monitoring Report

Consideration was given to the situation at the end of the third quarter of the year. Overall, targets set had been/were being achieved.

Presentation by Berwyn Rowlands, Director of Sgrin

Berwyn Rowlands, Director of Sgrin, was welcomed to the meeting of the Authority. He gave a presentation on the Cardiff Screen Festival (the new name for the Welsh International Film Festival) to be held between 14 and 22 November. He circulated the programme for the week, and drew Members' attention to a number of highlights. For example, the opening night would feature the European *premiere* of *Danny Deckchair* (starring Rhys Ifans in the main role). He said that the Festival had two main objectives. The first was that it should be a festival for the public; secondly, it was hoped that it would be an event relevant to the moving images sector in Wales (i.e. film, television and new media). He acknowledged that public awareness of the Festival had been low in previous years, but hoped that this year's marketing strategies would lead to an improvement. He said that it was hoped that some 10,000 tickets would be sold throughout the Festival. It was said that the city of Cardiff was highly supportive of the event and was anxious to make it a success. At the end of his presentation Members thanked Berwyn Rowlands for sharing information about the Festival.

Other Matters

The following matters were discussed/noted:

- Report of the Chief Executive – matters for information
- Report on the Programmes Service
- Financial Report
- Complaints Report
- Report and Minutes of the meeting of the Compliance Group held on 10 October 2003
- Report on the Viewers' Hotline
- Research Report
- Report of the Managing Director of S4C Masnachol