

# **The S4C Welsh Fourth Channel Authority Bulletin – October 1999**

The S4C Authority is committed to a policy of maximum possible openness about its discussions and decisions. In addition to its programme of meetings with the public across Wales and the publication of its annual report and corporate plan, as well as a wide range of other information on S4C's web site, the Authority has decided to publish regular bulletins about its discussions and decisions. These will be made available to the press and on S4C's web site.

This first bulletin looks back over the Authority's work during the past few months.

## **The Authority's rôle and Code of Practice**

The Authority reviewed its rôle and adopted a code of practice governing its behaviour and that of individual members. The code is based on the seven principles of public life laid down by the Nolan Committee. These are: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. These documents will be published soon, including on S4C's web site.

In the light of this, the Authority considered its future work programme and confirmed that its focus would be on:

- laying down S4C's strategic direction, priorities and main budgets, and the way in which its management team's performance in achieving them will be measured. This will be done on the basis of S4C's corporate plan, which will be up-dated every year
- regulating S4C's broadcasts and commercial activities
- considering regular reports on who watches S4C's programmes and what viewers think of them
- holding meetings every year in different parts of Wales to hear face to face what viewers have to say
- having regular briefing sessions, as well as meetings with outside bodies, to keep up to date with major developments and possibilities in broadcasting.

## **Programmes and budgets 2000/2001**

The Authority approved proposals for the commissioning of S4C's programmes over the next two years. These were drawn up, following detailed audience research, so as to fulfil the Authority's objectives of:

- providing services which are relevant and attractive both to first language Welsh speakers and to those who are less fluent, of all ages in all parts of Wales, from all social groups and of all interests, enriching the lives of all;

- providing an extended service on digital during non-peak hours, but ensuring that this will not mean a fall in the standard of these programmes which S4C broadcasts in peak hours on the analogue service (which are simulcast on digital);
- increasing the number of younger people, including those in the age group 16-44, who watch S4C.

The schedules will combine established and popular existing programmes with the new, and provide a clear daily and nightly pattern, so that viewers will know what kinds of programmes will be broadcast when. The main new features of the schedules on both analogue and digital will be:

- an increase in the amount of original drama
- an increase in new programmes for pre-school and school age children
- programmes targeted at a youth audience on Thursday evenings throughout the year
- further improvements in sports coverage
- more family entertainment on Saturday evenings
- more Sunday day-time programmes.

In addition, late evenings on digital will provide a wide variety of themed programmes of interest to particular groups of viewers.

The Authority also approved budget allocations for 2000.

As a result of these decisions, 99% of the UK Government's grant to S4C will be spent on the programme service, and at least 95% of S4C's expenditure on commissioning programmes will be in Wales.

### **Timing of the main evening news**

Following detailed analysis of audience viewing patterns, the Authority had, in 1998, approved moving the main evening news on S4C from 20.30 to 19.30 from the beginning of 1999.

The Authority considered detailed figures about the performance of S4C's main evening news and drama and entertainment programmes since this change. They showed that, taking the year as a whole, the main news programme had maintained its audience share and reach overall (although the figures had varied from week to week and night to night), and had increased its share substantially in South Wales. Audience appreciation for the news had also been maintained. The number of viewers in the 20.30 to 21.00 slot, which had been filled by a mixture of drama and entertainment programmes, had risen by 38% on average, from 34,000 to 47,000.

In the light of this information, the Authority decided that the decision to move the main news had been the right one and that this pattern should continue. Like all programme and scheduling decisions, this will be kept under review by the Authority in the light of S4C's continuing programme of audience monitoring and research.

## **Programme Guidelines on the use of English in Welsh language programmes**

The Authority considered representations from a member of Cylch yr Iaith objecting to its Programme Compliance Guidelines as to the circumstances in which it may be acceptable to allow the use of a limited amount of English during Welsh language programmes.

The Authority noted that it had adopted the Guidelines in September 1998 after careful consideration and full discussion of the views that had been put to it, and having regard to the results of specially commissioned research on the attitude of S4C's viewers.

After further detailed discussion, the Authority decided that there was no reason to change the Guidelines at this time. It was conscious, however, that this is a difficult and sensitive issue which generated strong feelings. It will continue to monitor carefully how the Guidelines are operated and review them from time to time in the light of that experience.

### **Sub-titles**

The Authority approved special arrangements for open English language sub-titling of peak time Welsh language programming during the opening week of the Rugby World Cup. The intention was to draw viewers' attention to the sub-titling service on page 888 of Teletext and so encourage more non Welsh speakers and those with hearing impairments to watch S4C's programmes. It was also felt to be a good way of drawing S4C to the attention of those visiting Wales for the Rugby World Cup.

### **Party Political Broadcasts**

The Authority approved consultation with the major political parties on new proposals for party political and party election broadcasts. These had been prepared jointly by S4C with the BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority. In the light of a survey of the public's views about these broadcasts, the main proposed change is to link non-election broadcasts with party conferences. The parties in Wales have been asked to indicate whether they would foresee exercising this entitlement in relation to their British or Welsh party conferences.

### **S4C's Commercial Activities**

The Authority laid down guidelines on how it would continue to oversee and regulate S4C's commercial activities. Its aims are to maximise the dividend for S4C over a period of years to invest in extending the range and quality of its Welsh language programmes and other public services. At the same time, it will ensure fair trading, with no subsidy of any kind, direct or indirect, from public funds, and in accordance with general competition law.

As part of the changed arrangements for funding S4C introduced by the Broadcasting Act 1996, which reduced the real level of S4C's public funding, S4C was given the power to establish or participate in commercial enterprises. These must be wholly or mainly for the purpose of running broadcast services, or incidental activities, and be licenced by the Independent Television Commission or the Radio Authority.

S4C has moved quickly to exploit the benefits of this power. Already its annual commercial turnover exceeds £11.5 million a year, and makes an important contribution towards paying for S4C's central overheads and marketing. This has made it possible to release resources to improve Welsh language programming. It is also making possible important public service improvements such as the live broadcasting of the National Assembly for Wales and the plans to extend educational opportunities throughout Wales by means of the Digital College. In addition, it is providing the seed corn which will make it possible to expand commercial enterprises and generate additional income for S4C's public services in the future.

The Authority confirmed that its role was to:

- lay down overall strategy and general policies for all S4C's commercial activities
- approve the management and financial systems between S4C and its companies, and those in which S4C is a shareholder
- approve any proposed new commercial activities with strategic implications
- publish guidelines for S4C's commercial activities
- monitor the performance of S4C's commercial subsidiaries and investments regularly
- monitor the control systems to make sure they are working properly

The Authority expects to publish its commercial guidelines later this year.

The Authority has charged its Audit Committee with the job of scrutinising that S4C's commercial operations are carried out in accordance with these requirements.

## **Compliance**

The Authority considered the regular monitoring reports from its Compliance Group. The Group reviews the compliance of S4C's programmes with the relevant Codes of Practice (including those of the Independent Television Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Commission) on the basis of wholly independent reports produced under the aegis of the Thomson Foundation. The Group, which is independently led, draws the Authority's attention to any possible breaches of the relevant codes of practice and advises on how the codes should be kept up to date.

The Authority agreed that consideration should be given to extending, to cover material on the Internet, the present requirement that children should be reminded to get permission from a responsible adult before using a telephone number referred to in a programme.

The Authority clarified the rules governing the broadcast of information about commercial products directly connected with programmes, e.g. videos and books. These have been allowed during the credits at the end of programmes. The Authority decided that they should also be allowed just before the end of a programme which does not have closing credits. As with programmes which have closing credits, programme presenters must play no part in these factual announcements, which must be made by the use of one or more of a separate voice-over, text or pictures.

The Authority is to give detailed consideration to the use of strong language in programmes, particularly soon after the 9.00 pm watershed.

The Authority is reviewing and updating its programme compliance guidelines generally. It intends to publish the revised version in the New Year, following consultation with programme providers to ensure that the new guidelines are clear and will work at a practical level to deliver the Authority's requirements.

## **Complaints**

The Authority agreed to establish a committee to consider any complaints about programmes or other aspects of S4C's activities made formally to the Authority. The committee will include an independent member and will report to the Authority, which will make the final adjudication. There have been few such complaints in the past since most points made by viewers are dealt with effectively by the Viewers' Hotline or other staff.

To ensure that the public knows how to make representations or complaints, the Authority agreed that it should publish a leaflet which will be made available widely, including on the Authority's web-site.

## **Discussion with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport**

At its September meeting, the Authority was glad to welcome Nicholas Kroll, the Head of the Creative Industries, Media and Broadcasting Group at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (the UK Government Department responsible for the public funding of S4C). This provided the opportunity for a full discussion of a range of major issues facing broadcasting, especially in light of the recent speech at the Royal Television Society conference at Cambridge by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Mr Chris Smith, MP. In his speech the Secretary of State had reaffirmed the central importance of public sector broadcasting in the digital age. He had stressed, in particular, its responsibility to ensure high quality content and to secure the Government's objective that all sectors of society should benefit from the wider range of services, information and opportunities made possible by digital technology. He had also said that, subject to the great bulk of the population having access to digital television and related services, the Government believed it should be possible to switch off analogue broadcasting sometime between 2006 and 2010. He had indicated that, if re-elected, the Labour Government would bring forward major new legislation early in the new Parliament to provide the right framework for rapidly converging broadcasting, telecommunications and internet technologies and industries.

The wide-ranging discussion with Mr Kroll focussed on how to promote digital broadcasting so as to fulfil this vision; the funding of public sector broadcasters to compete in the digital age; and issues which might arise in the proposed legislation.

The Authority expects to return to these issues in the months ahead. It looks forward to making a contribution to the wider policy debates to ensure that the needs of Welsh broadcasting, and especially broadcasting in the Welsh language, are taken fully into account.

## **Economic development and European funding**

The Authority was pleased to note that the European Task Force, which is advising the Assembly on how to make the best use of European Community Objective 1 and Objective 3 funding, had identified media industries generally, and broadcasting in particular, as priority areas which could play a major part in achieving sustainable growth in the Welsh economy.

S4C has submitted a full response to the proposals of the Task Force. This is available on the S4C Web site.

## **Sponsorship and scholarships**

The Authority approved S4C's sponsorship of a number of key organisations in 2000, including:

£150,000 to the BBC National Orchestra of Wales  
£25,000 to the Celtic Film Festival  
£5,000 to the Wales Media Forum

## **Other matters**

The Authority also continued to monitor:

- the performance of the programme services
- S4C's financial position
- the performance of S4C's commercial operations

## **The Authority's next public meeting**

The Authority will hold an open public meeting at 7.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Merthyr Tydfil, on 28 October 1999. It looks forward to hearing the public's views and answering questions face to face.

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