

S4C Authority Bulletin April 2000

This Bulletin reports on the Authority's most recent business meeting, which was held on 31 March 2000 in Cardiff.

Corporate Governance

As part of its programme of work to ensure that it discharges its responsibilities in accordance with best practice across the public and private sectors, the Authority received a presentation by its Auditors, Grant Thornton, on the systems in use for the regular and systematic assessment of risk across all of S4C's activities. This assessment provides the basis for the annual programme of internal audit, which is considered and approved by the Authority's Audit Committee. An example of a high risk area requiring regular audit is the process of commissioning S4C's programmes, including the ability of the production companies to supply programmes of the required standard for the agreed cost, since this is by far the single biggest item of the Channel's expenditure.

Following a thorough discussion of the systems, the Authority indicated that it regarded them as appropriate and satisfactory. Their operation will be kept under review.

Meeting between the S4C Authority and BBC's Broadcasting Council for Wales

The Authority reviewed its meeting the previous evening at S4C's headquarters in Llanishen, Cardiff, with members of the BBC's Broadcasting Council for Wales, including its Chair, the BBC's National Governor for Wales, Mr Roger Jones, as well as the BBC's newly appointed Controller for Wales, Menna Richards and other senior members of staff. The Authority believed that the meeting had been very useful and successful, providing the right backdrop for the regular day to day contact and co-operation between the staff of S4C and BBC Wales. It regarded as particularly encouraging the strong mutual will to co-operate wherever this was genuinely in the interests of viewers, as already happened across a wide range of activities, from the BBC's provision of 10 hours of programmes a week for S4C, to the broadcasting of the National Assembly for Wales, to S4C's sponsorship of the BBC's National Orchestra of Wales. That co-operation would need to be rooted in a full and mutual understanding of each broadcaster's distinctive missions and audiences, and with a recognition that competition for viewers could often operate in viewers' interests. The Authority looked forward to future discussions between S4C and the BBC on a wide range of matters, including in particular the nature and extent of the BBC's Welsh language programmes to be broadcast on S4C.

Premiere of the *The Miracle Maker* in London

The Authority welcomed the successful premiere of *The Miracle Maker* at the Curzon Cinema, Mayfair, following the tour of the Welsh language version, *Gwr y Gwyrthiau*, in Wales. The film is the latest of S4C's internationally co-produced animations, involves teams of animators in Russia and Cardiff, and is the first to be a full length feature film. The premiere had been attended by a wide range of celebrities, including the Secretary of State for Wales, Mr Paul Murphy, MP, who had spoken warmly of the film. The Authority noted that it was to be shown on the ABC channel across the United States in prime time on Easter Sunday and that it was also being shown in native language versions in a number of other countries including France, Spain and Italy.

***Cân i Gymru* (A Song for Wales)**

The Authority reviewed the action taken by S4C in the light of the faults in the telephone lines set up by Broadssystem under contract to Apollo, the company responsible for the production of the programme. Following full discussion of the action taken, and including taking account of correspondence from members of the public, the Authority decided that it was satisfied with the steps taken by the Chief Executive to investigate this matter and to ensure that lessons were learnt for the future. Confirming this in a subsequent statement to the press, the Authority had stressed that it was anxious to assure that S4C's viewers that it shared the audience's disappointment. It regarded maintaining S4C viewers' confidence as a matter of great importance. The Chair and Members shared the sadness felt by viewers and all who were involved with the programme, and apologised once more.

Gregynog Seminar

The Authority received a report from the Chief Executive on the recent seminar held at Gregynog between staff of S4C and the production and facilities companies which supply S4C's programmes. Over 80 people had attended what was regarded as a useful and productive sharing of ideas for the future. This was particularly relevant in developing proposals for the next commissioning round, which would be for programmes to be broadcast in the years 2002 and 2003, including the implications of commissioning programmes for multi-media digital platforms, including the internet.

The Oscars

Although it was a disappointment that the S4C International co-production *Solomon and Gaenor* had not won an Oscar, the Authority agreed that it had been a tremendous achievement to be nominated and for S4C to have now received the fourth such nomination in six years. It welcomed the attention and prestige this gave to S4C and to Wales throughout the world.

Compliance

The Authority considered two matters, which had been referred to it by its independently chaired Compliance Group, concerning the compliance of individual programmes with the S4C statutory programme guidance. It adjudicated as follows:

(i) Episode of *Uned 5* broadcast on 26 July 1999

In this programme, broadcast at 5.00 pm and aimed at children, the actor Rhys Ifans, had, in the course of an interview in which he described his reaction to seeing himself in the film *Notting Hill* alongside Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant, had used the term "*Iesu Mawr*" as an expletive.

The production company had sought to justify the inclusion of this element of the interview on the basis that to get Rhys Ifans to take part in the programme immediately after the release of the film had been a scoop and that Rhys Ifans' response had been very honest and natural, to the extent that it would have been impossible to cut it without disturbing the flow of the sentence. The company did not believe that Rhys Ifans had shown disrespect by swearing in this way but had demonstrated his disbelief at becoming famous so suddenly in a way with which children could identify.

The Authority accepted that all concerned had appeared to have acted in good faith but concluded nonetheless that the expletive should not have been broadcast since it was in clear breach of paragraph 1.2 of the S4C Programme Guidelines, which begins:

'The use of bad language and of expletives with a religious association offends many people. Such language should not be used in programmes produced especially for children (i.e. aged 15 and under).'

(ii) Episode of *Bandit* broadcast on 9 December 1999

In this programme, broadcast between 10.00 pm and 10.55 pm, one of the presenters, Ian Cottrell, in conversation with a female presenter, had referred to 'contact lenses' in a highly suggestive and sexist manner. This followed an earlier broadcast of the programme when the same presenter referred repeatedly in a disparaging and disrespectful manner to an identifiable individual, leading to a warning to the production company Boomerang from the Compliance Group. Boomerang had accepted on both occasions that the behaviour was in unacceptably poor taste and in breach of the Guidelines. The company had assured S4C that steps had been taken to ensure that *Bandit's* producers and presenters accepted their compliance responsibilities fully, including by disciplining the producer and presenter in connection with the most recent case.

Whilst welcoming the action taken by Boomerang, the Authority noted with concern that the language in question was, on the basis of research by the Broadcasting Standards Commission, amongst the strongest in the opinion of viewers. It found that this was a clear breach of the Programme Guidelines, specifically:

Paragraph 1.1 – 'The [Broadcasting] Act obliges S4C to ensure that nothing is included in the S4C service which offends against good taste and decency'

and

Paragraph 1.2 – ‘The use of bad language ... offends many people. In any programme the gratuitous use of language which is likely to offend should be avoided.’

In conveying its decision to the companies in question, the Authority has made it clear that it does not expect to see similar such occurrences in the future.

Management Team Declarations of Interest

The Authority has established procedures for the declaration of interests by its Members and how any possible conflicts should be avoided in practice. These are included in the Authority’s adopted Code of Practice, which is on the S4C Website (www.s4c.co.uk). The Authority applies similar principles to declarations by members of staff. All business and other interests conceivably relevant to the work of S4C have to be declared in writing and, where there is an actual conflict in an individual case, the member of staff must play no part in consideration of the matter in question. Declarations by members of the Management Team are made to the S4C Authority and the latest declarations were noted.

Cylch yr Iaith

The Authority considered a petition presented to the Chief Executive and other senior officers of S4C on 22 March 2000 by representatives of Cylch yr Iaith. Containing some 9,000 signatures, the petition was also to be presented to BBC Wales. In addition, to issues specific to Radio Cymru, it expressed opposition to what it perceived as the excessive use of English on S4C and Radio Cymru, which it notes were established specifically to provide Welsh language services, and to concern at the threat to the future to Welsh generally from what it describes as effectively bilingual services. It calls for a written policy for the channels which would ensure that only Welsh was used.

Following the presentation of the petition, the Cylch yr Iaith representatives had met the Chief Executive and other senior officers to discuss the issues in a meeting which had lasted well over an hour. There had been a full exchange of views and information, including the results of S4C’s research on the attitudes of different segments of the Welsh speaking population to S4C and specifically on the nature of the Welsh used and to the use of English in Welsh language programmes. The meeting had been conducted in a constructive spirit of mutual concern that S4C should succeed in its core mission of providing a wide range of high quality services in the Welsh language.

Subsequently, Cylch yr Iaith had written to each Authority Member and to the Chief Executive. Describing the meeting as having been useful and very constructive, the letter had reiterated important points made at the meeting which went beyond points raised in the petition. Special emphasis had been placed on the importance of tighter guidelines to end what Cylch yr Iaith saw as the excessive freedom currently allowed to use English on editorial grounds in the context of specific programmes; the need to avoid debased forms of Welsh; and a particular concern for the extent of the use of English on *Heno*, coupled with a call to replace it with a magazine-style programme aimed at the bulk of Welsh speakers rather than just those in the industrial areas of South West Wales.

The Authority received a full report on the meeting with S4C's senior staff and discussed the issues raised by Cylch yr Iaith in detail. The Authority welcomed Cylch yr Iaith's positive attitude to S4C's success and noted that at the meeting its representatives had agreed that it would not be appropriate or realistic to ban the use of any English in any circumstances. It wanted to hear from all viewers about S4C's services and made strenuous efforts, through the Viewers' Hotline, open public meetings, and by encouraging written comments, as well as by conducting objective audience research, to make sure that it stayed in touch with viewers' needs and wishes. It was only after having given the most careful consideration to viewers' opinions and needs that the Authority had adopted the current Welsh language guidelines in the Autumn of 1998. Noting that very few viewers had complained about the use of English to the Viewers Hotline (just 14 out of more than 10,000 calls in 1999) or at public meetings, the Authority nonetheless took Cylch yr Iaith's concerns seriously and they would be taken into account with all the other views and evidence.

It remained the Authority's intention to keep the operation of the guidelines and the guidelines themselves under careful review, and it has asked the independent monitoring unit and the Compliance Group to report to it by the Summer with detailed findings on the use of English in all S4C programmes.

Other Matters

The Authority also noted reports on:

- The performance of S4C's programmes
- The work of the Compliance Group
- Complaints
- S4C's financial situation
- Commercial activities.

Next Meeting

The Authority has its next business meeting in Cardiff on 28 April 2000, which will be preceded by a meeting with representatives of TAC (Teledu Annibynnol Cymru – Welsh Independent Producers).

The Authority will hold its next open public meeting at 7.00 p.m. on Thursday, 25 May 2000, at the Celtica Centre, Machynlleth. Its May business meeting will also take place in Machynlleth on the following day.
