

S4C Authority Bulletin - June 2000

The Authority held meetings at the Celtica Centre, Machynlleth on 25 and 26 May 2000.

PUBLIC MEETING

On Thursday evening, 25 May, the Authority held its latest public meeting where some 25 members of the public were present. This followed a reception where there was a special showing of the new S4C series *Y Celtiaid*. The series, which was a co-production with Gaelic Television in Scotland, had recently been shown to the international market and buyers from countries across the world had shown significant interest in it. A special copy would be shown in Celtica for a period before it would be televised.

In addition to the Chair of the Authority, Elan Closs Stephens, the Chief Executive, Huw Jones, and the Director of Programmes, Huw Eirug, also took part in the in the open meeting. All other Members of the S4C Authority were present to listen to the discussion and to have informal conversations with members of the public before and after the meeting.

Among the topics discussed were:

S4C Programmes

Noson Lawen –

A member of the audience expressed dissatisfaction that the same old faces appeared in the programmes of this series regardless of where the events were being held. Reference was made to the Urdd where it was evident that there was young talent to be found in Wales, but that somehow or other that talent was lost as young people left school for college or, perhaps, moved out of their area. Could not something be done to avoid losing these people, it was asked, and it was suggested that there was plenty of room for amateurs to appear in programmes such as *Noson Lawen*.

Huw Jones discussed the point of nurturing talent and bringing new faces to the screen. He referred to the fact that auditions were held annually for *Noson Lawen* and as such there was an opportunity for everyone in Wales to put themselves forward. However, he extended an invitation to anyone who knew of talented people to contact S4C to give details about them. It had to be borne in mind, however, that one consideration taken into account by producers was the need to have at least one star in the programme in order to attract an audience. Nevertheless, it was recognised that a mix and balance of famous people and new talent was needed on *Noson Lawen*.

Elan Closs Stephens expanded on the point of nurturing talent and referred to the importance S4C placed on the need to give young people assistance to develop their talent. She stated that S4C offers a dozen scholarships every year to enable young people to attend drama, music, singing, or performing courses, etc. S4C recognised that if young talent was not developed then problems would be encountered in the future.

Yr Urdd –

It was asked whether S4C would be broadcasting competitions during the day on analogue since only a minority were able to receive S4C Digital. Huw Eirug stated that the Urdd was broadcast throughout the day on S4C digital, but explained that S4C would continue to be under an obligation to reschedule Channel 4 programmes on analogue for some years to come. This meant that it was not practical for S4C to broadcast from the Urdd all day on the analogue service and this was why the digital service had been established. Huw Jones referred to the misperception which arose during last year's National Eisteddfod when people believed that not as much of the Eisteddfod had been broadcast compared to previous years. This was not true. The same amount had been shown on the traditional service but because the Eisteddfod had changed its schedule so that it started later in the afternoon, people thought that less of the Eisteddfod was being shown.

Pobol y Cwm –

Some members of the audience felt that the standards of *Pobol y Cwm* had fallen and examples of aspects that did not please were given. Huw Eirug listened to the points made and, since this was a BBC programme, promised to convey the comments made to the production team responsible for the soap opera.

Comedy –

One member of the audience criticised S4C's comedy programmes. In responding, Huw Eirug recognised that this was an area where S4C had experienced several failures, but believed that it was important that the Channel should persevere in its efforts to try to find successful comedy programmes.

S4C's Relationship with Mid Wales

S4C was asked whether it would have use of the BBC's new studio in Aberystwyth in order that people living in mid Wales could have a place to go when they wanted to contact S4C. Huw Eirug responded that this was a BBC development and although that did not preclude S4C from discussing the matter with the BBC in the future, there were no plans to do so at the moment. What S4C considered to be more important was the need to create a whirl of activity in respect of production in mid Wales. Companies supplying S4C with programmes from this area were few and far between and this was considered a shame since S4C wished to reflect the whole of Wales. Huw Jones said that the BBC's studio in Aberystwyth would be used in relation to the news on S4C since the BBC provided S4C's news service and, therefore, it was expected that this would help them to reflect mid Wales events in their news programmes. The audience noted that which was said but the feeling remained that it was important for the public to have a place to go to in mid Wales if they wished to contact S4C.

Standard of the Welsh Language on S4C

A member of the public asked whether S4C had a way of standardising the Welsh in its programmes. Elan Closs Stephens responded that this was a very big subject. She mentioned that S4C had established a Compliance Group to monitor the programme service, including the standard of Welsh; that Group also held seminars for producers from time to time. However, there were no easy answers in relation to the standard of Welsh. S4C had to appeal to an audience whose level ability in the Welsh language differed; it was important not to alienate people but rather to attract them to the Channel and to keep them viewing. Huw Jones agreed that the language issue was a very complex one. He stated that the prime aim of a television programme, and of those who take part in a television programme, is to communicate. Different programmes had different target audiences and, therefore, different language registers were valid. Whilst Huw Jones was not claiming that S4C had all the answers on this subject, he wished to assure the audience that the Channel thought long and hard about such issues.

The world outside Wales

It was suggested that S4C's factual programmes did not make enough effort to find out what was happening in the smaller countries across Europe and other parts of the world; nor did it reflect a multi-linguistic Europe. It was suggested that the Channel's programming did not reflect the philosophy of the European Broadcasting Union either. Huw Jones responded that S4C as a body participated in the process of promoting the value of minority languages within Europe and often took part in seminars, which discussed television and minority languages. Indeed, S4C was seen as being at the forefront in this field and people often turned to the Channel for an opinion. S4C also participated in conferences which, it was hoped, influenced broadcasting policy in Europe and in Britain. In relation to programmes, Huw Eirug drew attention to S4C's co-productions with European countries. He referred also to *Sgorio*, a programme which gave considerable attention to the Catalans, Galicians and the Basques. He also to a concert in Catalan, broadcast on S4C digital, at which the Gorky's had performed. Despite this, Elan Closs Stephens suggested that S4C's officers could give further consideration to this issue when considering the nature and mix of the programme service in the future.

Repeats

A member of the audience suggested that there was a feeling that some programmes were repeated fairly soon after they had first been shown and asked whether financial reasons were behind this. Huw Jones replied that there was no golden rule as to when programmes should be repeated. He went on to say that he could not promise that there would be less repeats in the future but that, with the hours on digital being extended to 12 hours from mid day to midnight, there would be opportunities to see programmes at different times. Therefore, the viewer who started watching at 8.00 p.m. would be unlikely to see a programme being repeated in that slot but it might, perhaps, be shown again at 2.30 p.m. for example.

Re-scheduling Channel 4 programmes

S4C was asked how decisions were made on which Channel 4 programmes should be shown. It was suggested that a number of good Channel 4 programmes were not to be seen on S4C. Huw Jones answered that Channel 4's most popular programmes were shown in the best slots on S4C and that there were statistics to show which programmes those were. However, it had to be recognised that S4C faced problems when it was not possible to predict the popularity of a programme. S4C did the best that it could but there was a fundamental problem in trying to channel two streams into one, so to speak, and it had to be recognised that S4C did sometimes get it wrong.

BUSINESS MEETING

S4C Charity

The Authority noted that *Heno's* specific effort in raising funds for S4C's Charity would take place during the week commencing 19 June. Attention was drawn to the fact that £100, 000 was raised last year and a similar sum was raised the year prior to that. S4C's nominated charity for this year is the NSPCC.

***Gŵr y Gwyrthiau/The Miracle Maker* –**

It was reported that S4C had received a letter from ABC Entertainment in America which contained some very kind and warm words on S4C's rôle in bringing animators from Wales and Russia together to create such a special film. It was mentioned in the letter that ABC had received 10,000 letters relating to the film, the most for them to receive since 1995.

Wales in Cannes

The Chair reported on her work for S4C during the Cannes Film Festival and whilst doing so remarked on how striking it was that there were fifteen films with strong Welsh connections among those given attention in a film magazine in Cannes.

The National Assembly for Wales – Post 16 Education Committee

A report was given on the appearance of S4C, HTV and the BBC before the Committee in order to give evidence in relation to the broadcasters' contribution to the arts in Wales. S4C would have another opportunity to present evidence before the Committee on 22 June when specific attention would be given to broadcasting. The Committee's intention to have input into the forthcoming White Paper on Communications was noted. Authority Members noted that a record of the evidence given by S4C to the Committee was available on the Assembly's website.

Cylch yr Iaith

Reference was made to the fact that a member of Cylch yr Iaith had been involved in a court case as a result of his refusal to pay for a television licence. Members of the Authority conveyed their disappointment about the situation, particular since they had understood at their previous meeting that the meeting which had taken place between S4C's officers and representatives of Cylch yr Iaith had gone well and that some common ground had been identified.

It was suggested that a national debate needed to be held on this subject. As a starting point, the producers of *Y Byd ar Bedwar* would be making an objective programme on the issue. Consideration would then be given to holding a follow-up lecture/discussion at the National Eisteddfod to be held in Llanelli in August.

BSS Wales' 1999 Annual Report

The Chair referred to BSS's annual report on the Viewers' Hotline service that it provided for S4C during 1999. The report gave details regarding contacts with the Hotline via letters, telephone calls, e-mail, or the Chat Room on the website. The Authority were pleased to see a rise of 34% in the number of contacts compared to 1998 as this reflected the fact that S4C's viewers were becoming more aware of the service.

S4C Information Pack

The Authority's attention was drawn to S4C's information pack which was now available to the public. It was noted that it had been produced in a format which would allow for additions in the future. Members of the public can obtain a pack through contacting S4C's Press and Public Relations office.

Sponsorship

The Chief Executive reported on an application received from the Edinburgh Television Festival for sponsorship towards a reception to be held following the MacTaggart Lecture, an important and influential event held on the opening day of the Festival. The reception would be co-sponsored with BBC Scotland. It was noted that S4C had sponsored similar events over the past three years and had achieved a considerable profile as a result.

Corporate Plan 2001-2005: Strategic Questions

The Authority held a long and wide ranging discussion on a number of strategic questions which needed consideration in order to give S4C officers the direction they required to enable them to start work on the corporate plan for the years 2001-2005. It is intended to publish the final version of the corporate plan during the autumn.

Key Issues Memorandum by the Auditors for the year 31 December 1999

The Authority noted with pleasure that there no substantial matters arising from the Key Issues Memorandum received from the auditors, Grant Thornton. In accordance with the requirements of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, a copy of the Key Issues Memorandum would be sent to it.

Presentation by the Director of Personnel and Administration

The Authority received a presentation on the work of the Personnel and Administration by its Director. A report was given on the nature of the workforce, that is, the number of staff, the hours worked, the percentage of male and female workers; age profile; place of origin, and their Welsh language ability; and details on periods of service. Details were given on the work of the Department. Reference was made to the work relating to employment such as recruitment, contracts, benefits/conditions of service/disciplinary measures, developing and adapting policies to reflect new legislation, etc. Activities in relation to training were elucidated upon, such as career development, career related courses, developing internal communication, and the scholarships offered, in addition to relationships with Cyfle and the National Film and Television School. Also explained was the administrative responsibilities of the department, such as looking after S4C's buildings; health and safety considerations; arranging communication systems (i.e. the reception, telephones, fax facilities; post, etc); ordering and maintaining office goods, furniture and equipment. The presentation was brought to an end by referring to S4C's successes which had been co-ordinated by the Department, those being: Investors in People 2000; Chartermark 1998; the Welsh Language Plan 1998; and Employer of the Year 1995.

Other Matters

The Authority considered regular reports on:

- the work of the Audit Committee
- S4C programme performance
- compliance
- complaints in relation to individual programmes
- S4C finance
- commercial activities.