

## **The S4C Authority Bulletin** **- October 2000**

The Authority held meetings in Blaenau Ffestiniog on 28 and 29 September, 2000.

### **Open Meeting**

On Thursday evening, 28 September, the Authority held its latest open meeting, with around 25 members of the public attending.

As well as the Chair of the Authority, Elan Closs Stephens, the Chief Executive, Huw Jones, and the Director of Programmes, Huw Eirug took part in the discussion. In addition, several other Authority members were present to listen to the discussion and to have an informal chat with the public before and after the meeting.

The matters discussed included:

### **Remarks of Young People**

The meeting began by specifically asking the young people present what their favourite programmes were and they were invited to refer to programmes in general, across all channels. Among the S4C programmes that young people watched were *Pam fi Duw*, *Rownd a Rownd*, *Amdani* and *Sgorio*. An important point for S4C to note was the fact that these young people were usually out with their friends early in the evening, between 6.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m., that being the time that S4C broadcasts most of its Welsh programmes.

The young people were asked what kinds of programmes they would wish to see on S4C. They replied that they would like to see talent shows similar to *Stars in their Eyes* or shows for people without experience. In addition, whilst recognising that S4C was attempting to be more modern by broadcasting programmes such as *Pam fi Duw?*, the Channel was asked to show programmes that were relevant to what young people were being taught in school, for instance, programmes relating to literature and Welsh poetry which were on the curriculum.

### **Remarks of the General Audience**

#### **Programmes**

*Pobol y Cwm* was a subject for discussion amongst the remainder of the audience. It was felt that the programme had lost its way as far as story-lines were concerned and was not as good as it had been in the past. It was felt that getting rid of the characters from North Wales had been a retrograde step. The nature of the love affairs in the soap opera did not please either. Story lines progressed too slowly and were too drawn out. Nevertheless, some of the audience felt that it should be recognised that *Pobol y Cwm* dealt with some sensitive matters very well. Some had been tempted to turn away from *Pobol y Cwm* because they were dissatisfied with it, though it was recognised that the programme had started to improve of late.

Documentary programmes were popular as were the *Newyddion* news programme and *Manifesto*. It was felt that *Celtiaid* was a particularly good series and more of this type of programme was requested.

There was some unease regarding programmes such as *Y Brodyr Bach* which made fun of people and where people were shown being belittled. Nevertheless, it was said that the people concerned had given permission for the programme to be broadcast. Whilst noting what had been said, doubt was expressed as to whether people would be strong enough to say that they were unwilling for the programme to be shown.

Many in the audience supported the remark that there were too many sports programmes on S4C. Saturdays were particularly frustrating with nothing being offered apart from sport when switching from channel to channel. Huw Eirug replied that many people enjoyed sport and, to be realistic, it was at the weekend that most sporting events were held; it was, therefore, inevitable that this would be when broadcasters would show these programmes.

Some of the audience criticised S4C comedy programmes and asked where were S4C's comedy writers. Huw Eirug said that there had been criticism of S4C comedy programmes in every open meeting that he had attended and he admitted that S4C had failed with this genre on several occasions. In spite of examples of failure, however, he felt that S4C should keep trying to find comedy programmes that were successful.

It was suggested that S4C had not acknowledged some historical events as it should have. Specifically, reference was made to the fact that there had been no programme on the Battle of Britain. Another member of the audience appreciated the attention given to Owain Glyndwr, and asked whether something similar could be done to recognise other Welsh heroes or princes, for instance, Llywelyn the Last Prince in December; Princess Gwenllïan on her birthday in June. Welsh people needed to take pride in their heroes as is done in other countries. Huw Eirug admitted the fact that S4C did not make a programme on the Battle of Britain and he mentioned that there were no plans for programmes on Llywelyn or Gwenllïan either. Nevertheless, he recognised that S4C had a responsibility to mark important dates in the nation's calendar, and he mentioned that the series on the Celts, *Y Celtiaid* was an example of that philosophy. S4C would continue to consider what events should be marked in future.

### **Language and Voice-overs / Subtitling**

After a member of the audience had criticised *Heno* for being a boring programme, another person expressed the opinion that the programme was, to all intents and purposes, a bilingual programme rather than a Welsh language programme. The discussion went on to consider in greater detail S4C's policy not to use voice-overs for interviews in English. The opinion was expressed that there should be voice-overs for such interviews; others said it would be better if such interviews were subtitled as happens in other countries, where the majority understands English. However, Huw Jones explained that Wales was somewhat different from other countries as everyone understands English and S4C believed that that fact should be acknowledged. Evidence available from research carried out by S4C showed that viewers preferred to hear someone like Tony Blair or Ryan Giggs directly rather than have another voice coming between the interviewee and the viewer. Similarly, it seemed pointless to provide Welsh subtitles as everyone understands English. Nevertheless, S4C was aware that it had to be very careful in its use of English and it was not proposed to change the need for very strong justification for including English interviews in Welsh programmes.

A member of the public expressed the opinion that S4C had very significant responsibilities as far as the Welsh language was concerned. The people of Wales, for instance, had become more familiar with the various dialects of the country and this was considered important. It was stated that people sometimes ask what unites the Welsh people as a nation and it was suggested that one of those things was S4C. It was also stated that S4C was responsible for a large industry in Wales as regards programme production companies, a substantial Welsh-medium industry which could be based in any part of Wales. Pride should also be taken in the fact that the Welsh media had provided the opportunity for a number of rising stars to shine.

### **Viewing S4C in North Wales**

The Chair referred to S4C's disappointment regarding the viewing figures for North Wales and asked the audience what they thought was responsible for this. The view was expressed that there was too much bias towards the south; this was particularly true about the news programme, *Y Newyddion*. One evening, a member of the audience had noted where each item of news came from and out of 12 items, 11 were from South Wales and 1 from North Wales.

### **Digital**

Reference was made to the fact that people living on a pension were unable to afford £20 a month for digital television. Elan Closs Stephens referred to a leaflet available which explained how people could obtain digital television without having to pay £20 per month for it. While accepting that not everyone could afford to pay £100 for digital television, Huw Jones urged people to go to their local television shops and enquire about the arrangement for making a one-off payment of £100 in order to receive those digital channels that were available for no charge.

## **Business Meeting**

### **Welcome**

Mr John Howells, the new Secretary of the S4C Authority, was given a warm welcome to his first meeting.

### **Edinburgh Television Festival and the BBC's Future Plans**

The Chair had attended the Festival and referred, in particular, to the speech by Greg Dyke, Director General of the BBC. Reference was made to the BBC's plans for four main channels.

### **Political Matters**

The Chair reported that she and the Chief Executive were making use of the political conference season to meet politicians from all the main political parties in order to brief them regarding S4C's situation as the Government was preparing to publish the White Paper on Communications. They had both been present at the Plaid Cymru conference, at the Labour Party conference in Brighton; they would also attend the Conservative Party conference in Bournemouth. In addition, they intended to arrange a meeting for the Liberal Democrats.

## **Animation**

- (a) Launch of *Animated Tales of the World* – An extremely successful launch had been held at the South African High Commission where several ambassadors, or their representatives, from the 26 countries who had contributed to the co-production had been present. It was noted that there was a possibility that this co-production would go into *The Guinness Book of Records* as being the largest co-production ever anywhere in the world.
- (b) School Drama Festival - Shakespeare – The Chair would be attending this Festival which had been organised by the Director of Animation. If successful, it was intended to expand it to encompass schools in the remainder of Britain as a Festival based on the scripts of *The Animated Tales of Shakespeare*.

## **Five-Year Strategy**

The Authority discussed a document which set out a proposed strategy for 2001-2005. This was a key document which would form the basis for the direction S4C would take during the coming years; it would also be the basis for the corporate plan for 2001-2003, to be published before the end of the year.

## **Digital College**

The Chief Executive explained the latest developments in the work of the Digital College and expanded further on how the Digital College would be involved in the Wales On-Line scheme (namely, a scheme to be proposed for Objective 1 funding). The launch of the Digital College would be on 1 November 2000.

## **Compliance**

The report of the Compliance Group following the meeting held on 15 September 2000 was received. The Authority was pleased to note the fact that the report on the treatment of S4C's programmes of the Political Party Conferences 1999-2000 showed that the attention given to the parties had been well balanced.

The Authority then discussed two specific matters it had been asked to consider regarding particular problems faced by programme schedule planners because of the lack of slots on analogue television for Welsh-language programmes later in the evenings. The two examples considered were: *Llwyth o Docs* shown between 8.30 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. and *Lolipop Eisteddfod* shown between 9.00 p.m. and 9.30 p.m. It was felt that the timing of the *Lolipop Eisteddfod* programme was suitable; but that, although what was seen during the *Llwyth o Docs* programme - where a sadomasochistic couple were portrayed during a comedy sketch – was not in itself unacceptable, as a rule, the broadcasting of programmes and items on such subjects before 9.00 p.m., however light-hearted their nature, should be avoided. Nevertheless, the problems faced by schedule planners were recognised.

## **Amendments to the ITC Programme Code – S4C's Response to the Public Consultation**

The Authority considered the ITC's consultation document which proposed amendments to its Programme Code. The Authority had a particular interest in this matter as it was responsible for ensuring that the programmes broadcast by S4C complied with the ITC guidelines (as well as S4C's own guidelines). The Authority's remarks on the consultation document would be forwarded to the ITC.

### **Correspondence: Cylch yr Iaith**

Consideration was given to a letter sent to every Member of the Authority by Cylch yr Iaith regarding the service provided by Radio Cymru. A reply would be sent to Cylch yr Iaith on behalf of the Authority thanking it for the correspondence and mentioning that the Authority had noted the contents and expressed the opinion that this was a matter mainly for Radio Cymru. Nevertheless, the Authority also wished to refer to the fact that the use of English in Welsh-language programmes on S4C was something the Authority monitored regularly.

### **Other Matters**

The Authority also considered reports dealing with:

- financial matters
- commercial matters
- the Authority's work programme for 2001
- the Audit Committee meeting held on 28 July 2000
- complaints
- the Compliance Group meeting held on 15 September 2000
- research.