

S4C Authority Bulletin **- January 2001**

Congratulations

The Authority Members extended their warmest congratulations to the Chair, Elan Closs Stephens, on being appointed to the Chair in Communications and Creative Industries at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

The Assembly

- (a) *Meeting with Mike German, The National Assembly's Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economic Development* – The Chair and Chief Executive had a very worth while meeting with Mike German. The ways that S4C contributed to the Welsh economy and how it could be supportive of the Assembly's policies in the future were discussed.
- (b) *Meeting with Jenny Randerson, The National Assembly's Minister for Culture* - Once again the opportunity was seized to emphasise S4C's contribution towards the creative industries in Wales. It was recognised that although the Channel did not come under the Assembly's statutory responsibilities it could still be an enthusiastic partner.

The White Paper on Communication

The Chair referred to the White Paper published on 12 December 2000 and to the Secretary's report which summarised the main aims and outlined the implications for S4C. Authority Members were of the opinion that they required more time to consider the details of the Government's proposals and that the discussion should, therefore, be restricted to a preliminary one, with a full discussion being held in January. It was noted, however, that the White Paper confirmed the importance of S4C as a public service broadcaster and, in particular, as a Welsh language broadcaster.

In terms of the timetable following the publication of the White Paper, it was noted that the closing date for responses was 12 February 2001. It was confirmed that it was the Government's intention – dependent upon the result of the General Election in 2001 – to legislate early in the next parliamentary session with the changes effective from summer 2002. However, the Government had already expressed its wish that existing regulators start implementing the new system early in the New Year (2001) as though the changes had already taken place.

Meeting with BBC Wales

The Chair reported on the meeting that she, the Chief Executive, and the Secretary had held with BBC Wales' Chair, Controller, and Head of Corporate Affairs. The main issues discussed were the digital plans for the two organisations and the statutory ten hours of programmes that the BBC contributed to S4C's schedule. Both broadcasters had exciting plans to respond to the opportunities offered by digital technology. The BBC was also reviewing the nature and quality of the ten hours of programmes that they provided S4C with each week, but had no plans to expand the ten hours at present. In addition, it was agreed that a meeting should be arranged between the Members of the S4C Authority and Members of the Broadcasting Council for Wales early in 2001.

Health and Safety Officer

It was confirmed that Arshad Rasul, the Director of Engineering, would henceforth undertake the duties in relation to health and safety on behalf of the Channel.

Andrew Ramsey, Under-Secretary, Department of Culture, Media and Sport

Reference was made to the first visit of Andrew Ramsey, Under-Secretary at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, to S4C. A good meeting was held with the opportunity taken to explain S4C's broadcasting structure and early response to the White Paper on Communication.

Report on Programmes

The report of the Director of Programmes was received and, in particular, the following was discussed.

Reference was made to the fact that the lack of Welsh language slots later in the evening had been frustrating not only to viewers but to S4C too. After officers had discussed this matter, they had decided to experiment in the New Year with broadcasting Welsh language programmes in the 10.30 pm slot. The first programme to be broadcast in this slot would be *Diwrnod Hollol Mindblowing* which it was hoped would draw attention to the change.

Concern was expressed that some weak programmes still managed to find their way to the screen and discussion was held on the steps which could or should be taken to avoid this in the future. It was believed that the new thinking in relation to commissioning programmes on the basis of their strength rather than in order to fill a schedule which would be introduced in the next commissioning round would answer this to some degree. However, one problem was the fact that S4C had neither the human or financial resources to be able to work closely with each production. It was not possible to promise that everything produced from 2002 would be excellent since the same lack of resources would continue to exist.

Also discussed was the lack of young talent entering the industry. There was a need to act in a more proactive manner to draw them into the world of television. It was mentioned that as a rule small companies' margins were too small to enable them to invest properly in growing talent. It was suggested that S4C should try to establish where young talent was going if it was were not entering the television industry. It was suggested that perhaps a development fund should be established and also that other sources of funding be sought out in order to develop talent and offer experience opportunities. There was also a need to consider how the television industry could be promoted in general so that it might be able to compete more effectively within and outside Wales.

Open Meetings 2001

In accordance with the wish of Members in the last meeting, further discussion was held on the nature and structure of the Authority's open meetings. After consideration, it was concluded that no significant changes should be made to the nature of the meetings but that at least one of the meetings in 2001 should be used to experiment with a slightly different structure.

Compliance

The Secretary referred to a couple of matters that the Authority should be aware of. Firstly, an adjudication by the Broadcasting Standards Commission was circulated around the table. This related to a complaint the Commission had received by the University of Wales Bangor in relation to the *Taro Naw* programme broadcast on 1 November 1999. It is expected that the Commission will publish its findings in its Bulletin in January (to be found on its website: www.bsc.org.uk).

In addition, an official complaint had been received from Carmarthenshire County Council in relation to the *Y Byd ar Bedwar* programme broadcast in June 1999. The Secretary on behalf of the Authority had started on the process of corresponding with the Director of Programmes and HTV (the production company) in accordance with the complaints system. Further information would be brought before the Authority in due course.

Other Matters

In addition, the following were discussed/noted:

- financial report
- report by the Managing Director of S4C Masnachol
- minutes of the Audit Committee held on 24 November 2000.
- report of the Chief Executive – matters for information
- paper on the presentation by S4C to the National Assembly for Wales' Culture Committee
- complaints report
- report and minutes of the Compliance Group in relation to its meeting held on 8 December 2000.
- report of the Viewers' Hotline
- research report.
- minutes of the Personnel and Remuneration Committee meeting held on 24 November 2000 (Strictly Confidential – discussion among Authority Members only).

Future Meetings of the Authority

The next meeting of the Authority will be held on 25 January 2001 (a special meeting to discuss the White Paper on Communication) with the next ordinary business meeting being held on 26 January 2001, at S4C's headquarters in Cardiff.