

S4C Authority Bulletin **- April 2001**

OPEN MEETING

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Tuesday 27 March 2001 at Gwyn Hall, Neath which was attended by about 30 members of the public.

In addition to the Authority's Chair, Elan Closs Stephens, the Chief Executive, Huw Jones, and the Director of Programmes, Huw Eirug took part in the discussion. Other Authority members were also in attendance to listen to the discussion and chat informally with the public both before and after the meeting. Among the matters discussed in the meeting were the following:

Sports Programmes

Two sports matters were raised by a member of the public: the first regarding cricket and the second Italian football. With regard to cricket S4C was said to have more advertisements than Channel 4. Huw Jones answered it was difficult to understand how this could happen as S4C generally followed the same advertising pattern as Channel 4, but that he would nevertheless raise the matter with the presentation department in order to check the position. The member of the public was invited to leave his name and address so that S4C could respond to him directly on this point.

The member of the public also referred to the fact that S4C no longer broadcasted the Italian football matches shown on Channel 4 and that S4C only offered *Sgorio*. Huw Jones answered that the nature of the service offered by S4C meant that compromises must be made on the broadcasting of Channel 4 programmes. S4C had been set up to provide Welsh language programmes and broadcast Channel 4 programmes when Welsh language programmes were not being shown. It was therefore inevitable that not all Channel 4 programmes could be broadcast. Although Italian football was not being shown, it was felt that *Sgorio* nevertheless provided another option. It was suggested that S4C could broadcast Italian football either at night or in the early hours of the morning, so that people could at least tape the programmes. S4C promised to look into this idea and assess the likely demand for this service.

On a more general note, it was pointed out that digital television would eventually be available to all when analogue television finished and that this would resolve the above problems. S4C would then offer a far wider Welsh language service and Channel 4 would be available to all. It is of course possible to receive digital satellite TV now at a cost of approximately £100 for the equipment without being obliged to subscribe to Sky.

Programme introductions

One member of the public complained that the run-in to programmes was far too long and a source of considerable annoyance. He quoted the rugby on Saturday evenings and *Sgorio* as examples. It was noted that this matter had never been raised in any public meeting held by S4C. This was an interesting point which S4C would duly consider.

Byd Pws

A member of the public expressed the opinion that Dewi Pws often displayed a derogatory attitude towards the people of countries he visited. It was felt that his humour had crossed the bounds of acceptability. The programme on Lapland was cited as a particular example of this. This was a disappointment in a programme which was otherwise very good. Elan Closs Stephens answered that it was interesting to hear this since S4C had never felt that Dewi Pws was patronising but rather that he was laid-back in his manner. It was asked whether the rest of the audience felt that Dewi Pws was patronising. One person responded that they felt that the programme was adventurous, feeling that Dewi Pws was a character who had the ability to communicate well with people from other countries. *Byd Pws* was felt to be one of the best programmes on S4C. Another member of the public said that he enjoyed *Byd Pws* and that it compared favourably with English programmes. However, in considering the criticism that had just been made and thinking back over previous programmes there might well be a patronising element in Dewi Pws' comments. Elan Closs Stephens noted the comments and promised that S4C would review the situation.

'The Same Old Faces'

One member of the public was critical of the fact that the same actors are seen time and time again in S4C programmes, commenting that it was extremely unfortunate that an actor in *Ponteifi* for example should reappear immediately afterwards in *Talcen Caled*. It was suggested that this never happened on English television. Huw Eirug noted the point and acknowledged that it was unfortunate that the two programmes cited had been broadcast consecutively. There was however disagreement with the more general point regarding English television and examples were given of actors seen frequently on the other British channels.

Quiz and Comedy Programmes

One member of the public felt that quiz and comedy programmes on S4C were extremely weak. Huw Eirug commented that this matter had been raised in every single open meeting. It was acknowledged that success in these fields, particularly comedy, had eluded S4C and that the Authority felt obliged to persist in its efforts rather than abandon them. It was hoped that through perseverance S4C would eventually succeed and Huw Eirug was more confident now than in recent years that the future would yield results.

Regarding quiz programmes, Huw Eirug said that S4C was now broadcasting fewer than previously. The message that viewers were sending to S4C was that they did not want a Welsh language version of *Big Brother* for example - and that if they wished to see *Big Brother* they would watch the original version on Channel 4. Exactly the same attitude obtained regarding other quiz programmes such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, *The Weakest Link*, *Blind Date*, etc. This meant that S4C would have to come up with its own quiz formats. S4C would therefore only produce quiz programmes that appealed to its viewers.

Current Affairs Programmes

One member of the public began by saying that she believed that *Newyddion* provided a very good service with a balance of Welsh, British and International interest. There was nevertheless a feeling that the standard of programmes such as *Y Byd ar Bedwar* and *Taro Naw* had dropped. It was suggested that the journalism was poor, the research inadequate and the presentation and interviewing superficial. Despite available material, the programmes were not as polished as they might be. A comparison was made with *Week In Week Out* and *Wales This Week* which were believed to be of a higher standard. Huw Jones noted the comments and suggested that the comparison with English programmes was an interesting one as *Taro Naw* came out of the same stable as *Week In Week Out* as did *Y Byd ar Bedwar* and *Wales This Week*. Nevertheless S4C would consider the points made.

Also on the subject of current affairs programmes, it was felt that there was a lack of discussion programmes on S4C and that non-Welsh speakers often missed out as there were no subtitles on current affairs programmes. More non-Welsh speakers would be able to benefit from programmes of this kind if subtitles were provided. There was also a feeling that the coverage of National Assembly affairs was inadequate on the whole. Elan Closs Stephens answered that most S4C programmes were subtitled through the teletext 888 service but acknowledged that this was not the case for instance with the programme *Manifesto*. On a more general note, she said Welsh language broadcasting for only four hours or so a day also limited coverage of current affairs and National Assembly matters. Huw Jones added that S4C did nevertheless provide the *Pawb a'i Farn* series of current affair programmes biannually, running 8 to 12 programmes in a series. Although they would like to offer more programmes, it had to be acknowledged that there were not enough readily available platform speakers with a standard of spoken Welsh high enough to justify a longer running series. The member of the public also commented on the lack of European coverage. Huw Jones replied that S4C broadcast the *Ewropa* series on Sunday afternoons adding that it was important to acknowledge that BBC Cymru which provides this programme was the first (with the exception of London) to locate an European correspondent in Brussels.

Another member of the public suggested that those interviewing politicians and other guests on current affairs programmes were too aggressive in their manner. It was further suggested that a less aggressive style of interviewing would allow for a more considered discussion. Huw Jones answered that he felt a forceful style of interviewing to be completely acceptable in a world where politicians were now trained in methods of dealing with the media and interviews and that there was nothing wrong in an interviewer pressing for answers to his questions.

Pobol y Cwm

A member of the public asked why *Pobol y Cwm* had not referred to the foot and mouth crisis, as there had been no mention of it in the last few weeks. While recognising that the programmes had been pre-recorded, it was asked whether it might not be possible to re-record parts of them in order to acknowledge what was happening. *The Archers* on Radio 4 was cited as a programme that was discussing the subject. Another person commented that *Pobol y Cwm* was to her mind attempting to emulate *Coronation Street* as similar storylines often appeared in *Pobol y Cwm*. There was also a feeling that the task of preparing a programme five days a week was too much for the producers and that storylines were too drawn out. The points made were noted, and Elan Closs Stephens promised that the Channel would forward these comments to the BBC which is responsible for this particular soap opera.

Background Music

A member of the audience complained that background music spoils programmes and cited the programme *Llafur Cariad* as a prime example. Huw Eirug noted the point made and said that the aim of background music was generally to enhance the atmosphere of a programme. He was aware, for example, that the producers of *Llafur Cariad* had endeavoured to use different types of music to complement and convey the atmosphere of different periods of time covered by the series. He suggested that the problem might stem from the volume of background music used rather than the background music itself.

Cultural Programmes and Male Voice Choirs

One member of the public felt not only that insufficient coverage was given to male voice choirs on S4C but that some of them, and in particular the non-Welsh speaking male voice choirs, were ignored altogether. Huw Eirug replied that S4C had given more coverage to male voice choirs than any other broadcaster in Wales but had not broadcast as much as usual recently. There were several reasons for this, one being that the Channel was attempting to explore different types of musical expression and identify particular events which might provide an opportunity for different artists to participate. A reference was made to a previous series entitled *Gwahoddiad*. There was a feeling that the experience of this series, which was very good, had shown that whereas viewers were willing to watch and enjoy a 'one off' concert they were not quite so eager to sit through a whole series. As far as non-Welsh speaking male voice choirs were in the question the point was made that a number of non-Welsh speaking singers in Welsh-speaking male voice choirs manage to learn to sing songs, hymns and choral pieces in the Welsh language. S4C had a duty to broadcast in the Welsh language which it took very seriously. It was suggested that if the contributor from the audience felt particularly strongly about the matter he should raise it with the BBC or HTV.

Heno

One member of the audience felt that the programme *Heno* contained too much English. Huw Eirug disagreed with that opinion. *Heno*, he said, had developed and evolved since the series began a number of years ago, and he particularly felt that any use of English over the past year was editorially justifiable. The programme's function is to attract viewers who may not be quite as proficient as others in their use of the Welsh language. This did not necessarily mean, however, that English would be used. The person who raised the point was asked to watch *Heno* the following week and, if they still believed that too much English was being used, to write to Huw Eirug so that they might discuss the subject further. A member of the production team for *Heno* was present in the audience and endorsed Huw Eirug's point regarding the change in the programme's use of English during the past year. He referred specifically to the last nine months saying that there had only been 18 minutes of English broadcast during that period.

Another member of the audience referred to the purity of language used by the presenters, complaining about the use of the word 'lyfli' instead of 'hyfryd' for example. Huw Jones replied that it was difficult to make a list of acceptable and unacceptable words. For example, words considered unacceptable for use 50 years ago would now be perfectly acceptable. One had to be careful about telling people what was and was not acceptable.

Another person commented that people came from different areas with different dialects and that such differences should be respected. The contribution made by series such as *Pam Fi Duw* was also acknowledged. This was one of S4C's best productions. Whilst some people criticised the programme for the amount of English it uses, there was a feeling that, if it succeeded in attracting viewers to the Channel and the Welsh language who would not otherwise have done so, this was acceptable.

Welsh and non-Welsh speakers

One member of the audience commented that he remembered S4C being established and the movement to establish it. Nevertheless, he felt that the Channel had not moved on since those early days. He felt that there was still paranoia among Welsh speakers, which led to the disenfranchisement of non-Welsh speakers. For example, in current affairs programmes, since only the opinion of Welsh speakers was heard, no consideration was given to that of non-Welsh speakers. It was asked whether S4C served only Welsh speakers as this created an imbalance which disenfranchised others.

Elan Closs Stephens replied that, yes, it was the statutory duty of S4C to provide a service for Welsh speakers. She, nevertheless, acknowledged that the point raised was a difficult and sensitive one for everyone concerned. She suggested that the matter touched upon here was in fact the lack of a comprehensive Welsh service in English. HTV provided 11 hours of programmes and the BBC was understood to be moving towards providing two hours each day on BBC2 Wales. Although this might not perhaps bring Welsh and non-Welsh speakers entirely together, it would at least provide non-Welsh speakers with more programmes of Welsh concern in English than were available to them at present. Elan Closs Stephens acknowledged that while the 888 subtitling service attempted to attract non-Welsh speakers to the Channel, the quest for a means by which non-Welsh speakers might contribute to Welsh language programmes was a far more difficult matter to resolve.

BUSINESS MEETING

Meeting with the BBC

It was noted that the meeting between the S4C Authority and Broadcasting Council for Wales had been postponed at the BBC's request. Other dates had now been suggested to the BBC based around dates of the S4C Authority meetings in June and July.

Political Conferences

The Chair reported that all S4C events at political party conferences had been successful.

Meeting with the Secretary of State for Wales

The Chair stated that she had arranged a meeting with Mr Paul Murphy, MP for 5 April 2001. The purpose of the meeting was to ensure that the Secretary of State kept in touch with developments on the White Paper on Communications and its implications for S4C.

Creative Wales

Reference was made to a second meeting of this group in Aberystwyth on 23 May 2001.

S4C Charity Appeal

Attention was drawn to the decision to launch an S4C appeal on Good Friday. Mention was made of a possible extension of the period of the appeal this time as it was thought that money raising would be hindered by the foot and mouth crisis.

Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive gave his report. He made particular mention of the effect of the foot and mouth crisis on the service provided by S4C, noting that a number of programmes, including some drama productions, had had to be postponed or cancelled. He also noted that the decision to cancel the Urdd Eisteddfod had been confirmed.

There was a feeling that the Channel should at least attempt to provide some kind of eisteddfod. Following discussion with Urdd officials it was established that the charring, crowning and prose medal ceremonies as well as the arts and crafts competitions would still be available. Consideration was also given to the possibility of inviting performers who had reached the stage over the last five years or so, to take part in 8 or 9 competitions during Eisteddfod week. Although it was hoped that something could be provided in keeping with the ethos of the Urdd, the options open to S4C were extremely limited.

The threat of a possible postponement of the Llangollen Eisteddfod was also announced and it was noted that a decision on whether or not the Royal Welsh Show would be held was to be taken in early April. There was also mention of possible problems regarding the National Eisteddfod. This year's Eisteddfod field was to be on farmland and it was as yet impossible to access the site and make the necessary preparations for erecting the pavilion, tents etc. as the animals could not be moved from the land.

Investors in People – South East Wales TEC awards

It was reported that S4C had won an award in the 'Excellent Practice' category for bodies employing more than 50 members of staff.

Funding Applications

The Chief Executive gave a verbal report on two applications for funding which were as follows:-

- (a) *BAFTA Cymru* – An application had been received from BAFTA Cymru asking for S4C sponsorship for its Award Ceremony. The Authority was reminded of S4C's support for this event over the years. It was agreed that a grant of £6,000 be awarded to BAFTA Cymru towards its Awards Ceremony.
- (b) *Welsh International Film Festival* – An update was given on future plans for the festival. It was reported that the Festival was applying for a grant similar to the one received from S4C in the year 2000. A decision was made to award a grant of £15,000 to the International Film Festival for the year 2001 and it should also be noted that an application for additional funding is to be submitted later in the year.

Report on the Programmes Service

The Director of Programmes gave his report. The discussion led to further consideration of Authority's aspirations for the programmes service in the next few years. This would be the last opportunity to discuss such matters before the Director of Programmes and the commissioners begin considering submissions for the 2002-03 round of commissioning.

Annual Report 2000

An outline for the Annual Report for 2000 was considered. Members noted that a draft of the full text would be put before them at a meeting to be held in April.

Other Matters

The following matters were also discussed or noted:

- Chief Executive Report - Matters for information
- Complaints Report
- Minutes of the meeting of the Compliance Group held on 16 February 2001
- Viewers' Hotline report
- Research Report
- Financial Report
- S4C Masnachol Managing Director's Report