

S4C Authority Bulletin - June 2001

OPEN MEETING – RHYL

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Thursday evening, 24 May 2001, at the Sun Centre in Rhyl attended by some 35 members of the public.

As well as the Chairman of the Authority, Elan Closs Stephens, also taking part in the discussion were the Chief Executive, Huw Jones and the Director of Programmes, Huw Eurig. Other members of the Authority were also in attendance to listen to the discussion and to chat informally with the public before and after the meeting. Among the matters discussed at the meeting were:

National Festivals

It was asked whether it was possible to view festivals such as the Urdd, the Agricultural Show, the Llangollen Eisteddfod, the National Eisteddfod and so on, in their entirety on the analogue service. Huw Jones replied there were no less hours broadcast from these festivals on S4C analogue than had been the case in past years. Nevertheless, it had to be recognised that S4C has the problem of trying to squeeze Welsh language programmes together with Channel 4 programmes into the one service. The only thing S4C could do was to try to encourage people to purchase the equipment in order to receive the S4C digital service which broadcasts 12 hours of Welsh language programmes daily. While recognising that £100 is a considerable sum for some people to afford, it was emphasised that this was the total amount which people have to pay in order to receive the free channels such as S4C digital; there is no need to pay a subscription to Sky. This was a matter of paying for the equipment, in the same way as someone might buy a television set, rather than paying to receive the service. At the end of the day, therefore, it was up to the individual whether they wanted to invest in the equipment to receive a digital service.

Elan Closs Stephens picked up on the point that buying the necessary equipment was beyond the pocket of some people, and said that this was a matter of which the Government was aware and there was a discussion in progress at present on the promotion of the digital service and how it could be ensured that people might be able to afford the necessary equipment.

It was asked whether it was possible for everyone to receive the digital service since people living in Penllyn had tried and failed to receive it. According to Huw Jones, everyone should be able to receive digital and he would be very interested to learn more about this situation. He invited the member of the audience concerned to leave their name and address after the meeting in order that S4C might be able to pursue this matter.

Religious Programmes

It was asked whether S4C had anything against religious programmes since they were rarely to be seen on the Channel. There are still large numbers of people who attend chapel or church on Sundays, and therefore it should not be difficult to find an audience for such programmes. Huw Eurig replied that S4C does provide religious programmes. Everyone was familiar, of course, with *Dechrau Canu*, *Dechrau Canmol* and the Channel had also broadcast *Cewri'r Ffydd*. In addition, the programme *Hanfod* was being broadcast on the digital channel. Another series would be broadcast later on in the year, namely *Llwybrau Paul* and there were plans for further series in the next couple of years.

It was also asked whether S4C thought that series such as *Fondue*, *Rhyw a Deinasors* were suitable for broadcasting on Sunday evenings. Huw Eurig replied that people had different views and opinions concerning what was suitable for broadcasting and when. In this respect what S4C was trying to do was to offer a variety of drama, including contemporary and adventurous drama. In the final analysis it was a matter of taste. Huw Jones added that the following for the series in question was very strong among those in their thirties – an audience which S4C had found difficult to win over. Perhaps this series was not to everyone's taste, but such a success is important to the Channel and its future. This illustrated how difficult it was to appeal to everyone.

Afternoon Programmes

A member of the audience raised the point that there are no Welsh programmes on offer during the afternoon hours between *Planed Plant*, broadcast at midday, and *Planed Plant* at tea time. This was acknowledged but once again it was suggested that the answer was to arrange to receive the digital service, since S4C Digital broadcasts Welsh programmes during this period and reference was made to the programme *Pnawn Da* as an example of the menu on offer in the afternoon.

Welsh Learners

A member of the public enquired whether it might be possible to provide a programme where a mother and her children who were learning Welsh could sit down together to watch. It was acknowledged that *Talk About Welsh* was available for an older audience but there was nothing on offer for little children. Huw Eurig replied that this was an excellent point and that S4C was aware that there was a demand for such a programme and indeed it was something which the Channel was already working on.

Repeats

A member of the public asked why there were so many repeats being broadcast. Huw Jones replied that there were two main reasons for this. The first was financial. It was a matter of trying to divide the cake in order to broadcast all the time. Repeats are a way of making that cake go further. The second reason was a more positive one. During a period when more and more channels were on offer and people are choosing to watch another channel as their first choice, they appreciate a second opportunity to watch a programme on S4C. Generally with regard to the issue of repeats, according to Huw Jones, he didn't foresee the situation changing. It was not just S4C, of course, who broadcast repeats.

Since he thought it was only fair to discuss finance, Huw Jones expanded on this issue. He said that S4C spent £70 million annually. By way of comparison, Channel 5, for example, a channel which one could argue broadcast cheap programmes, spends £140 million annually just on programmes. S4C therefore, has just half the funds to do the same job. The Channel had to spend carefully – this was not an excuse but simply putting the issue into context.

A member of the audience responded by saying that everyone understood S4C's situation, and speaking personally, he wanted to congratulate the Channel, in particular in respect of dramas. There was a good variety on offer. While it is perfectly in order to criticise the Channel for things which are not well received, it should also be praised for the good things which it provides.

Programmes on Digital

It was asked why some of the programmes shown on S4C Digital could not be repeated on S4C Analogue. Some of the programmes were very good; *Croma* for example. Huw Eurig was very glad that *Croma* was so well received. Nevertheless, S4C is restricted by the requirements of having to broadcast Channel 4 programmes as well. *Croma* is an hour long programme and therefore it would take up a considerable amount of S4C's schedule. Also, of course, if S4C wants people to watch S4C Digital, it has to provide programmes in its schedule which will attract viewers to it.

Pobol y Cwm

A member of the audience stated that they got hours of enjoyment from watching S4C; that generally she enjoyed it, as did the rest of the family. Nevertheless, she wanted to raise the matter of *Pobol y Cwm*, in respect of storylines running for too long. Another member of the audience took up this point. While he and his family enjoy this soap opera, he agreed that the storylines go on too long. What concerned him more was the effect of long storylines dealing with issues such as drugs, for example, on young people and children. If *Pobol y Cwm* is going to deal with issues such as the misuse of drugs, the implications and lessons should be shown clearly and quickly and the story not allowed to run and run.

Huw Eurig acknowledged the point which had been made, and said that it is difficult for the producers of a daily soap opera to decide when to bring a story to a close. This was a problem which the BBC, the producer of the programme for S4C, had to resolve. *Pobol y Cwm* was a valuable programme for S4C and hearing viewers' response and opinions was important because competition from other channels was becoming increasingly ferocious – for example, *Emmerdale* on ITV was now being broadcast daily. Huw Eurig would be meeting with the BBC in the next month and he would present the audience's comments to them at that time.

The Celtic Nations

A member of the audience acknowledged that providing a television service was an incredibly expensive undertaking and he believed that what S4C provides is nothing short of miraculous when one considers the funding available. Nevertheless, it was asked, why were there not more programmes concerning Ireland and Brittany being made. Huw Jones answered that this was a question which has often been raised over the years. The truth of the matter is that S4C provides programmes of this type from time to time and rather more so than the English channels. Nevertheless, whilst showing an interest, the Welsh should not consider themselves as a minority in a world of minorities but also should think of themselves as one of the peoples of Europe. Wales also had to look outwards.

Elan Closs Stephens made the additional point that S4C had, nevertheless, played a leading rôle in the world of Celtic broadcasting. One example, was that Huw Jones had given a speech on minority language television in Brittany; and the S4C Developments Consultant, Mr Euryn Ogwen Williams, had also been giving advice to the Celtic channel in Scotland. In some ways then, S4C had been working closely with the broadcasting systems in the Celtic countries and had given them both support and advice.

Comedy Programmes

S4C was thanked for bringing back *Fo a Fe*, which had never been equalled. The repeat of *C'mon Midffild* was also something to be welcomed. Huw Eirug said that he was prepared to accept praise for drama programmes, but that he was also willing to take the blame for comedy programmes which failed and he acknowledged that a number of comedies in recent years had failed. Nevertheless, he did not believe that efforts to find new successful comedy material should be relinquished. He hoped there would be one or two programmes which would be commissioned in the next couple of years which will be well received.

National Eisteddfod

Reference was made to the service from the Eisteddfod and how the discussion between the competitions impinges on the enjoyment of the festival. It was asked whether it would be possible to use these periods to show recordings of the competitions which have been held earlier in the day. The panel's deliberations were boring. Huw Eirug referred once again to S4C's digital channel and that what the viewer got on that channel was a ticket to the pavilion in the company of just one person, Alwyn Humphreys.

A member of the audience referred to the fact that the National Eisteddfod this year is of course being held in Denbighshire and that everyone in the area was looking forward to it.

Advertisements

It was asked why there were not more advertisements being made in Welsh. Wyn Innes, the Managing Director of S4C Commercial (who was in the audience) said that S4C does its best to get more firms to advertise in Welsh. Two years ago there were 9 companies doing so, the target this year was to get 35 companies to advertise in Welsh (and perhaps some of these would be making two or three different advertisements). S4C was aiming to get not just local firms to advertise in Welsh but international companies too (for example, Ford). Efforts are also being made to get Welsh-language sponsorship for programmes. It should be noted that S4C, through its commercial arm, provides subsidies for companies to advertise in Welsh.

Railways Series

There was praise for the presenter, Arfon Haines Davies, and reference was made to the series *Cledrau Coll*. It was asked whether it was correct that a similar series would be produced. Huw Eirug confirmed that another series on railways called *Cledrau Cul* was being produced.

BUSINESS MEETING - RHUTHUN

Members of the Authority

The Chairman referred to the fact that this was the last meeting which Peter Davies and Janice Rowlands would be attending as their terms on the Authority were coming to an end. Appreciation was expressed for their devotion and loyalty to the aims of S4C. Their desire for S4C to succeed had been very apparent. They were thanked for their very valuable contributions over the last five years.

It was reported that interviews for successors to Peter Davies and Janice Rowlands would be held on the 4 to 5 June 2001. These recommendations would be passed on to the Assembly for agreement and then on to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sports for the final seal of approval.

Head of the Press Office

The Authority wished to acknowledge formally the day of David Meredith's retirement. David's contribution to S4C and more generally to the media in Wales, had been considerable. Aspects of his work had been closely and directly bound up with the Authority's work, for example in arranging open meetings. David Meredith's gentlemanly attitude to everyone, whoever they were, had been a feature of his time with S4C.

A Performance Review of Members appointed to Public Bodies by the Government.

The Chairman referred to the letter from Sir Robin Young concerning proposals for revised arrangements for reviewing the performance of chairpersons and members appointed to public bodies by the Government. The letter emanated from a committee report led by Dame Rennie Fritchie. Having discussed what was in view, the Members welcomed the idea that chairpersons should meet informally with members of boards sponsored by DCMS at least once a year.

Welsh Subtitles

The Chief Executive referred to the discussion which had already been held by the Authority on this subject and the results of research undertaken were discussed. S4C officers had come to the conclusion that the development of the existing 889 service could be useful not only for Welsh speakers who are deaf or partially hearing, but also for Welsh speakers of differing language abilities. Further research was approved in order to establish how practical such a proposal might be.

The Assembly's Review of the Welsh Language

The Members noted the timescale for presenting written evidence (July) and oral evidence (December) to the Assembly concerning the review of the Welsh Language. Some issues of specific interest to S4C were discussed arising from the consultation. A further report setting out headings as a basis for S4C's written evidence, would be submitted to the Members in the next meeting for discussion.

Schedule

The Members' attention was drawn to the problems which will face the planning department in the near future in terms of rescheduling some of the Channel 4 programmes such as *Big Brother*, the cricket and *Richard and Judy*. Although this was a matter for the planning department to decide, guidance was invited from Members of the Authority. In the opinion of the Members, broadcasting *Big Brother* at 8.30pm (i.e. during peak Welsh language hours) would not be acceptable. Nor did they believe that the slot for broadcasting *Planed Plant* should be moved in order to broadcast *Richard and Judy*. The Authority nevertheless accepted that there must be flexibility in some circumstances and they differentiated between what could be considered as an "event" e.g. the cricket, compared with a daily magazine programme such as *Richard and Judy*.

BAFTA Cymru

The Members referred to the press coverage of BAFTA Cymru and it was asked what was behind the reports which had appeared. The Chief Executive explained the situation concerning the award ceremony in general and the adjudication with regard to the 'best film'. Members of the Authority noted the background of what had appeared in the press.

Annual Report 2000

Members of the Authority agreed the draft text of the Annual Report for 2000. The Annual Report and Accounts for 2000 would be published on 28 June 2001.

Other Matters

The following matters were also discussed/noted:

- The Chief Executive's Report – Matters for Information
- Complaints Report
- Report and Minutes of the Conformity Group held on 11 May 2001
- Report of the Viewers' Line
- Research Report
- S4C Commercial's Managing Director's Report.
- Report on the Programmes Service
- Financial Report
- Minutes of the Personnel and Acknowledgement Committee held on 27 April 2001