

S4C Authority Bulletin - August/September 2001

Members of the Authority

It was reported that the Assembly had now agreed on the two new members and it was expected that the recommendation would be forwarded to the DCMS within a week or two.

Chairmanship of the Audit Committee

In noting that Janet Lewis-Jones's term of office as chair of the Audit Committee had come to an end, the Members expressed their gratitude to her for chairing the Committee for very many years during which she gave strategy and detailed care to the work. Everyone was most appreciative of and grateful for all her work.

Meeting with the Minister for Broadcasting, Film and Tourism

The Chair reported that a very useful and constructive meeting had been held with Dr Kim Howells, MP, on 10 July. The opportunity was taken to show him the technology block and the S4C International building and to explain the various aspects of S4C. During the discussion, Dr Howells outlined the timetable for the Communications Act that would be announced in draft form in the new year. This had been a good meeting and it was hoped that Dr Howells had a far fuller picture of the Channel's work when he left S4C than he had had before his visit.

S4C's Political Receptions

It was reported that S4C's reception in the Houses of Parliament had been most successful, with most of the Welsh Members of Parliament attending. The reception for the Assembly in the Norwegian Church had also been quite successful, although of course the occasion had been tinged with sadness with the announcement that day that Val Feld, AM, had passed away. S4C had considered postponing the event but it was finally decided, after consulting with the office of the President of the Assembly, that the event should proceed in a quieter way. As expected under these circumstances, some of the Assembly Members who had accepted an invitation did not attend. Those that did attend expressed their appreciation of the fact that the reception had been held in an appropriate and worthy manner.

The National Eisteddfod

Attention was drawn to the fact that the S4C reception at the Eisteddfod would be held on Thursday, 9 August.

Chartermark

It was noted that S4C had submitted its application to retain the Chartermark. The Chair, amongst others, had met the assessors on 18 July. It was felt that a strong application had been submitted and hopes were high that the award would be retained.

Broadcasting Standards Council

It was noted that Wales still had no representative on the Council and concern was expressed that this boded ill as far as representation on the new OFCOM was concerned. It was agreed that the Chair should write to the Standards Council regarding the situation.

Meeting of the Authority with the Broadcasting Council for Wales

The meeting held with the Broadcasting Council the previous evening was discussed. The meeting had provided a good opportunity to ensure that the Council was aware of the prime aims of S4C and a useful discussion on a number of current issues was held.

Commissions 2002-2003

The contents of the document published the previous day, which set out the details of the commissioning for 2002-03 were noted. The Director of Programmes drew attention to some main headings, namely:

- that the hours for children's programmes had been extended, with one hour being televised in the afternoons on analogue
- the change in the schedule between 6.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. There would be a new half-hour magazine programme at 6.00 p.m. which would focus on reflecting events in and around Wales. As a result of the Authority's public meetings there was an awareness that people felt that their stories were not being seen and heard on television; it was hoped that this programme would meet that demand. At 6.30 p.m. a half-hour programme for the family would be televised, with series such as *Rownd a Rownd* amongst others.
- the focus on drama. There would be an even greater focus on drama during the forthcoming two years. The Sunday evening slot would continue but there would be more drama during the week. S4C had proved time after time that its drama was good and popular. In addition, a pattern would be established where another opportunity would be provided for S4C plays to be viewed. It was felt strongly that S4C needed to develop as a channel that provided a second opportunity for its programmes to be viewed. However, it must be remembered that the Channel could be seen as the Channel of repeats and it would be important to maintain a correct balance. Care also had to be taken with deciding when open subtitles would be used; the current practice was to focus these on repeat showings.

The Members of the Authority discussed what the implications and effects of the commissioning would be on the independent production companies and they were given an outline of which companies would benefit and which would lose out as a result of the commissioning round and the possible implications to some of them as far as job losses were concerned. While noting the situation, consideration was given to what assistance could be offered by S4C to the companies that had lost out in the current commissioning round. It was suggested that ELWa might put together packages in order to retrain or develop the skills of those who had suffered as a result. It was noted that TAC, Cyfle and Sgrîn also had a role to play in this context.

With regard to the next commissioning round, reference was made to the way S4C and the broadcasting world had developed and was continuing to develop and evolve. S4C would have to work with the independent companies in order to ensure that the proposals offered by them during the next two years were appropriate to the needs and requirements of the Channel. There was also a wish to consider further what S4C could do to try to ensure that opportunities were available to allow young talent come to the fore.

New BBC Digital Services

Reference was made to the consultation by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport Department (DCMS) regarding the BBC's plans for new digital services. The Members considered and agreed on the response to be submitted to DCMS.

Richard & Judy

Although programme scheduling was an issue for the officers at S4C rather than the Authority, this matter had been put to the Authority because of the matter of principle raised as a result of the recommendation to move Welsh language children's programmes from 5.00 p.m. in order to allow *Richard & Judy* to be televised at the same time as on Channel 4. The Members recognised that it was intended, in any event, to provide in the new year a schedule that offered an hour of children's programmes between 4.00 and 5.00 p.m. Even so, there was still a need to make a decision regarding what should be done about broadcasting *Richard & Judy* when Channel 4 started televising it in the autumn. A detailed and careful discussion on this issue ensued and, having weighed all the relevant considerations, it was agreed that the recommendations of the officers regarding the broadcasting of children's programmes at 4.00 p.m. from the autumn onward be accepted. This would allow *Richard & Judy* to be televised at 5.00 p. m.

Rugby and Football

The Authority discussed the BBC's decision not to continue the football programme, *Gôl* and the attention this decision had attracted.

Review of Performance against Targets in the Corporate Plan 2001-2003

S4C's performance against the targets set in the corporate plan was discussed. To date, the vast majority of the targets had been reached but some doubts were expressed regarding the reduction in viewing figures which demonstrated the impact of losing the Urdd Eisteddfod and the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

A report was received from the Secretary which gave an introductory assessment on the impact of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on the activities of S4C. The next step would be to produce a plan of the information that S4C publishes. The Information Commissioner would provide guidance on the form the plan should take and what its contents should be. A further report on this matter would be submitted to the Authority in due course.

Report of the Compliance Group

The report of the Compliance Group arising from the meeting held on 13 July 2001 was accepted. Attention was given to two specific matters:

- (a) The use of English in *Porc Peis Bach* -
 - (i) Being aware that the Authority had already expressed some dissatisfaction with the amount of English in the previous series of *Porc Peis Bach*, the Monitoring Unit had noted that this had been extended in the second series beyond its use by those characters whose language style had been established in the first series. As an example, the Authority was shown a clip from a scene (to do with a gypsy) where, in the opinion of the Compliance Group, the use of English could have been avoided. The Members discussed the example put before them and the use of English generally in this series.
 - (ii) It was agreed that new scenes introducing new English-speaking characters (as in the gypsy scene) in addition to those that included characters that had already been established in the first series (such as the mother) led to an unacceptable level of English. This was not a documentary and the argument that the aim was to portray reality was not as strong where fictional drama was concerned; there had to be clear and strong justification for using English on each occasion. The series had gone too far in its use of English and more consistency was required in the English that was used. S4C officers should make it clear to the production company concerned, and to production companies in general, that the Authority expected them to follow the guidelines that had been set.
- (b) **Report on the treatment by S4C programmes of the Political Party Conferences 2000-2001** – The report prepared by the Monitoring Unit was discussed. It was noted that there was no cause for general concern regarding fairness and balance in the attention given to the various parties. It was also noted that there would be a full report on the General Election available to the Authority in September.

Other Issues

In addition, the following matters were noted:

- Chief Executive's Report - Issues for information
- Complaints Report
- Minutes of the Compliance Group held on 13th July 2001
- Report of the Viewers' Line
- Research Report – Performance against targets
- Report on the Programme Service
- Financial Report
- Report of the Managing Director of S4C Commercial