

The Authority's Bulletin

- October 2001

OPEN MEETING

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Thursday evening, 27 September 2001, at the Arts Centre in Porthmadog which was attended by around 35 members of the public.

Elan Closs Stephens, the Authority's Chair, along with Huw Jones, the Chief Executive, and Huw Eirug, the Director of Programmes, took part in the discussion. Other members of the Authority were also present at the discussion and were available for an informal chat with the public before and after the meeting. Among the topics discussed at the meeting were:

S4C's Remit

A question was asked about S4C's remit. Elan Closs Stephens stated that the primary aim was to produce high quality Welsh Language programmes which would prove entertaining to a variety of audiences in Wales. There were also secondary aims, for example, providing work in the local economy and contributing to the British and international world of television. Huw Jones added that the formal aim of S4C had been established by law, originally by the 1982 Broadcasting Act and had been confirmed by further broadcasting acts. These acts state that S4C's role is to provide a high standard television service with the majority of programmes during peak hours being Welsh language programmes. The act also placed a duty on S4C to reflect as much as possible of the Channel 4 service.

The use of English in S4C's Welsh Language Programmes

The point was raised that S4C programmes contained far too much English. Huw Jones stated that much discussion had taken place in S4C on this issue and that the Channel had prepared guidelines for producers. These guidelines stated that there should be strong and valid editorial reasons for including English in a Welsh Language programme. However, there were, at times, varying opinions as to what was justifiable. The question was asked why voice-overs were not used more frequently. Huw Jones replied that S4C's viewpoint was that the vast majority of its viewers understood English and when something was worth saying, people wished to hear it in its original language. This situation is unique to S4C when compared with any other channel in any other country. However, this situation means that producers have a responsibility to find ways to limit the use of English otherwise this philosophy could lead to an increase and unlimited expansion in the use English. Elan Closs Stephens added that S4C has a system whereby all its Welsh Language programmes are monitored against compliance guidelines which include language guidelines and that the Channel is able to measure how much English is being broadcast.

A member of the audience returned to Huw Jones' point concerning the fact that Welsh-speakers understood English. It was felt that this was a very dangerous viewpoint in Wales, especially in Welsh-speaking communities in Gwynedd where non-Welsh speakers were moving into the communities and expecting Welsh-speakers to switch automatically to English. The Welsh Language was in a very fragile state. It was felt that the English Language was evident at all times, and that the least S4C could do was to provide a Welsh Language service for all which is pure, simple and correct. Huw Jones acknowledged what had been said but gave the following as an example: if Rob Howley, Captain of the Welsh Team, was being interviewed on *Y Clwb Rygbi*, viewers would wish to hear him using his own words. He suggested that, in effect, the dilemma was the ability to strike the correct balance between when English should be allowed yet without changing the nature of a programme which was in essence a Welsh Language programme.

Standard of Programmes

An opinion was given that programmes of quality were few and far between on S4C. While John Owen's programme on the slate quarry had been an example of a fine programme, such programmes were rare. The question was asked why viewers could not have more educational, historical and nature programmes. It was also felt that too much emphasis was being placed on programmes for young people compared with programmes which are suitable for all, such as *Fo a Fe* and *Teulu'r Mans*. Huw Jones replied that it is difficult to maintain a balance between every viewer's taste. He stated, for example, that programmes such as *Amdani* and *Ffondue*, *Rhyw a Deinasors* did not please some viewers, while other viewers enjoyed them immensely. Taste, too, changes as the years go by and what was popular twenty years ago no longer entertains the younger generation in the same way today. Huw Jones, however, proceeded to name a number of programmes which will be featured in the coming year which could perhaps interest people present in the audience, programmes such as - *Ystafell Ddirgel*, *Rhys Lewis*, *Talcen Caled* etc.

It was also felt that many programmes were situated in Gwynedd or in the Llanelli area or Cardiff, but that there was a need for programmes which contributed something from every locality in Wales which meant visiting such areas as Holywell or Breconshire. Huw Eirug accepted this criticism and stated that S4C had been aware of this. In an attempt to rectify the situation, a new series would be broadcast in January which will visit various regions in Wales; this will be a nightly programme containing stories and characters from various districts.

Another viewpoint expressed was that there was too much emulating of programmes which have appeared on other channels, American or English, and the speaker called for more originality in the context of Wales and its way of life. Huw Eirug agreed with this and stated his opinion that S4C's best programmes, the programmes which prove to be the most popular, were those which had their grass roots in Wales. He acknowledged that there had been a time when the aim was to emulate popular English programmes but that it was currently believed that the strength of a broadcaster such as S4C is its identity and that should be built upon and

such programmes compiled. This also means that the task is much more difficult because of the simple fact that it is much easier to copy or take inspiration from an idea which already exists; it is much more difficult to find original ideas which appeal to and give pleasure to an audience.

Brass Eye

A member of the audience referred to the programme *Brass Eye* which was broadcast at the end of July and stated that it was a disgraceful programme. Had not the programme been broadcast by Channel 4 before S4C, and had no-one from S4C seen it before it had gone out, were the questions asked. Elan Closs Stephens said that this programme had been broadcast at the same time on Channel 4 and S4C but despite the fact that she was happy to listen to what the audience had to say about the programme, she did not wish to express her personal opinion that evening because this issue was being presented to the Authority in its meeting the following day (see the Authority's decision below).

Comedy

It was asked what S4C would offer in the realm of programmes which would make its audience laugh. Reference was made again to programmes such as *Fo a Fe* and *C'mon Midffild* and an enquiry made as to whether there were programmes of this calibre in the pipeline. Huw Eirug stated that several new series would be broadcast next year and he hoped that these would make people laugh. He acknowledged that S4C had failed on several occasions in this field but that the Channel was doing its best in its search for successful series. He added, however, that writing comedy was the most difficult of skills in the realm of television, since there is only one criterion, that is, does it make you laugh or not. It had to be acknowledged that there was a shortage of comedy writers and it was essential that the Channel should foster them and give them every opportunity. Having said this, the same problem existed in England and across Europe - that is why *Friends* appears on schedules everywhere, because other countries also were unable to replace it with their own comedy programmes.

Pobol y Cwm

A view was expressed that the linguistic standard of *Pobol y Cwm* was unacceptable. "Dwi byth wedi bod" a "na fi hefyd" were cited as examples of phrases used. The question was raised whether script editors looked over such sayings. It was felt that if such things were allowed, then Welsh learners or those who have an unsure knowledge of Welsh would hear them and use them. Whilst acknowledging the comments made, it was suggested that some things were correct from the point of view of dialect in certain areas but incorrect in others. "Sai byth 'di bod" was given as an example of a phrase which was likely to be acceptable in South West Wales, yet unacceptable in North Walian dialect.

Sport

It was felt that in general there was too much sport on television, S4C included, and the situation regarding cricket was discussed in particular. Huw Eirug referred once again to S4C's responsibility to offer the best of Channel 4's programmes and said that this, in the main, is the reason why S4C broadcasts the cricket. Whilst he accepted the criticism that a vast amount of sport is shown on television, he did not know the answer with regard to those who do not enjoy such programmes, except to refer them to S4C's digital service.

S4C and the Welsh Language

It was believed that S4C had a duty to provide programmes for young children. Concern was expressed about the demise of the language and young children are important for the future of the language, and indeed, the future of S4C. It was felt that S4C had a responsibility to promote the Welsh Language. Television reached all our homes: English speaking homes, homes where children were learning Welsh and also schools and S4C had an important role to play in the future of the Welsh language.

Another individual added that she was extremely glad that the Channel existed, despite the criticism of S4C's programmes. While there was room for improvement, she was very proud of the Channel and was looking forward to the day when it would be free of Channel 4's programmes. Huw Jones thanked her for her comments and drew attention to the fact that S4C, by means of digital satellite, had been available in England and Scotland for the last two years and that the Channel had received letters from Welsh-speakers who live in these areas, some of them perhaps who had lived there for about twenty five years, who were very appreciative of the service.

Digital Television

It was suggested that a vast amount of money was being spent on digital television at the expense of analogue television. Huw Jones replied that digital expenditure was under tight control and that it was no more than 10% of the total. Elan Closs Stephens added that we should remember that it is possible that the digital service would be the only service available from some point between 2006 and 2010 (although the Government had not decided upon a set date for the withdrawal of analogue) and that the Channel would be like an ostrich with its head buried in the sand if it were not taking steps to develop the digital service in readiness for that day.

In response to a comment that very few people, especially in the Porthmadog area, had digital television, Elan Closs Stephens referred to the fact that the public did not have to subscribe to Sky or ONdigital in order to receive the service. A set top box could be purchased for £100, and S4C, BBC News 24, etc, could then be received free of charge.

Another member of the audience expressed her wish to receive digital television but because she was living in a house which had been registered by CADW, she was not permitted to place a satellite dish on the wall. It was understood that others were able to receive the service by cable. The question was asked whether or not priority should be given primarily to adapting transmitters in rural areas. Huw Jones was grateful for this example. He said that adapting every transmitter in Wales, with the vast majority of them in rural areas (naturally because of the hills and mountains and the need for relays), would cost a vast sum of money. Some were of the opinion that broadcasters should be responsible for this cost. The broadcasters felt that paying for this would mean that there would then be no money available to spend on programmes. The broadcasters were of the opinion that the Government should pay if it wished digital television to be made available for each and every one without exception, otherwise there would be people who would be unable to receive digital television.

BUSINESS MEETING

Authority Members

It was reported that the recommendation in respect of the two new Members had since arrived at the office of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and was awaiting approval.

The National Eisteddfod

It was reported that the reception held by S4C at the Eisteddfod had been very successful.

Broadcasting Standards Council

The Chairman reported that she had received a reply to her letter to the Broadcasting Standards Council. The letter stated that it was intended to appoint a member from Wales to the Council.

Audio-Visual Industries Training Group Report

The Chairman drew attention to the report 'Skills for Tomorrow's Media' which was launched by Dr Kim Howells, Minister for Tourism, Film and Television, at the beginning of the month in London. It was noted that the Chief Executive had been a member of the body which produced the document, which was a comprehensive and detailed report. The Chair referred to the fact that Richard Laughton, Chairman of the Group, had expressed his gratitude to Huw Jones for his substantial contribution to the process.

CCG (Gaelic Television in Scotland) Annual Report

The Chair noted the CCG Annual Report and referred to the fact that John Angus MacKay had written to her to state that he and the CCG Members would like to come to Cardiff to meet the Authority.

Party Conferences

It was reported that the Chief Executive and the Director of Corporate Issues had attended the dinner held by S4C at the Liberal Democrats' Conference in Bournemouth. The event was a successful and beneficial one and two Members of Parliament and two Assembly Members as well as other members of the Party attended. It was noted, however, that the events which were due to be held at the Labour Party's Conference and the Conservative Party Conference, had been cancelled as a result of changes to the parties' arrangements following the tragedy in America.

Visit by Chris Bryant, AM, to S4C

It was reported that the visit by Chris Bryant, AM, a member of the Culture, Media and Sports Select Committee, had been successful and beneficial.

The British Film Institute (BFI) and the British Council in Wales

The Chair reported for information that she had recently been made a member of the BFI and also a member of the British Council in Wales.

The New York Tragedy

It was noted that the tragedy had raised questions for S4C with regard to the Channel's ability to respond in full to such events in the absence of its own news service. S4C's role for the future needed to be considered, especially when the only channel available would be a digital one. S4C would be failing in its responsibilities if it was unable to respond and provide the same type of service as all the other providers. The news service needed to be considered further.

Court Case

Reference was made to the fact that John Owen, the author and director of *Pam fi Duw?*, had been accused of child and youth abuse whilst holding a teaching post at Ysgol Rhydfelen between 1974 and 1991. Aspects of the matter which consequently needed to be considered by S4C and HTV were explained along with the resulting measures taken up until now. Having heard of the way the Channel had responded to the news of the accusation against John Owen, the Authority felt that the officers had dealt correctly with the matter.

Public Broadcasters' Conference, Toronto

The Chief Executive gave a verbal report on the conference for public broadcasters which he had attended in Toronto. This was a conference which was held annually and was a timely one in the wake of the tragedy in America. One session was held to discuss the way in which broadcasters had responded to the tragedy. A striking contribution was also made by a

broadcaster from Algeria and during his speech he emphasised that not all broadcasters had broadcasting freedom; those who had such a 'privilege' should make the most of it. Following the Chief Executive's report on the conference, the Authority discussed the way in which reports of international, British and Welsh issues were presented on S4C and in the other media in general.

Sponsorship

The Chief Executive gave a verbal report on a request for financial support received from Pendyrus Choir which was seeking to set up a scholarship fund in order to enable an individual from Wales to follow a course for Choir Conductors. It was agreed to contribute £2,000 towards the scholarship.

S4C's request to the DCMS for Financial Support

The Authority agreed upon a report to be presented to the DCMS as a part of S4C's application for further financial support.

Report on the Programmes Service

The report on the programmes service was received. Noted in particular were the changes in the schedule in the wake of the events in America. A comparison between the viewers' figures for *Pobol y Cwm* in 1999, 2000 and 2001 was also noted, along with the decline in percentage and number of thousands who watch the programme. The performance of *Pobol y Cwm* was a cause for concern and a matter which called for further discussion with the BBC.

Brass Eye Special: Paedophilia

A discussion was held on a report which asked Members to consider what the Authority's response should be to the broadcasting of the programme *Brass Eye Special: Paedophilia* (Channel 4 programme) which was shown on S4C at 22.35 on 26 July 2001. The report included details of complaints which had been received by the S4C Viewers' Hotline along with an outline of the response of the other regulatory authorities in Britain as well as a copy of the response made by Channel 4. The Members had also watched a tape of the programme before the meeting. The Members gave careful consideration to the various viewpoints and comments made, and the warning given by the presenter before hand was also considered.

Resolved:

- (a) that it is important that challenging programmes such as the programme under consideration should be produced and broadcast. This was a powerful and unsettling programme but an important programme nonetheless. Although it was uncomfortable to watch, such a programme is able to extend viewers' understanding of a difficult and

sensitive subject. *Brass Eye Special: Paedophilia* therefore was a programme which was appropriate for S4C to broadcast;

- (b) that the warning given by the presenter before the programme was sufficient. However - whilst considering the importance of giving an appropriate and sufficient warning before such a programme - S4C officers should ensure that the information received by them from Channel 4 concerning the content of its programmes should be sufficiently detailed. This would allow S4C to make a better assessment on behalf of its viewers as to whether more detailed warnings should be broadcast concerning the nature of such programmes in the future.

Compliance Group Report

The Compliance Group Report was received following its meeting which was held on 18 September 2001. Attention was given to two specific items:

- (a) **The *Taro Naw* programme which was broadcast on 30 April 2001 –**

- (i) During this specific programme in the *Taro Naw* series, much attention was given to a man who outlined in great detail a number of deceitful ways which he had employed to gain goods or money. The Group was concerned that the details presented during the programme could inadvertently assist people who have a tendency towards criminal behaviour. The BBC's response to the Group's comments was presented to the Authority and Members were asked to decide whether the compliance guidelines had been broken.

- (ii) **Resolved:** Although it appeared that the BBC had not sought the advice of the police in producing the programme, the fact that legal advice from the BBC's internal solicitor had been taken throughout the process and in respect of the final programme was sufficient in this case.

- (b) **Report on the broadcast of the Parliamentary Election 2001 on S4C's Welsh programmes** – The report which had been prepared by the Monitoring Unit was considered. It was noted that there were no causes for concern with regard to political balance.

Other Issues

The following issues were raised:

- Chief Executive's report - Details for information
- Complaints Report
- Minutes of the Conformity Group meeting held on 18 September 2001
- Report: Viewers' Hotline
- Research Report - the corporation's Performance against targets
- Financial Report
- Quarterly Report by the Managing Director of S4C Commerce
- S4C Authority's Time-table of Meetings in 2002
- Minutes of the Review Committee held 27 July 2001