

S4C Authority Bulletin

- December 2001

OPEN MEETING

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Thursday evening, 29 November 2001, at Theatr Hafren, Newtown, attended by some 30 members of the public. The format of the meeting was slightly different to normal, with two videos being shown at the beginning of the meeting, one giving a taste of the Christmas programmes schedule and the other showing clips of programmes to be shown on S4C on 27 December covering the twentieth birthday celebrations of Theatr Mwldan (recorded at Theatr Hafren).

Following the videos an open discussion was held in the usual manner. In addition to the Chair of the Authority, Elan Closs Stephens, the Chief Executive, Huw Jones, and the Director of Programmes, Huw Eirug, also took part. Other Authority members were also present to listen to the discussion and to have informal discussions with members of the public prior to and following the meeting. Amongst the matters discussed at the meeting were:

Educational Programmes on Welsh History and Culture

Reference was made to the recent focus on people moving in to Welsh speaking areas of Wales, and given the fact that television is a medium of education as well as entertainment, whether it was possible to provide programmes to educate such people on the cultural context in Wales. Huw Jones agreed that this was an interesting idea. Although S4C offered opportunities for people wishing to learn Welsh through programmes such as *Welsh in a Week* it did not currently provide programmes of the type suggested. It was an idea that S4C could usefully consider further. Elan Closs Stephens added, although S4C did not wish to avoid its responsibilities, and whilst emphasising also the sub-titling service provided by the Channel, there was a responsibility upon the BBC and HTV to provide such a service, adding that people moving in to Wales were initially likely to turn to English programmes for a taste of life in Wales before taking the more difficult step of learning the language.

S4C Digital

Reference was made to S4C Digital and to the fact that there was a feeling that those people unable to receive digital television were missing out on the 12 hour a day service. It was asked whether it might not also be possible to broadcast these programmes on S4C's analogue service, or alternatively whether the 12 hours of Welsh programmes could not be broadcast on the analogue service, with the Channel 4 output being shown on the digital channel. Huw Jones replied by explaining that anyone not in receipt of digital television could only receive S4C. He said that S4C had been a compromise from the outset in an attempt to respond to the aspirations of Welsh speakers for a Welsh language channel whilst also satisfying those people who wished to receive Channel 4 programmes. S4C was duty bound to provide Channel 4 programmes around the block of Welsh language programmes. Digital made it possible to provide two completely separate services (S4C and Channel 4). It was emphasised that it was possible to obtain digital television for £100. It was possible to obtain Sky equipment by paying £100 without having to subscribe to any Sky services. It was acknowledged that this was not always easily available but that Sky had a responsibility to provide the service as it had advertised it. As a result, if any viewer wished to receive S4C for 12 hours a day, or indeed the comprehensive Channel 4 service, this was the solution for them. For those people not able, for whatever reason, to pursue this option, they would have to continue with the compromise of the present service on S4C analogue.

Focus on Mid Wales

It was suggested that there was a general feeling that all-Wales institutions served the North or South and that Mid Wales was somewhat left out. It was felt that such institutions – most of them based in Cardiff – had a greater duty than ever to remember about rural Wales, and in particular about Mid Wales. More specific reference was made to the independent television sector and the fact that not a single independent producer was based in Mid Wales, whereas numerous companies based in the North and South, received commissions on a regular basis. It was also noted that there was a lack of training provided for young people in Mid Wales, who were forced to move to Cardiff to obtain such facilities.

Huw Jones responded by saying that this is one of the most difficult issues of all and that he was not sure what S4C could offer in this direction, apart from providing commissions for economic rather than programming reasons, which he felt would be inappropriate. He said that the same complaint, namely the attractions of Cardiff, was also heard in the North, which itself had a thriving television industry. He said that Cardiff attracted young people; it offered the attractions of city life and was also a place where people were able to live their lives largely through the medium of Welsh. It was felt that all that could be said was that it was essential that the Channel should reflect life in the whole of Wales. It was often easier to do so if a producer or production company was based in particular areas. On the other hand the industry was dependent on a certain level of “critical mass” in order to enable people to make a living without being dependent on a single programme, to allow people to work for more than one company, to gain a variety of work experience, and to sustain a resource base that could be used for a range of different productions. There was nothing that prevented anyone who wished to set up a company in Mid Wales from doing so, possibly by starting at a fairly modest level, initially using people on a freelance basis without employing too many people. S4C was always willing to listen to new ideas, and if the ideas helped S4C to fulfil its aim of providing a service for all the people of Wales, it would then be much easier for S4C to listen sympathetically to such ideas and to commission programmes.

Huw Eirug also referred to the new programme to be broadcast in the New Year, to replace *Heno* in the schedule. *Heno* had been interesting for several reasons, but added that it had become increasingly apparent that S4C needed to reflect community life in its various guises in all parts of Wales. That was the intention of the new series *Wedi Chwech* that would begin in January, to be broadcast between 6.00 pm and 6.30 pm. The main function of the series would be to reflect the events and the people to be found in then many and diverse communities throughout Wales. It would not always be an easy task and Huw Eirug said that he very much looked forward to hearing people’s views.

Following on the point about the lack of focus on Mid Wales, a question was asked about the position of Aberystwyth-based Cwmni Hon who had recently lost a commission. It was said that it was a company that was closer to Mid Wales than any other and it was suggested that S4C had not in any way helped Mid Wales by not renewing Cwmni Hon’s commission, and that if anything it had made the position even worse. Elan Closs Stephens said that this was a difficult situation but that it was ultimately a matter of having to balance the various demands on the schedule. Huw Eirug added that ultimately S4C had to make its decisions for programming reasons, and that to make broadcasting decisions for economic rather than programming reasons was a very dangerous path to follow. He said that several companies had lost programmes; it was unfortunate that the company in question worked mainly on the one series, namely *Hon*. The decision had been made for scheduling reasons and on the basis of the kinds of programmes S4C wished to broadcast. It was acknowledged that the tendering process was highly competitive, but that this merely reflected the equally competitive nature of the world in which we live.

Gôl

It was suggested that S4C had lost hundreds of viewers by taking *Gôl* off the screen. Although *Gôl* was not perfect it was better than nothing and those present were asked for their views. Another member of the audience reiterated the views expressed and added that people involved with soccer in Newtown were very disappointed that very few of their games were now covered on television, and similarly so for Caersws. Huw Eirug replied by saying that a decision had been made jointly by S4C and the BBC to bring *Gôl* to an end, mainly due to the feeling that it did not offer the required quality of programme. He said that it was important not to confuse two issues - *Gôl* had to be judged as an individual programme, whilst the general issue of the coverage of soccer in Wales was a separate issue. Discussions were ongoing with the BBC in an attempt to seek agreement on the best way to cover soccer in Wales. It was expected that S4C and the BBC would be issuing a statement in the near future.

Learning Welsh

Reference was made to the *Saith ar y Sul* series shown on S4C in the recent past. The series offered a selection of the week's news highlights for learners, with the level of the language chosen carefully and the presenter speaking in a more measured manner and with clear pronunciation. It was believed that these programmes had been very well received. It was said that evening classes for Welsh learners were very popular in Powys, and that amongst classes for adults they were the most popular classes of all. The series *Saith ar y Sul* was used extensively in the classes when it was available. It was asked whether the series had gone forever, or whether an alternative offering was being considered. Huw Eirug said that S4C officials had in fact been discussing the issue in recent weeks, following the overwhelming success of *Welsh In A Week*, and had looked at how to provide the best possible service for Welsh learners, including news for learners. He said that no decision had yet been made, but that it was good to hear that such a programme had obviously been well received.

Pam Fi Duw?

Reference was made to the fact that S4C had recorded another series of *Pam fi Duw* and a request was made for it to be shown. Elan Closs Stephens replied by saying that this was a very difficult issue following the accusations made against John Owen (author and director of the series) and the circumstances surrounding his death. She said that the present position was that the series would not now be shown at the beginning of the year as originally intended. It was suggested that this was entirely reasonable, especially given the fact that it was the intention of the Children's Commissioner for Wales to conduct an investigation into the claims made against John Owen during his period as a teacher at Ysgol Rhydfelen. The Channel also had to consider the likely response of thirteen and fourteen year old youngsters to the series in the light of the recent press coverage and so on.

Overview of S4C programmes

It was said that music, drama and rural affairs programmes on S4C were of an excellent standard and that *Cefn Gwlad* appealed to large numbers of people in Mid Wales, both Welsh and non Welsh speaking, but it was asked why the quality of light entertainment and comedy programmes in Welsh was so poor. Huw Eirug said that the issue of comedy programmes had been raised in each of the public meetings he had attended. He said that it was very, very difficult to attract scripts that made people laugh. The same problem applied in England, and in the exceptions to the rule, it was usually the quality of the script that made the difference. He said that people still appreciated *Fo a Fe*, and *C'mon Midffild* but that S4C had failed more often than it had succeeded in recent years. He did not however believe that this should be used as an excuse to withdraw from providing comedy programmes on S4C. He said that it was one of the most difficult areas of programming and that the ultimate yardstick of the success of any comedy was whether or not it made people laugh. He said that S4C intended to persevere in this regard and added that new comedies were scheduled to appear on S4C in the

new year, and that he would again welcome viewers' responses to the quality of these new offerings.

Investing in Talent

It was asked whether the Welsh, as a nation, invested sufficiently in their writers and queried where writers came from? Huw Eirug said that the best writers benefit greatly from working with other experienced writers. He said that very few writers wake up one morning, start writing and realise that they are very good. Most people had to serve an apprenticeship and the difficulty in focussing exclusively on Wales was that there simply was not the breadth of proven talent available to nurture new writers. Huw Jones added that he did not think that the situation was entirely negative. He referred to programmes such as *Llwyth o Docs* and *Lolipop* that had been successful in their own way, although not to everyone's taste. He said that what was needed on S4C was comedy that had universal appeal. He said that S4C was very much aware of the need to tap into a vein of talent that could be developed over the longer term and said that one of the announcements made by the Channel in the past week was that one of its programme commissioners, Meirion Davies, would from the new year be working as Head of Developing Talent, across all areas of programming. His responsibility would be to discover potential, discuss with commissioners, and to promote new talent wherever it was discovered. This could include placing people to work with other people, helping colleges who provide courses, making it possible for people to see career paths in difficult areas such as writing. He said that it was not an easy situation, but that it was being very seriously considered. It was hoped that S4C would be in a position to return before long with a number of success stories.

Pobol y Cwm

It was felt that *Pobol y Cwm* had lost its way. It was no longer a programme that was watched by any members of the audience; many of the best actors had left and it was no longer an enjoyable programme to watch. It was felt that many of the storylines on *Pobol y Cwm* had already appeared on *Brookside* and *EastEnders*. There was not enough that was unique to Wales, rural Wales or that reflected Welsh village life. It was also said that the decision to screen the programme five nights a week meant that people got fed up with it and that the storylines suffered as a result. *Pobol y Cwm* was a programme that had been a nightly must at supertime, but the tendency now was to switch to the other channels to see what was available. Another member of the audience added that *Pobol Y Cwm* had lost its sense of humour. Dyff, Marc and Cath had gone – they were the kind of characters that gave the whole programme a lift.

Huw Jones replied by saying that S4C and the BBC shared many of the concerns that had been expressed. He said that a number of meetings were being held to see how to rekindle people's interest in *Pobol y Cwm*. He added that the programme had been a key element in S4C's schedule, and had constantly attracted the highest ratings. It was important that the programme maintained its usual high standards.

BUSINESS MEETING

Members of S4C Authority

At the beginning of the meeting the Chair extended a very warm welcome to two new Members, Eira Davies and Chris Llewelyn to their first meeting of the Authority.

S4C Funding Application

It was noted that the meeting with the Secretary of State for Wales that was originally to be held on 5 November had been postponed until 17 December.

John Owen

Reference was made to a comment made at the last meeting in respect of a photograph of John Owen that it was claimed had appeared during the announcement made at the end of the final chapter of the series. Officials had investigated the matter and it was confirmed that a photograph of John Owen was **not** shown during the announcement.

Ffeil

The Chair referred to correspondence from the Secretary of State for Wales in relation to *Ffeil* following a letter he had received from the NUJ. Reference was also made to the fact that a letter from the NUJ was apparently in circulation in schools asking children to write to S4C. However, it was noted that the NUJ had not written directly to S4C asking for its observations and response to the situation and it was agreed that the Chair should write to the NUJ about the situation.

Gôl

The latest developments in respect of the discussions on the broadcasting of League of Wales soccer were outlined. The Director of Programmes was hopeful of being shortly in a position to make an announcement about League of Wales soccer on S4C.

Corporate Plan 2002-2004

Members discussed the draft Corporate Plan for 2002-2004, which was based on the structure and main priorities of the plan for 2001-2003. It was agreed that the Corporate Plan for 2002-2004 in the form in which it was presented was acceptable and that officials should therefore present to the December meeting a finalised version of the Corporate Plan containing revised targets for 2002 for approval by the Authority. The Corporate Plan would have to be sent to the DCMS for final approval.

2002 Budget and beyond

The Chief Executive reported on the background of the discussions of the Senior Management Team on the budget for 2002 and beyond. He and the Director of Finance then took Authority Members through the report and the 'Book' that contained a summary of the main budget headings. The formal matter presented to the Authority for its consideration was its approval or otherwise of the 2002 budget. However, it was necessary to consider the likely financial pressures in the longer term. The Authority was therefore asked to consider various elements of the business plan extending over a ten-year period commencing in 2002.

The Management Team had prepared a number of scenarios in order to fulfil the aim to safeguard programme funding during this period whilst at the same time preparing a balanced budget. The four scenarios placed before Members were explained, all of which outlined the various possible funding cutbacks and the factors and considerations that underpinned them. It was the recommendation of the Management Team that Scenario 4 be adopted.

Members discussed the budget for 2002 in general terms but much of the debate focussed on the various outcomes provided for in the different Scenarios that would become operational from 2003, together with the funding cutbacks envisaged in each Scenario.

The Authority agreed that the budget recommended by the Management Team should be adopted for 2002 and that the recommendations outlined in Scenario 4 should also be adopted. This was a compromise budget that did not resolve all of the issues faced by S4C; it did however safeguard the programme budget.

It was also agreed that the Authority should hold a special meeting in the new year to discuss in greater detail whether the present commissioning system was best suited to allow for the flow of creative talent, whilst at the same time offering best value from the funding available.

Meeting with the Assembly Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language

The Chair drew attention to the fact that Jenny Randerson, AM, had accepted an invitation to meet the Authority on Thursday evening, 20 December. This would be an opportunity to outline the Channel's plans for the forthcoming year.

Open Meeting

Reference was made to the new format of the Open Meeting held the previous evening and the Chair suggested that a meeting should be arranged to discuss the format of future open meetings.

Commission for Equal Opportunities

The Chair had attended a meeting at which the Commission for Racial Equality and various media organisations had been present. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how the media could promote equal opportunities, both via their employment policies but also on the screen. It was intended to hold the next meeting at the offices of HTV and it was hoped that the following meeting would be held at S4C.

Net Meeting

The Chair confirmed that she had held a meeting via the Internet on 20 November. Most of the people who had contacted her had been media studies students.

Welsh Woman of the Year Awards Ceremony

This had been an excellent evening and it was noted that Welsh had been far more extensively used this year than last. The Director of Finance was also thanked for giving so much of her time to the event in her capacity as one of the judges.

Shakespeare Drama Festival for Schools

The final evening held at the Duke of York Theatre in London had been an overwhelming success. It was attended by Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, as well as Cherie Blair and members of her family.

Television without Boundaries

It was reported that the Chair and the Secretary had contributed to the above seminar arranged by Eirug Wyn, MEP, to discuss the European Directive on 'Television without Frontiers'. The intention was to pass on the findings of the seminar in order to contribute to the consultation process on the directive.

Meeting with Kim Howells, Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting

Members were reminded that the Chair, Chief Executive and Secretary would be meeting Kim Howells on 6 December 2001 to discuss the request made by S4C for additional funding. This was seen as the latest in a series of discussions that must be held before the Government decides on its next Public Expenditure Review.

Richard & Judy

The Chief Executive referred to a note sent to Members since the last meeting drawing their attention to the change of mind that had taken place about the proposed live screenings of Richard & Judy from the end of November. It had been decided that a recorded version of the programme should be broadcast a day after live transmission of the show, and that live transmissions should commence in the new year when the new schedules made this possible. The full thinking behind this change of mind was explained. Although it was early days, it was noted that S4C's decision had thus far attracted not attracted any attention or comment.

Pam fi Duw?

The note referred to above had also contained reference to the decision made not to show the latest series of *Pam fi Duw?* Since this issue was discussed at the last meeting of the Authority the situation in respect of the accusations made against John Owen had changed. It had now been announced that the Children's Commissioner for Wales intended to conduct an investigation between February and June. It was also necessary to take into account the likely response of viewers if the series was broadcast in January, and how children would be likely to react.

Members took note of the latest position. Specific reference was made to the likely reaction of young viewers and one Member said that his experience of discussing *Pam fi Duw* with young people was that they did not know who John Owen was and that their main concern was when the next series was to be shown. This was noted and it was agreed that when the investigation had been completed that the question of whether the next series should be permanently shelved would have to be revisited. In the meantime, HTV were working on two other series to fill the gap created by the decision not to broadcast *Pam fi Duw*.

Following discussion on the latest situation, the Authority confirmed that it was of the view that the decision not to broadcast *Pam fi Duw* in January had been correct and that the matter should be considered further once the investigation into the accusations made against John Owen had been completed.

Head of Developing Talent

The Chief Executive gave an oral report on the newly created post of 'Head of Developing Talent' to be located within the Programmes Department. This step had been taken in response to discussions amongst Authority Members and officers on the need for S4C to be more pro-active in its efforts to develop and nurture talent in the industry, primarily for the future benefit of the Channel. The person appointed to this new post was Meirion Davies, present Commissioner of Programmes for Children and Young People, who had been chosen because of the special contribution that it was believed he could make to the post. Members expressed their support for this new development and extended their best wishes to Meirion Davies in this new and important undertaking.

Matters for Information

In addition to the above the following matters were also discussed:

- Report on the Programme Service
- Financial Report
- Internal and External Audit Services for the period 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2004
- Report of the Chief Executive – Matters for information
- S4C Response to the Government's Consultation Paper on the Digital Television Action Plan
- Complaints Report
- Report and Minutes of the meeting of the Conformance Group - 12 October 2001
- Report of the Viewers' Hotline
- Research Report – Service Performance against targets
- Report of the Managing Director of S4C Masnachol.