

<p style="text-align: center;">S4C Authority Bulletin - March 2002</p>
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OPEN MEETING - AMMANFORD

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Thursday evening, 28 February 2002 at the Miners Theatre, Ammanford, attended by over fifty people. 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 in the discussion. Other members of the Authority were also present to listen to the discussion and to meet and talk to members of the public on an informal basis prior to and after the meeting. Amongst the matters discussed were:

Use of English in Welsh language Programmes

A member of the audience expressed dissatisfaction with the use of English in programmes such as *Porc Peis Bach* and *Pam fi Duw?* It was felt that if they were Welsh language programmes they should not contain any English. Another viewer expressed a different view by saying that there was a place for such use of English in some Welsh language programmes. It could be argued, for example, that the use of language in a programme such as *Pam fi Duw?* is a reflection of the society in which the programme is located. Another member of the audience claimed that programmes such as *Pam fi Duw* could also attract people who were learning Welsh or people who did not have complete confidence in their use of the language. Such programmes could therefore help to expand the audience base for Welsh language programmes. As a result, some people believed that it was important to provide programmes reflecting different levels of linguistic fluency.

Taste

Another point raised was that certain programmes contained items that were in poor taste and *Noson Lawen* was cited as a specific example. Huw Eirug responded by saying that S4C was very much aware that audience expectations created a boundary and that the Channel took great care to try to ensure that programme makers did not cross such a boundary. It was however acknowledged that some people would find certain programmes to be in poor taste. Elan Closs Stephens also referred to the fact that S4C had very clear guidelines to which production companies were expected to adhere in terms of taste and decency. In fact, S4C had a group of people monitoring the service that identified any areas where they believed that the guidelines were being broken. Therefore, it was stressed that this was an issue that the Channel took very seriously.

Pobol y Cwm

On the subject of crossing the boundary of taste and decency reference was made to *Pobol y Cwm*. It was felt that all the characters in the soap opera crossed the taste boundary every night, as it seemed that all the characters were carrying on with each other. As things stood, it was suggested that the series should be broadcast after 10 p.m. and that it should carry a warning.

Another member of the audience went on to say that *Pobol y Cwm* did not offer the same level of enjoyment as in the past. The series had been popular for such a long period of time but it was now surprising how many faithful viewers no longer watched it. It was felt that the focus of the series had become increasingly narrow, with just three locations – the Deri, the shop, and the students' house. If the intention were to try to portray life in a typical Welsh village, it would be very difficult to conceive of any village without a primary school and chapel as part of its everyday life. It was also noted that there are surely some happy marriages in every village.

Another member of the audience referred to what were seen as attacks by *Pobol y Cwm* (and other programmes) on Christianity. Specifically, it was felt that there were examples of dialogue that belittled the Christian way of life in a way that would not be permissible in the case of other religions. It was said that there had been a tendency in recent times to undermine everything that was associated with Welsh chapel life on *Pobol y Cwm* in a way that was unacceptable. Another member of the audience added that there were numerous story lines that could be developed based on a positive portrayal of chapel life in Wales today.

Elan Closs Stephens noted the points made and confirmed that S4C would be raising them with the BBC who were the producers of the series. Huw Jones went on to say that it would be interesting to try to understand the underlying reasons for people's reactions to *Pobol y Cwm*. There were similar story lines, for example, in corresponding English language soap operas such as *Emmerdale*, *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*.

Heno and Wedi 6

Members of the audience asked about the decision to bring *Heno* to an end to be replaced by *Wedi 6*, a programme that was seen to be too short. Huw Eirug said that the purpose of *Wedi 6* was to reflect life in as many communities in Wales as possible. Many other areas of Wales had welcomed the coming of *Wedi 6* as it meant that life in their communities was now being covered. S4C was also anxious to use the hour, which was previously taken by *Heno*, to offer a range of different types of programmes. It was good to see that *Rownd a Rownd* had received a very positive response in its new slot at 6.30 pm, and that *Byd Pws* had also been a successful addition to this slot. Whilst naturally respecting the views expressed, S4C was currently satisfied with its decision to bring *Heno* to an end and to offer a range of other programmes in its place.

S4C Headquarters

A question was asked as to whether S4C had considered moving its headquarters out of Cardiff to areas such as Gwynedd, Ceredigion or Carmarthenshire so as to bring it closer to its core audience and also to provide a welcome boost to the local economy. It was felt that Wales currently had a twin-track economy. Eastern Wales was highly prosperous but areas such as Carmarthenshire were facing severe problems. Elan Closs Stephens said that the location of S4C headquarters was a matter for careful consideration. S4C was aware that the issue of moving national institutions out of Cardiff was currently very much on the political agenda. It was the Authority's duty to consider the matter in the context of its primary responsibility to provide a television service of the highest possible quality.

However, it was important to bear in mind that only 10% of S4C's total expenditure was spent within its headquarters. The remaining 90% was in the hands of the small companies in areas such as Gwynedd, Llandeilo and Llanelli. It was the independent companies that provided the opportunities for producers, camera personnel, actors etc. The opportunities available at the headquarters were those for technicians, lawyers, and finance personnel. Having said that, it was obvious that to move a number of quality jobs to any area would strengthen its economic base. This was undoubtedly an issue that S4C would have to consider further. The Channel's main consideration would however continue to be how best to serve its viewers on their television screens, and how to keep expenditure not spent directly on providing on-screen services as low as possible.

Music Programmes

Reference was made to Wales' supposed position as the land of song, in contrast to the fact that there was very little singing broadcast on television. Although singing was an obvious feature of Eisteddfod broadcasts there seemed to be very little provided at other times of the year. It was said that it would be pleasing to hear individuals and choirs singing, both male voice and mixed choirs, in order to encourage young people to join choirs. It was suggested that Alwyn Humphreys would be an ideal presenter for such programmes, and that it was the duty of S4C to encourage such participation. Reference was also made to the 1960s when Raymond Edwards had a programme featuring village choirs, and it was suggested that there were still plenty of village choirs who could provide material for such a programme. Huw Eirug said that it was interesting to note that the number of programmes featuring singing were far fewer in general than in the past, both in Welsh and in English. The current trend was to feature one or two songs within a chat show format – as was the case on *Nia* for example. Nevertheless, S4C was increasingly trying to focus on producing special concerts and other musical events. He gave an example of the competition for choirs launched a fortnight earlier, to be broadcast during the Spring of 2003.

Planned Plant Bach

A question was asked about the scheduling of Planned Plant Bach and it was claimed that the timings were inconvenient for some schools. The fact that the starting times were often changed at short notice when golf or horse racing was to be broadcast also created problems for some schools that wished to record the programmes. Huw Eirug said that the decision to change the time of Planned Plant Bach and Planned Plant had been taken after consultation, and that it reflected the feedback received from a number of educational organisations outside of S4C. As far as the changed times were concerned, Huw Jones said that it had to be acknowledged that cricket did cause difficulties, because once the Channel had begun to broadcast a test match its audience would expect to see it in its entirety. However, it was believed that cricket was the only instance where Planned Plant had to be moved, and that with that exception its times were constant. Nevertheless, it was said that S4C officials would keep a close eye on the position.

Elan Closs Stephens enquired further about Planned Plant Bach, and asked for general comments on the programmes. It was said that *Tecwyn y Tractor* was very popular, and that *Sali Mali* remained a great favourite, as did *Ding Dong*. It was a pity that *Pingu* was no longer broadcast. Overall, it was said that school children enjoyed Planned Plant Bach.

It was also suggested that S4C should offer more programmes that focussed on numeracy and literacy. It was also said that there was room for story telling programmes (along the lines of 'Jackanory'), including stories presenting old Welsh myths and tales.

Digital Television

A question was asked as to when analogue television would be switched off, with all viewers transferring to digital. Huw Jones said that there was no clear information available at present. The government hoped that this would happen sometime between 2006 and 2010, but that it would not do so until 95% of the population was able to receive digital television. He said that set-top boxes were about to come on the market for some £100 and that this would enable viewers to receive a digital service through the aerial – if they lived in an area where it could be received. Once this was available some 15 channels would be available free to air including S4C digital, the new BBC services, etc. This could be attractive enough to persuade many people to switch over to digital television.

BUSINESS MEETING - CARMARTHEN

S4C Request for Additional Funding – Meetings with Politicians

A report was received on the meeting held with Paul Murphy, MP, Secretary of State for Wales; to discuss the request made by S4C for additional funding. It was hoped that a meeting could be arranged with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in the near future.

S4C Charity

It was reported that the Appeal Panel had met and had prepared a shortlist of the applications received for the choice of the S4C Charity for 2002. Matters were, therefore, progressing satisfactorily.

Viewing Figures

Members noted the unsatisfactory position outlined in the report of the Chief Executive in respect of the new BARB system for measuring audience size. It was also noted that this impacted upon commercial activities. The Chief Executive, the Managing Director of S4C Masnachol and the Head of Research had arranged to meet BARB on 5 March to discuss the situation and to ascertain what steps were being taken to seek to improve matters and to produce dependable figures.

BBC

It was reported that the BBC had written to S4C recently asking for more details about S4C's programmes strategy in order to strengthen the arrangements for providing Welsh language programmes for the Channel. Members warmly welcomed this. This was the period in which S4C receives the proposals made by the BBC and it was important that they had as comprehensive as possible a picture of the wishes and aspirations of the Channel.

Re-location of S4C Headquarters

The Director for Corporate Affairs presented an initial report setting out the main practical considerations that the Authority would need to look at in any possible re-location of S4C Headquarters. Members discussed certain aspects of the report at this meeting but it was agreed that the discussion would continue at the next meeting.

S4C and the Communications Bill

Members discussed certain elements relating to the position of S4C in the new regulatory framework to be introduced in the Communications Bill. It was still expected that the Bill would be published later during the Spring.

Corporate Plan 2001-2003 – End of Year Review

The Authority considered performance against the Corporate Plan 2001-2003 to the end of 2001. It was noted that the large majority of targets had been achieved. It was however noted that the hours of drama broadcast had been below target, but accepted that this was accounted for by the problems encountered during the production of the *Iechyd Da* series.

Requests for Sponsorship

The Authority considered a paper that set out the details of four requests received for sponsorship. It was agreed: That sponsorship should be provided as follows:

- Edinburgh International Film Festival - £10,000
- Cymdeithas Ddawns Werin Cymru - £500
- Young Farmers' Clubs - £5,500
- Black Light – £1,000

Presentation of the Director of Animation

The Director of Animation gave a presentation on S4C's animation projects since the days of Super Ted. A tape was shown containing clips of *Sam Tân*, *Hen Wr Lochnagar*, *Beryl*, *Gogs*, *Animated Tales of Shakespeare*; *Barber of Seville*, *Testament*, *Canterbury Tales*, *Miracle Maker*. He also explained the background to the development of the 'Short Shorts' competition and showed examples of the 45-second animation stories. Reference was made to the fact that the competition supported and encouraged the growth of talent within the industry. When the competition began a mere 35 submissions were received, but last year the figure had grown to 200. This year the most successful productions would be shown at the Cartoon Forum. The Cartoon Forum is a £1 million event attended by over 800 people from all over Europe. The Forum was set up 12 years ago and is held in a different country each year. This year it will be held at Y Faenol, Gwynedd.

Reference was made to the achievement of *Animated Tales of the World* where S4C and Wales had served as a link between a number of different countries to make possible the 26-tale production. Examples were shown of tales from Taiwan, Denmark, and Australia. The presentation also covered the role played by S4C in the Shakespeare Drama productions for schools. The project began two years ago for schools in South West Wales, but last year it was taken to London where 60 schools took part, with the four best productions staged at the Duke of York Theatre in the West End. This year, the scheme would return to Wales and involve schools from all parts of the country. It was hoped to extend the project in 2003/2004 to the different regions of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Other Matters

In addition, the following matters were discussed or noted:

- Report of the Chief Executive – Matters for information
- The Electoral Commission: Review of Political Party Broadcasts 2001/2002
- Complaints Report
- Report and Minutes of the Conformance Group held on 15 February 2002
- Report of the Viewers Hotline
- Report of the Managing Director of S4C Masnachol.
- Report on the Programmes Service
- Financial Report