

S4C Authority Bulletin
- June 2002

OPEN MEETING - Wrexham

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Tuesday 27 May 2002 at Wrexham where about 30 people were present. In addition to Nic Parry, a Member of the S4C Authority, the Chief Executive Huw Jones, and the Director of Programmes, Huw Eirug, took part in the discussion. Other Members of the Authority were also present to listen to the discussion and to have an informal talk with members of the public before and after the discussion. Among the matters discussed were the following:

The News

A member of the audience referred to the news service at 6.00 pm and 7.30 pm. It was felt that the bulletin at 6.00 pm was too short and therefore there was a tendency to watch the English news at this time of the day to have a fuller report of the news. It was felt that people would watch in Welsh if an extended service was to be offered at 6.00 pm. It was also believed that many people watched television first thing in the morning and S4C did not offer a service at this time. It was asked whether S4C had considered this, because it was important to have a service at this time of the day also.

Huw Jones replied that one of the things S4C was attempting to do was to provide news at different times from other services, rather than try to compete with the main English programmes. Offering a more comprehensive news programme at 7.30 pm was an opportunity when no one else was broadcasting a news programme. In addition, it was mentioned that BBC Wales (which provides the news for S4C) was using the same studio facilities etc for its news broadcasts in English as for the Welsh service for S4C. Therefore, practical factors also influenced the time for broadcasting the news. As far as broadcasting in the morning was concerned, that of course would mean additional costs and the money would have to be moved from somewhere else – as things stood, S4C did not have the resources to do that.

It was also emphasised that it was important that the news should reflect international news, not only news in Wales. While it was important to have a Welsh emphasis, there should also be news in Welsh about the rest of the world. However, there was a feeling among the audience that too much attention was given to news from South Wales (especially the Assembly) and that events in Wrexham were not given attention. It was felt that Wrexham was not being given fair play.

Huw Eirug said this was a complaint which was heard in every open meeting held by S4C. This feedback would be relayed to the BBC. It was mentioned that S4C this year had introduced a new programme, *Wedi 6*, and that the intent of this programme was to report stories and news from different parts of Wales, and the production company was working closely with local papers to ensure that his happened.

Viewers were asked whether they would prefer to hear people like Tony Blair/George Bush in English, or would they prefer voice-over or sub-titles for what they had to say. People in the audience said they preferred to hear such people using their own words/voices without voice-over or sub-titling.

Pobol y Cwm

S4C was congratulated on the standard of drama broadcast recently. However, considerable dissatisfaction was expressed at the standards in *Pobol y Cwm*. It was asked, if the producers found it difficult to maintain the story every day of the week, whether it would be better to broadcast it twice a week. There was a standard to programmes such as *Tipyn o Stâd* and *Pen Tenny*, but it was felt that *Pobol y Cwm* had lost its way.

The point was noted, but the difficulty with soap opera was that it had to be broadcast frequently, otherwise people would switch to programmes such as *Emmerdale* and not return. S4C had been discussing the programme with the BBC. A new producer had been appointed, but the changes being discussed at present would not reach the screen until September. It had to be admitted that people were not watching the programme as they used to in the past, and this was a cause of concern to S4C.

Members of the audience were asked what they thought was wrong with the soap opera. They replied that the stories and the characters had been changing so much that it was impossible to believe in them any longer. It was felt that the series was not maintaining the story long enough. Compared with *Coronation Street*, the stories here developed and then disappeared within a few weeks. It was also felt that the acting in *Pobol y Cwm* did not compare favourably. Some members of the audience admitted that they no longer watched the soap opera. Others said they had always watched *Pobol y Cwm* and would continue to do so – however, they also believed that the stories did not develop as they should. While they still enjoyed the soap opera, it was not as good as it had been in the past. The point was also made that the characters many years ago were elderly people. An attempt had obviously been made to change this, but perhaps the producers had gone too far. Now the characters were almost all young people and that meant inexperienced actors

Viewing Figures

Reference was made to the fact that *Y Cymro* used to publish S4C viewing figures in the past and that it was interesting to read them. The figures had not appeared in the paper recently. There were rumours that the reason for this was the very poor viewing figures. There were also rumours about *Pobol y Cwm*. It was asked why *Y Cymro* no longer published these figures. It was explained that a company called BARB was responsible for measuring and providing viewing figures and that the panel it used had changed entirely in January. So far S4C had no faith in the new figures and what was coming through was causing the Channel considerable confusion. If the Channel was to believe these figures, it would have to believe that its viewing figures had halved overnight. Therefore, S4C had had discussion with the companies which provide information about viewers. As soon as S4C was happy that the figures being provided were valid, it would publish them. These figures were important to S4C as they were necessary for discussions with the production

companies which supplied programmes for S4C. It was greatly hoped that the situation would be resolved before very long.

Viewing among Young People

Young people in the audience were asked whether they watched S4C. They replied that *Rownd a Rownd*, *Tipyn o Stâd* and *Pen Tennynd* pleased them. They also liked the music programmes on Sunday afternoons – although they felt the broadcasting time was wrong and they would prefer if they were shown at night. The programme *Tabw* was welcomed for being so open about the subject of sex, and *Procar Poeth* was also good because it showed what some young people did – the programme was a fair reflection. However, it was felt that not enough was being offered for people in their twenties and early thirties.

Digital Television

The audience were asked how many of them had digital television. It appeared that about half the audience could receive digital television and they were asked what they enjoyed watching. They mentioned that *Pnawn Da* was enjoyable, but again everything came from Llanelli and they asked whether it was possible to have some days from North Wales. It was admitted that this was a fair point. Having said that, while the programme came from a studio in Llanelli, the content of the programme was supposed to reflect other areas of Wales.

Drama Programmes

The question was asked whether people in South Wales complained about all the recent series, such as *Pen Tennynd*, which were located in North Wales. The reply was that this had been a subject of complaint. It was suggested also that one of the problems was that the accents in these series were very much North Walian, which made them difficult for South Walians to understand. However, it was said that the proof of a good programme was that it appealed to everyone, and that the objective for S4C was to continue to make programmes for whole of Wales.

Nia

It was asked whether another series of *Nia* would be shown. Huw Eirug replied that there would be a special *Nia* programme at Christmas and then a new series would appear shortly after next year. S4C had received favourable reaction generally to this series. This was welcome news, but people mentioned it was a pity the series did not include more programmes: the last series was too short. There were plenty of talented people in Wales and it was good to know about them. The audience was asked whether a Saturday evening showing pleased them, or would they prefer it to be broadcast on some other night. Would Sunday be better, for instance? The consensus among the audience was that they favoured Saturday.

Sports/Music Programmes

A member of the audience said how pleased he was that S4C had won an award for *Y Clwb Rygbi*. However, he personally was not interested in rugby and he thought there were many people like him. There was the impression that everyone loved rugby when that was not the case. However, another member of the audience said that rugby was something that attracted non-Welsh speakers to the channel. Indeed, by now they did not complain about the Welsh commentary and the rugby games televised by S4C added to their Welshness and had also had an effect on their sympathy for the Welsh language and the fact that Wales was a bilingual country. While others in the audience had nothing against rugby as such, they

wished to see a better balance in the televising of soccer. The question was also asked why S4C had stopped televising the Tour de France.

It was stated also that many people were interested in cars and it was suggested that more attention should be given to this. It was felt that the fact that Wales is a place for motor sport should be reflected – for instance, a great deal of this took place at Penbrey and in Anglesey, and in the country's forests.

The reply was that sport was an interesting subject, as S4C could only televise those sports events for which it had broadcasting rights. One question, for instance, was whether the Channel showed enough Welsh League soccer. However, it had to be admitted that rugby gave S4C good viewing figures. The Channel was always looking to see which different programmes it could televise. As far as the Tour de France was concerned, S4C was aware that Channel 4 had reconsidered its priorities and this possibly was no longer among those priorities.

It was suggested that the Channel should broadcast more concerts and choirs, etc. It should also televise evenings by Young Farmers Clubs. It was accepted that this might be an old-fashioned idea, but it was suggested that these things could be done in a new way. It was believed that there had to be way of adapting entertainment to make it suitable to attract young people. Another member of the audience who was interested in traditional and folk music supported the idea. He believed there was no reflection of traditional music and that more programmes were needed to attract teenagers. There were many children from non-Welsh speaking families and they needed something like *Newsround* to maintain their interest. These were the people to aim for as they were the next generation.

Huw Eirug and Huw Jones replied by saying that S4C had offered a series on folk music on Monday evenings. The Channel was also looking at offering more composite music programmes in the future, similar to the Jools Holland programme, with a variety of musical styles in one programme. They referred also to *4 Trac, Y Sesiwn Hwyr* – although it was accepted that these programmes did not reflect folk music. With regard to the programme *Newsround*, it was suggested that *Ffeil* would correspond to that programme.

Television in England

A member of the audience voiced his concern that so many people were turning their aerials towards England. This meant not only that they did not watch programmes in Welsh, but also that they did not watch Welsh television in English. In addition, some people had difficulty receiving S4C, and if they did not have digital television, they could not receive S4C. It was suggested that children did not watch S4C, therefore, as they did not know the programmes existed. It was agreed that the challenge was reaching people with the message of what was available, especially with young people where work was needed to win them over and again. S4C realised that means had to be found to work with others to ensure their investment reached as far as possible.

It was asked whether S4C worked with other channels to draw attention to the channel. It was stated that there was a good relationship with Radio Cymru where there was an effort to draw attention to S4C programmes. S4C would have to pay for any campaign on HTV. On the question of reception on the Borders, it was said that sometimes people had a choice of two directions but that they did not realise that. This problem was likely to be worse when digital expanded. It was not a simple matter for broadcasters in Wales to get people to switch from Granada/BBC England/Channel 4 etc to watch television in Welsh and about Wales. If any members of the audience had any ideas, S4C would welcome hearing them.

It was mentioned that S4C also suffered from the listings situation in newspapers, where S4C programmes usually appeared under the section listing regional variations. The majority of the audience obtained their information about television from the Daily Post.

The Eisteddfod

The question was asked whether people who could not receive digital television would lose out on broadcasts from the Eisteddfod. The reply was that S4C had to make the digital channel attractive, otherwise people would not choose to have it. It was true that people with digital television would see more of the Eisteddfod, but having said that, S4C still broadcast the same number of hours from the Festival on the analogue channel as previously, but it was felt that this to some extent reflected the fact that there was extended coverage on digital television.

BUSINESS MEETING – WREXHAM – 28 MAY 2002

At the opening of the meeting, Janet Lewis-Jones referred to the fact that the Chair of S4C had gone into hospital for treatment that day. The Chair was in everyone's mind and all the Members agreed to contribute to a bouquet of flowers to wish her a speedy and complete recovery.

BBC – It was reported that it had not been possible to arrange the annual meeting between the S4C Authority and the Broadcasting Council for Wales before the summer. Therefore, attempts would have to be made to arrange a meeting in the autumn.

Letter to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport – A letter had been sent to the Secretary of State drawing attention to the implication for S4C following the ITV Digital situation and its effect on SDN. This merely underlined the importance of the request by S4C for additional money. A copy of the letter sent to the Secretary of State was circulated at the meeting.

DCMS Officials - 14/15 May

- (a) A report was presented of a meeting at BBC headquarters in Cardiff on 14 May. Andrew Ramsay, a senior officer of DCMS, had been invited to discuss the new Communications Bill. Also present was Jenny Randerson, Minister at the Assembly responsible for broadcasting, and also representatives of HTV and the ITC. Mr Ramsay outlined briefly the points in the new Act and there followed an open discussion on the various aspects of the Bill and its likely effect on Wales.

- (b) It was reported also that Diana Kahn, head of DCMS Broadcasting Department, had given a briefing session to the Assembly on the Bill the previous day and there was general discussion about this. This proved to be a useful session.

Government Audit Committee on the Communications Bill – It was reported that an Audit Committee had been set up to consider the Communications Bill. S4C had been invited to submit written evidence by 10 June. S4C would also be part of a group of broadcasters to appear before the Committee on 17 June to discuss technical matters such as spectrum. The main broadcasters, including S4C, had also been invited to appear before the Committee on 20 June for a half hour session each. Therefore, the response by S4C to that Committee and the evidence it was to present needed to be discussed. This was discussed in greater detail later in the agenda for this meeting – see below. At the same time, DCMS was also advising on the content of the Bill.

Parliamentary Lunch – There was a report of the Parliamentary meeting held on 15 May. This was an opportunity to explain what S4C was to those who were not familiar with the Channel's activities before proceeding to discuss the specific elements of the Communications Bill and the bid by S4C for additional money. A lively discussion followed, and by the end many of the MP accepted S4C's argument for fair play.

Reception at the Conservatory Party Conference – It was reported that the reception held at the Conservative Party Conference had been successful.

Reception in Parliament – 18 May – Members' attention was drawn to the reception which S4C was arranged in Parliament on 18 May.

Seminars with Programme Suppliers – A report was given on three seminars held the previous week with producers. There was good attendance at all three and about 100 were present in Cardiff, 50 in Carmarthen and 70 in Caernarfon. It was thought essential to arrange these seminars as part of the preparation for the next commissioning round as they reinforced the messages that S4C wished to convey about its expectations and requirements.

The Draft Communications Bill

The Authority considered a paper which had been sent to the Assembly in response to its request for evidence for the discussion which the Culture Committee was to have on 29 May. In addition, the Secretary outlined some of the additional points which should be included in the response to Parliament. In the consideration of the paper, a number of points were raised:

- The Bill currently referred to a review by the Secretary of State every five years, while the system for the BBC was that the Charter was reviewed every ten years. Since the Bill treats S4C and the BBC on an equal footing, it was suggested that S4C should also be reviewed every ten years.

- The Bill acknowledged the responsibilities of the S4C Authority, but did not support that with the necessary funding to implement them. At the same time, it was important not to move away from the principle that the formula was defined by statute as this underlined the independence of the Channel. What should be pressed for, therefore, was a process of review from the baseline which was not available in the present formula.
- Much of what OFCOM would do did not affect S4C. Care should be taken, therefore, to ensure that the wording of the Bill ensures that S4C did not contribute to those elements of OFCOM costs that were irrelevant to the activities of the Channel.
- As for the role of OFCOM, although what was said about self-regulation should be welcomed. The fact that someone could go directly to OFCOM to complain before approaching S4C was contrary to this principle. It was not thought to be reasonable for people to complain to broadcasters in the first place to obtain their response. OFCOM could then stand behind this process.

Sponsorship

A request was considered by the Wales Digital College for sponsorship for category one in the College's Annual Awards to be held in July. A recommendation was agreed that the 'Special Needs' category be sponsored offering an award of £500.

Compliance

The Compliance Group report stemming from its meeting on 12 April 2000 was considered (the Authority had postponed this report from its last meeting). The Group specifically asked the Authority to consider a scene in a showing of *Porc Peis Bach* broadcast on 26 February 2002 where Kenneth had sworn at his mother. The Director of Programmes reported orally the comments of the Commissioner and the author on the scene. The intention was to show a child who had been disappointed and angered, and that these were the strongest words he could think of in response to his mother's attitude.

It was agreed: That the scene and the words used were out of character, should not have been used and were not suitable for the situation. Therefore, the Director of Programmes should convey the decision and the comments of the Authority to the Commissioner and the production company.

A report by the Compliance Group was considered stemming from its meeting on 10 May 2002. The Authority was asked specifically to consider scenes which raised questions of strong language and the use of the English language.

It was agreed: Taking into consideration the broadcasting time of the series and its context, the strong language and the use of the English language in the scenes in question did not contravene the compliance guidelines.

At the conclusion of this discussion, reference was made to the adjudication of the Broadcasting Standards Commission regarding *Taro Naw*, which was broadcast on 14 May 2001. This programme dealt with allegations that imported meat was being sold as Welsh meat. The Commission had received complaints from numerous meat companies following the programme. The Commission had accepted the complaint in part and S4C therefore needed to broadcast an apology on the screen. The Authority noted that although it was the BBC that had produced this programme, the Broadcasting Standards Commission was of the view that S4C, as the broadcaster, was responsible.

Other Matters

In addition, the following reports were discussed or noted:

- Minutes of a Meeting of the Audit Committee – 26 April 2002
- Report by the Chief Executive – Matters for information
- Complaints Report
- Minutes of a meeting of the Compliance Group on 10 May 2002
- Report on Viewers' Hotline
- Report by the Managing Director of S4C Masnachol
- Report on the Programmes Service
- Financial Report