

## Authority Bulletin - March 2003

### OPEN MEETING - ABERYSTWYTH

The Authority held an Open Meeting in Aberystwyth on Thursday evening, 27 February 2003, which was attended by around 40 people. The meeting was chaired by Cefin Campbell, a Member of the S4C Authority. The Chief Executive, Huw Jones, and the Director of Programmes, Huw Eirug, took part in the discussion. Among the matters discussed were the following:

#### Sport

A member of the audience asked if S4C had any plans to screen Welsh League football? Huw Eirug replied that *Y C/wb* on Sundays was meant to show more than just rugby and referred to the fact that S4C did not hold rights to the Welsh Football League matches – the BBC held these rights. Huw Jones stated, however, that it had to be acknowledged that Welsh football was not as attractive as football matches screened on other channels. The truth of the matter, therefore, was that broadcasting live football matches between Welsh League teams was not particularly attractive to S4C because they would not draw a large number of viewers. A highlights programme was another issue but this type of programme incurred high production costs. Whilst the standard of Welsh club rugby was comparable with the best, this was not the case with football.

Another member of the audience commented that too much focus was given to rugby and football and that many other types of sport deserved attention. Another person asked why attention was not given to women's sports. Huw Jones replied that his answer was similar to that given with regard to Welsh Football league matches – that women's sport did not attract viewers. This was true of all channels – viewers showed very little interest in watching women's sport, with the exception of Wimbledon perhaps.

#### Reflecting Minorities

The question was asked concerning what S4C was doing to reflect minorities on S4C's screen. It was felt that the Channel was not doing as much as other channels. Huw Eirug replied that S4C was to some extent giving attention to minorities in its programmes. Some black actors, for example, had appeared on *Pobl y Cwm*. People from ethnic minorities had also appeared on *Welsh in a Week*. S4C had also tried to give opportunities for minorities to voice their opinions. However, it was acknowledged that S4C had much more work to do in this field. Indeed, the Channel had been discussing the issue about a month ago and it was hoped that more proactive ways could be found of ensuring that S4C provided a platform for all people. Huw Jones added that the Channel had broadcast an interesting programme lately on Ramadan, following the video diary of a muslim. A programme on racism in rural Wales had also been broadcast. Also, as a result of the education system in recent years, an increasing number of Welsh-speaking black actors were beginning to come to the fore.

#### Films

A member of the audience mentioned that Huw Jones, some years previously, had mentioned the intention to set aside money for developing films which would be shown first in cinemas, before being broadcast on S4C. The question was asked whether that aim had been achieved. Huw Jones replied that this had not been fulfilled as had been anticipated. S4C had tried to set up a system to identify ideas for film. When this was achieved, they were shown in the cinema before being shown on television and indeed, some success had been achieved with films such as *Y Mabinogi*, *Eldra*, *Solomon a Gaenor*, and *Chameleon*. However, the truth of the matter was that ideas with any chance of succeeding in the cinema without the need to spend large sums of money were hard to come by. It was not possible to achieve much with a budget of £750,000 – even £4 million was a very small sum when the aim was to produce a good quality film. It was hoped that the new Fund supported by the Assembly would provide new opportunities for film-making – a fund to which S4C, and hopefully other establishments, would contribute.

### **New Technology**

A question was asked concerning the use of new technology in the production of programmes and did this not offer a less expensive way of making films. Huw Jones responded by saying that picture and sound are essential in television and that the Channel's officers were not aware of any developments at present which would reduce costs without compromising the standard of picture and sound. S4C commissioners daily faced the challenge of producing less expensive programmes. However, anyone who had any ideas about how programmes could be produced more cheaply was invited to approach the Channel to discuss the matter. It was acknowledged, however, that it was important that the Channel should keep a constant eye on developments.

### **Programmes after 9.00pm**

It was suggested that the standard of the programmes being broadcast by S4C after 9.00pm was deteriorating (i.e. the Channel 4 programmes which it was broadcasting). Huw Eirug replied that it was S4C's statutory duty, with regard to the analogue channel, to broadcast mainly Welsh language programmes at peak hours, with Channel 4 programmes being broadcast at other times. That was why S4C had established its digital channel, in order that it might broadcast Welsh programmes from mid-day to midnight. Huw Jones also referred to the fact that S4C, since the beginning of the year, had made some changes to its timetable and that it was now broadcasting Welsh language programmes between 9.00pm and 10.00pm.

It was asked how many of the audience were able to receive digital services and it was noted that around half of them had the necessary equipment. This reflected the situation in Wales where around half the population have the facilities to receive digital services.

### ***Pobol y Cwm***

The question was asked why S4C had changed the broadcast time for *Pobol y Cwm*. Not only had it changed the time but it was also broadcasting the programme at different times during week nights. Huw Eirug replied that the schedule change had occurred as a result of the change in habits of the Channel's viewers, namely that their television viewing time had moved to later on in the evening than was the case a few years ago. *Pobol y Cwm* was one of the Channel's most important programmes and S4C was aware that it had more chance of getting people to watch it later in the evening. It was also hoped that viewers would stay with the Channel to watch the programmes following the soap opera. The reason why *Pobol y Cwm* was not being broadcast at the same time every evening was that S4C wished to avoid clashing with *Eastenders* on BBC and *Coronation Street* on ITV.

The audience was asked whether anyone had stopped watching the programme as a result of the change in broadcast time. Some six people raised their hands – although it appeared that some of these had stopped watching the soap opera about two or three years ago and had given up the habit of watching it by now. One member of the audience stated that she kept forgetting when *Pobol y Cwm* was being shown because of the inconsistent broadcast times. Another person said that 7.00pm had been a convenient time since he would then be sitting down to eat and watch after coming home from work. However, another person said that it did not matter when the Channel would be broadcasting the programme because he taped the programme and would then watch it at a convenient time. Discussions on this issue were drawn to a close with a reminder to the audience that *Pobol y Cwm* is repeated at 6.00pm on the digital channel the following evening.

## **Development for the Future**

The question was asked as to how S4C intended to move into the future with regard to the development of the Web, for example. It was felt that it was important that S4C should develop such things at the same time as other channels or it would fall behind. Huw Jones said that this issue had been discussed by S4C. However, the digital and web situations were complex issues since not all people had access to them in their homes. Consequently, it was not possible to direct all of the Channel's money in these directions when not all were able to access them. However, it was true that if the Channel did not develop now, it would be left behind as others moved forward. It was therefore necessary to assess how much use was being made of the web sites. It was important that these added to the value of what viewers got out of the programmes. The attitude adopted by S4C was that it was necessary to find situations and programmes where the new technology could be used in an imaginative way and that it should concentrate on those. It was not possible to do this in the case of all the Channel's programmes since that would mean taking money from the programmes which appear on the screen. S4C had to believe that traditional television was still a powerful tool – after all, 98% of the population had a television and this fact should not be ignored. Television was the reason why S4C came into being and perhaps there was need for another source or fund in order to provide for these new developments.

## **Viewing Figures**

The question was asked whether the new schedule had attracted more viewers to S4C. Huw Jones replied that the initial signs were mixed. Some programmes had attracted more viewers than they would have before Christmas while the Channel had hoped that other programmes would have attracted more viewers. However, it was too early to formulate a final opinion and a decision had been made before the schedule was introduced to wait for a period of around three to four months before reviewing the situation. It was necessary to remember too that the viewing figures stemmed from a sample and it was imperative that these should not be considered as gospel truths.

A member of the audience mentioned that the viewing figures for *Pobol y Cwm* had fallen to around half of what they were seven years ago. Huw Jones acknowledged that the soap opera's viewing figures had dropped over the years but that it should be remembered that channels such as ITV had also suffered similar falls. The multi-channel world was responsible for this to a large extent. S4C, however, had adopted the custom of giving viewers a second chance to watch its programmes and operating in such a way had raised the numbers watching individual programmes. Research showed that some 740,000 people watched S4C at least once a week.

## Programmes for Young People

Mention was made that programmes such as *Jara* and *Rownd a Rownd* pleased young people, but concern was expressed with regard to programmes for school children, especially the trend of interviewing English pop stars and pop groups. Young children were being drawn towards English culture and this was giving rise to concern. Huw Jones asked whether this happened often. It was, was the reply, with children's programmes interviewing people such as Gareth Gates. Huw Eirug suggested that reference was being made to *Popty* and he acknowledged that the aim of this programme was to reflect Welsh as well as Anglo-American culture. However, he would be interested to hear which other programmes were doing this since S4C was very careful about the use of English in its programmes. If it was thought that English was frequently appearing in children's programmes, then that would give rise for concern. The person who raised this issue was invited to contact Huw Eirug after the meeting in order to furnish him with examples of the issue raised.

## *Planed Plant*

A question was asked concerning the lack of provision for 3 year olds and pre-school children. *Planed Plant* did not offer any provision for them in the mornings. Huw Eirug replied that this, as it happened, was being discussed by S4C at present. The gentleman who raised the matter was asked at what time he would like to see such programmes being broadcast. He replied 'between 7.00 am and 9.00am'. The question was asked whether provision at these times during the week would be more important than provision at weekends, and this received a positive response. The opinion was noted and mention was made that this issue was still being discussed by S4C.

## Comedy

It was asked where comedy had gone on the Channel. Huw Eirug replied that he asked himself the same question. It was true that the Channel was failing in this *genre*. He referred to two new series shown last year, namely *Naw tan Naw* and *Bob a'i Fam*. The audience did not have a particularly high opinion of these, especially *Bob a'i Fam*. Another member of the audience referred to a number of successful comedy series in the past and asked why these were not being shown again. This was happening, was the reply, but it was easy to look back at the past – the challenge was to look to the future and to present new and successful comedy programmes. Having said this, comedy was evident in S4C's drama programmes, e.g. elements were to be seen in *Amdani* and also in *Fondue, Rhyw a Deinasors*. It was important, however, that S4C should still strive for success in this field.

A member of the audience commented that there were surely some people in Wales who could write comedy. Huw Eirug replied that comedy writing was a very difficult skill but that S4C had a responsibility to continue to search for people who could undertake this terrifying task. It should be acknowledged also that the English channels were facing the same problems (and that they had much more money to spend on developing and producing such programmes).

## Calling it a Day on Series

A question was asked concerning how the Channel decided that a series had run its course (*Porc Peis Bach* and *Pam fi Duw* were cited as examples of programmes which began very well but then deteriorated as each series progressed). Huw Eirug replied by stating that the

question was an important one and deciding when a series had died a natural death was a part of the work of S4C's commissioners. However, there was disagreement with regard to the particular series mentioned, e.g. in the case of *Porc Peis Bach* it was decided to continue with another series acknowledging that the main character was growing older – the strength of the series lay in the fact that the nature of the comedy had changed to reflect this.

### **Analogue Switch-off**

The question was asked as to when analogue broadcasting was likely cease. Huw Jones replied that the Government had set the target between 2006 and 2010. In spite of this, some were now talking of 2014. Huw Jones believed that it would happen between 2010 and 2014.

Cefin Campbell thanked all members of the audience for being present at the open evening and for contributing in such an excellent manner. An audience member also thanked S4C for holding such meetings and especially for coming to Aberystwyth to listen to and hold discussions with local viewers. The programmes broadcast by S4C were enjoyed and appreciated. The rest of the audience applauded these comments.

## **BUSINESS MEETING – 28 FEBRUARY 2003 - ABERYSTWYTH**

### **Audio Description**

Officers were still discussing with other broadcasters their views concerning the provision of a sound description service without the technology being available for viewers to receive it.

### **Labour Party Conference, Swansea**

The Chair gave a report on the event held by S4C at the conference the previous evening. The event was a success and as he introduced the Chair, the Secretary of State spoke in support of the Channel.

### **A meeting with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport**

A report was given on the meeting with Tessa Jowell on 13 February. The meeting had given the Chair an opportunity to explain to the Secretary of State the obligations which stemmed from the decision during the latest expenditure round not to offer additional monies to S4C. The Secretary of State explained that the Department had given careful consideration to the bid and that considerable strain had been placed on its budget and that it had not been possible to go beyond inflation. Thought should now be given to the next expenditure round in two years' time which meant that the would Channel need to formulate a thorough case to be presented to the DCMS in a year's time.

### **RTS Awards**

Reference was made to the fact that *Ar y Stryd* and *Byd Pws* had been nominated for RTS Awards.

### **S4C Charity Appeal**

- (a) Cefin Campbell, as Chairman of the Appeal, was invited to give a report on the final situation concerning the campaign to raise money for *Shelter* during 2002. He reported that the amount collected was £20,000. This sum did not compare favourably with the total raised on behalf of *The British Heart Foundation* the previous year but it had to be recognised that this figure included money which the BHF had itself raised. It was necessary also to acknowledge that *Shelter* was a very different charity and that *Shelter* itself was very satisfied with the money raised and the focus given to the charity. Mention was made also of the fact that the Air Ambulance and CYD had received support through the production of a video and that both charities had been very appreciative.
- (b) Looking forward to the 2003 Appeal, it was noted that money would be raised on behalf of *Ty Hafan* and *Ty Gobaith*. It was hoped that there would be an opportunity this year to appeal to local community interests, with one charity being based in the north, the other in the south.

## **Performance Review**

Members considered a number of papers. The main aim of this meeting was to introduce to them the instruments now being used by officers to try to determine to what extent programmes had reached their target. Although some interesting points were beginning to emerge, it was explained that it is too early to draw any final conclusions with regard to the new timetable.

## **Subtitles**

Consideration was given to a report which made recommendations with regard to the 889 subtitles service. The aim was to offer a comprehensive Welsh service with a broad appeal which would be useful for Welsh learners, those who were unsure of their Welsh, and those who were hard of hearing/deaf. Members were satisfied with what was being proposed but a request was made that a more formal review should be held beyond the monitoring panel referred to in the report. It was agreed to arrange an independent review after two years.

## **Corporate Plan 2002-04**

Consideration was given to a paper which reported on the final situation with regard to S4C's performance during 2002 against targets set by the Corporate Plan 2002-04. It was agreed to accept the report under consideration and to publish it on the web (once the financial figures and the broadcasting hours had been confirmed by the auditors).

## **Corporate Plan 2003-05**

The Authority was presented with the final version of the Corporate Plan for 2003-05 which now included targets concerning viewing figures as a result of information received from BARB for 2002. It also reflected comments made by the DCMS. Members noted the amendments to the version of the Plan which had been considered in December. It was agreed to give the Authority's approval to the final version of the Corporate Plan for 2003-05.

## **Sponsorship**

Members considered a paper seeking approval to recommendations in respect of sponsorship. It was noted that if these recommendations were accepted, the sponsorship budget for 2003 would be more or less spent. Apart from one application, in respect of which more information was requested, all the recommendations were agreed.

## **Other Issues**

The following issues were also discussed / noted:

- Chief Executive's Report – Matters for information
- Programmes Report
- Financial Report
- Complaints Report
- Report and Minutes of the Compliance Group held on 14 February 2003
- Viewers' Hotline Report