

S4C Authority Bulletin **– May 2003**

OPEN MEETING – LLANELLI

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Thursday evening, 24 April 2003 in Llanelli, attended by over 70 people. The meeting was chaired by Elan Closs Stephens, Chair of S4C, and 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 opportunity to meet members of the public prior to and following the meeting. Amongst the issues discussed were:

Pobol y Cwm

Reference was made to the fact that many people had complained about the changes made by S4C to the broadcast times of this soap opera. Huw Eirug responded by saying that the decision to change the schedules had not been taken lightly. He said that the decision had been taken because viewing patterns had changed and that people now watched television later in the evening. It was also not felt sensible to put the programme up against other soap operas such as *Coronation Street* and *Eastenders* and this was also a contributory factor in the decision not to broadcast *Pobol y Cwm* at the same times during the week. *Pobol y Cwm* remained the most popular programme on S4C and it was also hoped that the schedule changes would lead to people staying with S4C to watch the programmes that followed. A question was asked as to whether viewing figures had grown since the changes were made, the reply being that figures were broadly comparable to the pre-Christmas figures. The audience was asked how many of them preferred the 7pm slot and how many the 9pm broadcast time. The audience was split fifty-fifty on the issue, but the strongest message was the need for consistency, whichever broadcast time was chosen.

Advertisements

One gentleman asked why it was necessary to suffer advertisements, especially in the middle of programmes provided by the BBC, such as *Pobol y Cwm*. Huw Jones replied by saying that advertising income was one of S4C's major sources of income and that 15% of S4C's income came from this source. It was noted that this pattern of funding was commonplace in Europe.

Pawb a'i Farn

It was asked why *Pawb a'i Farn* was only broadcast for six weeks during the summer (with the exception of election periods) and why it was not available throughout the year. Huw Eirug replied by saying that the next series would begin in September to coincide with the new Assembly session and that in future it would not be shown

during the summer. On the issue of the number of programmes within a series, he said that this was currently the subject of discussion with the BBC. A member of the audience referred to the fact that *Question Time* on the BBC was broadcast all year round and suggested that a similar arrangement be adopted for *Pawb a'i Farn*. Huw Eirug acknowledged the point made, but asked whether there were sufficient contributors available to sustain a series over such a lengthy period – the numbers of Welsh speakers that could be called upon were limited. Huw Eirug asked if the audience preferred an exclusively political guest make-up or whether they would rather have a mix, with a number of 'celebs' also appearing on the panel. The consensus view was that a mix was the preferred option, as it gave an opportunity to hear views that did not necessarily reflect those of the main political parties.

Children's/Family Programmes

It was asked why English language programmes were shown between the end of the Planed Plant broadcast at 5pm and *Rownd a Rownd* starting at 6.30pm. Huw Eirug said that *Rownd a Rownd* was broadcast at 6.30pm because it was likely to attract more viewers at this time, especially in view of the fact that it appealed not only to children but also to adults. Elan Closs Stephens added that S4C also had a duty to show Channel 4 programmes on the analogue service. Huw Eirug went on to ask the audience about their views of children's programmes. The general response was that the quality had improved but that people would like to see more programmes suitable for the 8-11 age range. People were also anxious to see more hours of children's programmes being broadcast.

Talwrn y Beirdd

A question was asked as to why S4C had stopped showing *Talwrn y Beirdd*. Huw Eirug said that the reality was that it was a programme better suited to radio than television. He said that television was a medium where the picture was paramount, and that consequently this was not a programme that offered a particularly interesting visual experience. Another member of the audience asked why there was not a quiz show along the lines of *Question of Sport* on S4C. Huw Eirug said that discussions were currently being held about the possibility of producing such a quiz show. However, he said that S4C was sometimes criticised by people who believed that it was copying the formats of English language programmes and that there was, therefore, a need to find a Welsh way of producing such a programme.

Eisteddfod

A question was asked as to why extended broadcasts from the Eisteddfod were not available on analogue as they were on digital, given that not all viewers had the digital service. Huw Jones explained that the same number of hours of the Eisteddfod were broadcast on analogue as in the past. The difference was that the digital channel provided the opportunity to broadcast more from the Eisteddfod whilst upholding S4C's duty to broadcast Channel 4 programmes on the analogue channel. If people wished to see more from the Eisteddfod, the answer was to obtain the digital service, and attention was drawn to the fact that it was becoming increasingly cheaper and easier to buy equipment to be able to receive digital services.

Sports

A question was asked as to why S4C showed continental matches on *Sgorio* but no Welsh soccer. Huw Eirug replied by saying that S4C was of the view that showing matches involving teams such as Real Madrid was a good thing – viewers in England did not have this opportunity. *Le Rygbi* performed a similar function with its coverage of high quality French club rugby. It was not therefore felt that S4C should apologise for showing the best of European soccer.

Mas o Diwn

A question was asked as to why S4C had stopped broadcasting this programme. Huw Eirug said that S4C had no plans to commission a new series. It had been found that its appeal was too limited and that its viewing audience was restricted to people interested in classical and choral music.

The Chair drew the meeting to a close by thanking all members of the audience for their attendance. She said that it was encouraging to see so many people present. After the meeting the audience had an opportunity to take a guided tour around the Tinopolis studios, followed by an informal gathering over a cup of tea with members of the S4C Authority and officers.

BUSINESS MEETING – LLANELLI – 25 APRIL 2003

S4C Charity Appeal

- (a) The Member, Nic Parry, was thanked for attending a recent charity event at Blaenau Ffestiniog and for presenting the cheque to Shelter Cymru on behalf of the S4C charity appeal for 2002. It was noted that the event had been successful and that Shelter had expressed their appreciation not only for the money itself but also for all the publicity it had received as a result of the S4C appeal over the past year.
- (b) In terms of this year's appeal, it was noted that Iolo Williams would be undertaking a sponsored walk from north to south Wales. Related to the walk, two dinners would also be held – the first on 13 June in the north and the other on 26 June in Cardiff.

Communications Bill

- (a) It was agreed that a paper should be prepared for Members setting out the links between the Authority and OFCOM and giving an outline of the timetable for establishing OFCOM from now on. It was felt that it was important that the Authority should be in a position to express its opinions before final decisions were taken on the new regulatory system in Wales.

- (b) It was noted that Sue Balsom had been appointed the member to represent Wales on the OFCOM Contents Board. It was intended to invite her to S4C for a meeting once she had taken up her duties. It was noted that the first meeting of the Content Board would be held sometime during May.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 28 March 2003 were received.

Investors in People

All members of staff were congratulated for gaining Investors in People status for the second time. It was noted that S4C had not only regained IIP status but that it had done so with an excellent oral report from the assessor.

TAC

It was noted that a meeting had been held between officers of S4C and the Chair, Chief Executive and some members of the TAC Committee on 1 April 2003. Reference was made to the fact that the practice of holding regular meetings between the S4C Authority and the Council of TAC had ceased and it was agreed to look at whether this could be re-established.

Director of Engineering and Technology

The Authority congratulated Arshad Rasul, S4C's Director of Engineering and Technology, on being appointed a Fellow of the Institute of Electrical Engineers.

Annual Report 2002

Members considered the draft text for the Annual Report 2002. Members welcomed the fact that the report had a sharper focus than the Annual Report for 2001. During discussion, Members proposed certain textual changes, mainly in the programmes section. Conditional on Members' comments being given due consideration, it was agreed that the text for the 2002 Annual Report should be approved. It was noted that DCMS would also have an opportunity to comment on the draft.

Corporate Plan 2003-05 – Quarterly Review

The report on the progress achieved on targets set in the Corporate Plan 2003-05 was received. There were no issues of particular concern that needed to be highlighted at the end of the first quarter of the year.

Other Matters

In addition, the following matters were discussed/noted:

- Report of the Chief Executive – matters for information
- Programmes Report
- Financial Report
- OFCOM Appointments
- Complaints Report
- Report and Minutes of the meeting of the Compliance Group held on 11 April 2003
- Report on the Viewers' Hotline
- Research Report
- Report of the Managing Director of S4C Masnachol