

S4C Authority Bulletin - October 2004

OPEN MEETING – THE POP FACTORY, PORTH, RHONDDA

The Authority held an Open Meeting on Thursday evening, 28 October 2004 at The Pop Factory, Porth. There were 15 members of the public present. The meeting was chaired by Elan Closs Stephens, S4C Chairman and Huw Jones, the Chief Executive also took part in the discussion. The following were among the issues discussed:

Films

Reference was made to the success of *Hedd Wyn* and the question was asked whether another 'blockbuster' was under consideration, possibly about Owain Glyndwr. Huw Jones mentioned that for some time people had suggested that a film be made on Owain Glyndwr. The problem was that making an epic film was a costly business and that a very imaginative script was also a necessity. With regard to *Hedd Wyn*, this was not only a film about a poet, but there was also a good story attached. S4C tried to produce one or two films every year and even though it would like to produce more, the financial situation prevented this.

Films over Christmas

Another member of the audience mentioned that he looked forward every year to seeing the big film for Christmas, and every year was disappointed by it. He felt that the script writers and actors were trying too hard and were attempting to be too clever. Huw Jones was sorry to hear the opinion expressed, but he sincerely hoped that the film this Christmas - *C'mon Midffild* – would be enjoyed by all viewers.

Familiar Faces

It was suggested that the faces appearing on S4C were seen too often. It was recognised that this was a comment that the Channel heard from time to time. However, more people were to be seen in front of the screen on S4C than ever before. When the BBC began making Welsh language programmes for television, only six people held a contract; now hundreds of people were under contract to appear in Welsh language programmes. It was acknowledged that audience expectations rose continuously and there were indeed things which S4C had to be very careful about. For example, actors that appeared in English soap operas were not allowed to perform at the same time in other programmes. Ideally, S4C would like to arrive at the same type of situation.

Elan Closs Stephens went on to say that the BBC and S4C were working to try and foster new talent. One of the ways in which S4C did this was to offer a package of scholarships which enabled people to go to the various music and drama colleges etc, in the hope that they would then return to perform in S4C's programmes. The value of S4C's scholarships was acknowledged but attention was drawn to the situation with regard to *Planed Plant*, where presenters sometimes presented a programme in which they themselves were appearing and it was felt that this was an unfortunate situation. The suggestion was made that more provision was needed for teenagers and people in their early twenties. It was suggested that programmes such as *Bob a'i Fam* and *9 tan 9* were old fashioned and unsuitable for young people. Would it not be possible to experiment with new programmes on S4C2 and provide opportunity for new talent to appear?

Huw Jones acknowledged the points made and he mentioned that young people were the most difficult group to reach in the case of every broadcaster. It had to be recognised that money was again a factor in what is possible for S4C, e.g. BBC3's budget alone was larger than all the finances which S4C had at its disposal. It was not believed, therefore, that S4C could spend much on things which did not reach the main service. However, Huw Jones would take the comment with regard to the presenters of *Planed Plant* back to S4C and the situation would be examined, because such instances should not arise.

***Wedi 7/Pnawn Da* and the Community**

It was felt that whilst *Wedi 7* and *Pnawn Da* had a community role, the situation was not good enough from the point of view of reflecting the various regions in Wales. Furthermore, mention was made of the fact that the presenters in these programmes were not interesting enough and the atmosphere in the studio was somewhat lacking. Huw Jones noted these final points and mentioned that he would ensure that the Programme Directors was made aware of them.

Suggestions were made that S4C should make more of community broadcasts and that it should enable people, such as community groups, schools etc to appear on screen. Huw Jones responded by saying that he was not sure as to whether S4C's main service was the place for people to hone their skills. S4C's main role was to provide a television service for the whole of Wales and it was essential that the service was television of a good standard. However, he mentioned that S4C did much with regard to activities in the communities of Wales, and he referred to such things as the roadshow *Groto Sion Corn*, *Taith Popty* and attempts to forge partnerships with communities. His words were noted but it was said that the point being made was that things should come to S4C from the communities rather than S4C going out into communities. Huw Jones responded further by stating that half the production companies were based outside Cardiff and therefore what they produced came from the various communities in Wales.

Two Channels

It was asked whether S4C could afford financially to support two channels. Elan Closs Stephens mentioned that the Assembly was the only thing being broadcast on S4C2 at present, the remaining capacity being sold commercially. Everything on analogue was being broadcast simulcast on the Digital channel. Therefore, with regard to S4C Digital, what was under discussion was additional hours to those being broadcast on analogue rather than two channels. Broadcasting on analogue and digital at the same time was costly, and when analogue would cease around 2012, some savings would be made, but, on the other hand, there would be additional costs because payment for converting the transmitters would have to be made. No-one knew as yet what the level of cost would be for this.

Elan Closs Stephens added that one of the problems associated with the termination of analogue was that S4C would lose Channel 4 programmes with the possibility that the advertising income would be reduced as a result. In spite of this, it was hoped that a Welsh only channel would be viewed as increasingly interesting.

Concern was expressed that the standard of S4C's programmes would be lowered as the channel lost advertising revenue. Huw Jones responded by saying that the financial situation was constantly being discussed with the Department for Culture, Media and Sports. S4C was at present presenting a case for more resources.

Documentary Programmes

It was suggested that S4C's documentary programmes were in a vulnerable situation. Huw Jones responded by saying that documentary programmes were expensive to produce. However, S4C was responding to this challenge by forming partnerships with broadcasters in other countries in order to share the costs. Over the years S4C had discovered that the way forward in this case was for it to ensure that presenters who could speak Welsh were used - *Y Normaniaid* was an example of this. Huw Jones was confident that such programmes would continue and, for example, an agreement had just been reached on a programme about China.

Note was made of what had been said and a question was asked as to whether such programmes would be available on DVD. The response was made that these were not available at present, although a number of programmes had been put on VHS over the years. S4C had very recently begun to put programmes on DVD (e.g. *Sali Mali*) and DVD, indeed, was the future – however, S4C would have to be sure that anything which it put on DVD would be able to pay for itself.

Receiving Digital Television

The point was made that people in the Rhondda were unable to receive *Freeview*. Huw Jones replied that Sky, within the last fortnight, had introduced a scheme whereby a box was available for £150. Then it would be possible to request a card which would be valid for three years which would enable the 'free to air' services to be received.

Weekends

The question was asked why S4C did not broadcast in Welsh on Saturday and Sunday mornings. It was suggested that S4C was missing an opportunity here since the standard of programmes broadcast on BBC1 and ITV were not particularly good. This was an opportunity to get hold of young people who would be the viewers of the future. Huw Jones acknowledged the point made and he confirmed that broadcasting on Saturday mornings would be one of S4C's priorities when it could finance this.

BUSINESS MEETING – 29 OCTOBER 2004 – THE POP FACTORY, PORTH, RHONDDA

Welcome

A warm welcome was extended to Winston Roddick to his first meeting as an Authority Member. Nerys Hopkins, S4C Authority's new Secretary, was also welcomed. She had been appointed since the Authority's last meeting and had already started in her post. Nerys Hopkins had been a solicitor to S4C Commercial.

Sympathy

Great sorrow was expressed with regard to the news received a fortnight earlier concerning the death of Andrew O'Neill, a former commissioner of music programmes at S4C, at the very young age of 46. An very worthy funeral had been held which was attended by many from the world of music and broadcasting.

Pobol y Cwm

Reference was made to the 30th Birthday celebrations of *Pobol y Cwm*. Special thanks were paid to Aled Wyn Phillips, Marketing Department, for all his hard work in assisting with the arrangements for the evening held by the RTS to note the occasion.

National Assembly's Cultural Committee

Discussions ensued with regard to the appearance of the Chairman and the Chief Executive before the Cultural Committee as it discussed broadcasting issues.

Authority's Day Away - 8/9 November

The Chairman outlined what she wished to be the focus of this special meeting, namely, a response to the Laughton Report; response to the Ofcom phase 2 public service broadcasting review; and S4C's strategy with regard toward the day when analogue would be switched off.

Viewers' Night/Authority Meeting – November

It was reported that the Viewers' Night in November would be held in Crymych, with the Authority's meeting being held in Llechryd the following day.

Independent Producers

It was reported that a very good seminar had been held with the independent producers on 13 October.

Analogue Switch-Off

The Chief Executive reported on the latest situation with regard to the technical standard of pictures under the original model for the transfer of S4C to another multiplex. This situation had since been resolved and the pictures were now of an acceptable quality.

Commercial Activities Review

Discussions were held on the further work which had been done on the review of S4C's commercial activities.

Children's Channel

Siwan Jobbins, Commissioner for Children's Programmes, gave a presentation to the Authority which outlined the plans for the expansion of S4C's programmes service for children. She referred specifically to the launch of a new brand on 28 March, when *Planed Plant* and *Planed Plant Bach* would be disappearing. The intention was to broadcast, on S4C Digital, a block of 3 hours between 4pm-7pm (although *Pobl y Cwm* would have to be broadcast in the middle of this – at 6.00pm - for the time being). No name for this new style service had been agreed as yet, and Members agreed that finding a name which struck a chord with children was very important in order to attract them to the service. Mention was made that it was important to establish how success would be measured. Reference was also made to the hope that the service could be further expanded within five years, with the possibility of broadcasting a children's service for twelve hours a day.

Guidelines for Child Protection during the Production Process

A draft policy was presented to the Authority on the protection of children during the production process. The draft had been presented to the Children's Commissioner for his comments. Likewise, Authority Members were invited to give their opinion on the document. A final draft of the policy document would be presented to the Authority once all the comments had been received (probably in the new year).

Monitoring the Corporate Plan 2004-06

It was noted that the majority of targets for the year were being met. It was also noted that this would be the last monitoring report to be considered by the Members before the presentation of the draft Corporate Plan for next year to the Authority (in November). At that time, it would be necessary to consider whether the aims set in that document were still pertinent and relevant to the forthcoming period.

Compliance Report

The Authority noted the content of the Report by the Compliance Group following its meeting on 8 October, which included a report on the European elections. In considering compliance issues, reference was made to the Viewers' Hotline Report among the papers for information and the question was asked concerning what system was in place to ensure that complaints were being followed up. The Secretary reported that the Legal Department, as it happened, was in the process of reviewing S4C's complaints system and it was hoped that recommendations would be available by the New Year.

Discussion on Broadcasting with Chris Bryant, MP

Chris Bryant, Member of Parliament for the Rhondda and a politician who also sat on the Government's Cultural Committee in the House of Commons, with an interest in broadcasting issues, was welcomed. The reason for the MP's presence was to discuss the future of the broadcasting world, with special attention to Welsh and Welsh Language broadcasting.

Other Issues

The following issues were also discussed/noted:

- Chief Executive's Report – Matters for information
- Complaints Report
- Report and Minutes of the Compliance Group held on 10 September 2004
- Viewers' Hotline Report
- Research Report
- Programmes Report
- Financial Report
- Ofcom Pension Scheme
- Report by the Managing Director of S4C Commercial