



S4C's Response to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee Consultation: priorities for the Sixth Parliament

1. What is the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what additional support is needed from the Welsh and UK Governments to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and enable recovery following the pandemic?

There is no argument that the pandemic has had an impact on the Welsh-language screen and broadcasting sector. The sector has taken on the challenges to continue to create content to support and entertain the audience during the pandemic, but the effects of Covid-19 continue to be seen.

Production costs in general have increased as a result of Covid-19 with productions being cancelled or postponed but also as those that can film have to operate within tight filming restrictions. This is across all genres but especially so for drama because of the size and complexities of drama production. Having to postpone so many productions during 2020 meant that more productions were filming at the same time in 2021. With a shortage of freelance workforce even before the pandemic, this has led to further shortages that have made it very challenging for production staffing companies as well as increasing staffing costs due to the lack of availability in the market.

Although overall Covid-19 restrictions in Wales have eased, the production companies that create content for S4C choose to continue working under tighter restrictions. This is to protect staff and ensure that content can be filmed and delivered on time with the aim of reducing the risk of core staff either developing Covid or having to self-isolate. But it means the extra costs involved remain.

Through Creative Wales, the Welsh Government has provided liaison, co-ordination and financial and strategic support to the sector since the start of the pandemic. Insurance schemes to enable television productions to film have been central and the Welsh Government supported the establishment of these schemes at a UK level. We would be keen to see



such schemes continue, to ensure that Welsh language content can be filmed while Covid remains a challenge.

The Welsh Government supported key sector status for broadcasting so that filming could continue to support the audience. Without this, it would have been even more challenging for the sector with the elimination or postponement of productions at even higher levels.

2. What issues should the committee prioritise when planning our work programme for the short and long term?

The main areas that S4C would recommend that the committee consider are:

- cross-platform prominence of Welsh PSB content - including online and on devices such as smart TVs;
- how to improve support and funding for Welsh films about Wales and how to grow a sustainable sector in Wales;
- how content that can be exported/sold abroad can be ensured to increase international awareness of Wales as a brand and filming location;
- how the Welsh Government can support the development of a bilingual workforce for the screen sector. Staff shortages are due to the sector's success - in drama in particular – but digital content production skills also need to be developed across the sector;
- how to support and encourage the creation of digital and local Welsh language content;
- how the Welsh Government can support the development of factual and documentary content for these genres to grow and succeed to the same extent as Welsh drama;
- how inclusion can be increased and new opportunities created for people who are under-represented in the sector to come and work in the industry.

3. How does Brexit and the new UK-EU relationship affect you and your organisation? What support have you received to respond to the changes? What further support, if any, is needed from the Welsh Government and the UK Government?



Brexit and the new relationship between the UK and the EU have not yet directly affected S4C, but there has been an impact on the production companies.

We would want to see schemes and financial funds to support content creation to replace the EU schemes from which Wales is no longer able to benefit. Historically, these have been an important source to help fund series produced in Wales but with the potential to sell internationally, e.g. series 1 – 3 of the Gwyll/Hinterland. At present, no specific details have been published of UK funds to replace European funds such as the MEDIA, ERDF and ESF funds.

It would also be beneficial if the UK government could address the following issues:

- Quotas under European rules for 'European Works': there is concern that UK productions will not continue to be treated as 'European works' for the purposes of the quotas imposed on broadcasters in Europe. This could jeopardise opportunities to sell audio-visual content from the UK to Europe.

Country of origin principle: Much of S4C Clic's on-demand content is available online worldwide, including in Europe. At present, EU countries do not have rules that prevent S4C from making Clic available across Europe, but there is no guarantee that this will continue. We would like to see rules to protect the 'country of origin' principle that would ensure that services such as S4C Clic can continue to be provided from the UK into Europe.

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