

Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and
Sport
HM Government

22 November 2022

The Government's forthcoming Media Bill

Dear Michelle,

We are writing to relay concerns which have been raised with us relating to a potential delay in introducing the UK Government's Media Bill. As you will be aware, there is a clear consensus from stakeholders surrounding the need to update the public service broadcasting settlement in both Wales and the United Kingdom. Despite broadcasting being a reserved matter, we share these concerns and believe that there are several reasons as to why there is an urgent need for the Media Bill.

We would like to begin by stating that we support many of the provisions set out in the Broadcasting White Paper. These are proposals that were formed as a result of Ofcom's Small Screen: Big Debate programme of work. We published a report in December 2021 supporting many of the findings of this work. This includes that the UK Government should develop policy and legislative proposals to give effect to Ofcom's recommendations, and ensure that the devolved administrations are fully involved in this work. There are a number of issues which we feel need to be addressed through legislation as soon as possible, including:

- The **prominence and availability of public service broadcasting** on smart televisions and on-demand devices which is essential, especially in a Wales context. This includes ensuring that legislation ensures that all smart televisions and on-demand devices must deliver public service broadcasting as that is not the case currently. Without this, we are concerned that beyond linear broadcasting, Welsh audiences may find it harder to access Welsh channels and content. In the context of Welsh language broadcasting, this could hamper progress being made against the target of achieving 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050.
- **Updating the list of public service broadcasters eligible to broadcast sports 'listed events'**, which are commonly referred to as 'crown jewels.' As it stands, S4C is not included on the list of public service broadcasters which can broadcast such events.
- **Amending the statutory remit for public broadcasting** to include provisions which emphasise the importance of broadcasting in national and minority languages such as Welsh, as is the case with S4C.



- **Updating S4C's public broadcasting remit** to ensure it is able to provide broadcasting and digital services across the UK. This is of vital importance given that DCMS gave S4C an additional £7.5m per annum to support its digital development, which as your predecessor stated "is now necessary for the continuation of the service in the modern media landscape."

Further, we have been informed that the timing of your Bill is particularly important to the future of ITV Cymru Wales. They have told us that they "are now well into the statutory process for the review and renewal of our PSB licences – a process for which a clear understanding of our future PSB commitments is fundamentally important." We understand that the deadline to apply for a renewed licence, and therefore remain a public service broadcaster is April 2023. Given the heavy reliance on public service broadcasting in Wales, we are concerned that one of our major contributors in this sector finds itself in such a situation – particularly as our public service broadcasters support many jobs in a growing and thriving creative industries sector in Wales.

Finally, we'd welcome confirmation of news reports that previous plans to privatise Channel Four will now be shelved. We wrote to your predecessor outlining our significant concerns relating to that proposal, and we would strongly support retaining the channel in public ownership.

We would also like to extend the previous invitations which we sent to your predecessor to you, to attend a meeting of our Committee to discuss the future of public service broadcasting. We would be grateful if your officials would liaise with Committee officials to identify an appropriate date in the near future.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS

Chair of the Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee of the Welsh Parliament

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.