



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

Rt Hon Sir John Whittingdale OBE MP
Minister for Media, Tourism and
Creative Industries
1st Floor
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

E: enquiries@dcms.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/dcms

Delyth Jewell MS
Chair, Culture, Communications, Welsh Language,
Sport, and International Relations Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1SN

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Dear Delyth,

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence at the Senedd's Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee on 19 October 2023. As promised, I have come back on two points which the Committee raised during the session:

1. The committee asked whether Ofcom and UKG have had discussions on their recommendation that commercial radio licensing be changed to require stations to produce Welsh language content and to introduce a regulatory category for all Wales news.
2. The committee asked how the Media Bill may change Ofcom's ability to require specific Welsh language content from commercial radio providers. *[the minister replied that the Bill gives PSBs greater flexibility, but this is more for TV. He would like us to clarify this point across radio and TV].*

The Government recognises the importance of a diverse media sector in the UK, where audiences are able to select from many different kinds of programmes according to their own tastes and interests.

In respect of television, our public service broadcasters (PSBs) have an important and, crucially, a distinctive role to play in helping achieve this goal. To ensure the regulatory framework supports these outcomes, the draft Media Bill therefore replaces the 14 overlapping purposes and objectives PSBs must contribute to with a new, shorter remit.

Building on recommendations from the Public Service Broadcasting Advisory Panel, and Ofcom, this new remit maintains the requirement on our PSBs to produce a wide range of programmes, while also providing a much clearer sense of their distinctive role in the sector – ensuring free and universal access to culturally relevant programmes that reflect the lives and concerns of different communities and cultural interests and traditions within the United Kingdom; economically important programmes made in all parts of the UK; and democratically impactful content including news and current affairs. Under the terms of the Bill, Ofcom will monitor, and hold PSBs accountable for, delivery of this new remit. The new remit also delivers on our commitment to make the importance of programmes broadcast in the UK's indigenous regional and minority languages, including Welsh, clear in legislation for the first time.

With regard to the points about commercial radio requirements, the Government does not believe that proposals to introduce specific news and Welsh language requirements on commercial radio stations in Wales are appropriate and may result in a large increase in costs for commercial stations that already have significant challenges due to lower market sizes and higher distribution costs due to the hilly and mountain topography in much of Mid and North Wales in particular. We note that the BBC has plans to launch an extended BBC Cymru 2 service shortly, with a substantial increase in hours of original Welsh programming, and that commercial stations that do provide Welsh language programming such as Capital Cymru and Greatest Hits South Wales will continue to provide Welsh language services.

Where there is a potential gap in the provision of Welsh language programming by community stations. Although stations such as Mon FM, GTFM, Calon FM, Radio Tircoed and BRFM also provide Welsh language services, they cover relatively small geographical areas. We would be happy to further discuss with the Welsh Government longer term options to support new stations in parts of Wales not served. I have asked my officials to get in touch with officials in the Welsh Government and Ofcom to explore this and to look at possible options and I am happy to raise the issue at a future meeting with Welsh Ministers.

Your ever

John

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