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Chair
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee
Senedd Cymru
CF99 1SN

29 February 2024

S4C Action Plan and Appointment of Interim Chief Executive

Annwyl Delyth,

Firstly, I'd like to thank you again for the opportunity to address the Committee on Thursday, 11 January 2024. We are always grateful for the Committee's continued interest and support for S4C and public service broadcasting, even when the issues under discussion are difficult.

Following that meeting, there is one matter I feel ought be corrected regarding the suggestion made by one of your Members that staff sickness and absence levels at S4C were higher than the norm during the period leading up to BECTU's letter at the end of April 2023. Having looked at S4C's People and Remuneration Committee's minutes from the period in question, that is not what evidence showed. In our meeting of February 2023, a non-executive member of the People and Remuneration Committee made the observation that staff sickness absence figures appeared to be low.

We have revised the way in which S4C's People and Remuneration Committee receives figures relating to employment and we are confident that, moving forward, that Committee will receive a better picture of staffing matters and their effect on the workforce.

During our evidence session with you on 11 January, I told you that the S4C Unitary Board would be meeting to consider and agree a plan of action that we as an organisation have developed in response to the Capital Law Report. I'm glad to provide the Committee with further detail on this below.

The last two years have been difficult for many people associated with S4C, and in May 2023 the non-executive members of the Board commissioned Capital Law to undertake an independent fact-finding process into the culture and work environment at S4C in response to serious concerns raised by the BECTU union.

As you are aware, the non-executive members subsequently and unanimously took some hard decisions last autumn in response to the evidence presented. However, the Capital Law Report raised serious issues and some of these still require attention.

We are committed to ensuring that S4C is a place where our colleagues feel respected, supported, and motivated to perform at their best. We are acutely aware that significant work is required to restore confidence and trust in S4C as an organisation amongst our staff and our stakeholders in the creative sector.



Our Action Plan has been developed in collaboration with the S4C Management Team. We have also consulted with stakeholders, including members of staff and the BECTU union. It is based around four themes: leadership, culture, HR policies and procedures, and governance. I outline further detail on each theme below.

The Unitary Board will be ultimately responsible for the Action Plan, with a standing item at every Board meeting to report on progress against individual actions. The effectiveness of steps being taken as part of the Action Plan will be considered in the context of various feedback mechanisms, including: regular pulse surveys of S4C staff, feedback gathered through the quarterly meetings of the Staff Forum, and annual meetings between BECTU and the S4C Board.

Leadership

We are striving to restore trust and confidence amongst our staff, who play a vital role in the future success of S4C. Leadership built on integrity, accountability, cooperation and open communication is key to building a positive future.

The Unitary Board is committed to appointing a new permanent Chief Executive as soon as reasonably practical who can help restore an ambitious S4C with a renewed focus on collaboration and the well-being of our colleagues. They will be responsible and accountable to the Board for delivering our strategy and laying the foundations for S4C's continued success.

To ensure continued progress in the short term, the Board is pleased to advise you that we are appointing Sioned Wiliam as Interim Chief Executive.

Sioned Wiliam is well-known in the industry as a former BBC Radio 4 Comedy Commissioner and former Head of ITV Comedy. She was also previously a programme producer with television companies Talkback and Hat Trick.

She will join S4C on a part-time basis next month, before assuming the role full-time in early April.

One of Sioned's main responsibilities over the coming months will be to lead on the Action Plan, and the Board is confident in her ability to provide the strong, creative and conscientious leadership that S4C requires during this period.

We are also anticipating an announcement from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport shortly regarding an Interim Chair, who will commence in that role from 1 April 2024. The DCMS will launch an open process to appoint a new permanent Chair of S4C consistent with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

Culture

We must ensure that S4C staff feel the utmost confidence that any concerns they may raise will be dealt with, and one of our priorities moving forward is ensuring a culture of open communication to that end.

Working closely with the S4C Management Team, a programme will be implemented to ensure positive cultural change wherever needed within the organisation.

We will review S4C's purpose and values, with input from S4C staff at all levels of the organisation. We will also look at how we communicate our primary objectives to enable



clearer communication of our strategy. This will ensure that staff feel ownership of the organisation's values, understand our corporate strategy and their role in delivering it.

A new Internal Communications plan will be developed to improve information flows, the relationship between various teams, and to bolster the voices of our colleagues across all levels of the organisation.

We intend to implement a training programme for managers across the organisation which will focus on leadership, effective management, and managing change positively. All members of staff will receive external training focussed on building resilience and dealing with change.

The Management Team will be accountable to the Unitary Board for delivering this programme for cultural change, and regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms and processes will be put in place to provide a better indication of staff morale and the programme's success.

The Unitary Board will also review the Code of Practice which applies to all Board members to ensure it conforms to the highest standards and expectations, and aligns with S4C's values.

Policies and Procedures

We are clear that a positive organisational culture and effective HR policies must go hand-in-hand.

We are reviewing our HR policies – including on whistleblowing, grievances, and respect in the workplace – to ensure that they correspond to best practice.

We want staff to feel comfortable to raise any concerns and confident that they will be dealt with appropriately. We will strive to re-establish trust between staff, managers and the HR department and will conduct an external review of HR functions and procedures, to ensure that they align with best practice.

We will develop new policies where needed, including a suitable policy on how S4C is to respond to complaints against non-executive members of the Board.

Governance

As part of our efforts to ensure that our governance arrangements conform with best practice, we will commission an external review of governance effectiveness. We expect this to consider internal governance arrangements – including the Board and its committees, the Management Team, and other internal decision-making groups – and to particularly review whether there is appropriate accountability and communication between levels of internal governance.

We expect the outcome of this review to lead to revisions to our Standing Orders and will also therefore take this opportunity to benchmark our Standing Orders, reviewing best practice at comparable organisations.

Forthcoming legislation in the form of the Media Bill will also require amendments to our Standing Orders. While the S4C Authority has been operating as a Shadow Unitary Board on an administrative basis since 2018, we welcome the statutory certainty that the provisions of the Media Bill will provide with respect to S4C's governance arrangements.



I hope that the above summarises and outlines the rationale for the actions agreed by the Unitary Board, and demonstrates S4C's commitment to addressing concerns raised. I also attach a copy of the Action Plan, which is published on the S4C website.

Should you or any member of the Committee have any queries on the Action Plan or the appointment of an Interim Chief Executive, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rhodri Williams'.

Rhodri Williams
Chair, S4C