

BACKGROUND

- 1) Equity has been heavily involved in the development of the independent production sector in the Welsh language since the inception of S4C in 1982 and we have been very clear about our role to make sure the rewards to those who make the programmes are commensurate with actors across the UK doing similar work. We have never believed that the workforce at S4C should be the poor relations of the broadcasting industry.
- 2) Having said that we have also been realistic about the resources available to the channel and to their strategic objectives. This has in practice resulted in a regular readjustment of the contractual relationship between the independent sector and performers and we believe we have at all times behaved responsibly. We feel that this has shown a continuous commitment to the success of the channel.
- 3) We have on a number of occasions cautioned S4C against what we perceive to be unrealistic expansion of programme making given their inability to expand income. This was most noticeable over the huge increase in hours in the lead up to analogue switch over. The quality of programme making in this circumstance could not be maintained and resulted in what we felt was a downward spiral of standards and consequentially audiences, leading in the end to the crisis of confidence in 2010 which is well documented and made the channel susceptible to attack from central government which probably resulted in assisting decisions to bring S4C under BBC funding.
- 4) Along the way there have been a number of areas where we believe S4C had over committed. The obvious one is in the number of broadcast hours. We recommended that this be scrutinised as part of the long term strategy but this was flatly rejected. This has led to an over dependence on the use of repeats in filling the schedule.
- 5) We also believe that the reluctance of S4C to see the unions as stakeholders in the service is bluntly insulting. Given the support and assistance given by all the unions over the last 30 years and given that it off the back of our

members that the main success of S4C can be measured we feel we should have such a status.

General Question Areas

1. What sufficient funding for the channel looks like? For example, who should provide it, and how should it be calculated – should it be linked to a formula? How should this be supplemented with revenue raised by S4C?

It is almost impossible to put an exact figure on exactly what is sufficient. In an ideal world the funding would be returned to pre-2010 levels and would not be supplied by the BBC License Fee, but this does not take into account how the broadcasting landscape has changed in these times of austerity and the continual cuts in funding to the broadcaster from both the license fee and direct DCMS funding.

In the absence of any developed alternative Equity continues to support the Licence Fee as the most appropriate funding method for the BBC, and therefore S4C. It provides a direct link between licence fee payers and S4C, it provides sustainable and predictable funding, maintains the independence of the S4C from Government and enables the S4C to produce programming that other services would not fund. We do believe that there is a disparity between the inflationary increases built into the BBC Charter for the License Fee and the fixed funding of S4C for the initial 5 years and we hope that the long overdue Westminster review into S4C will address that situation.

2. What S4C's statutory remit should be. Is its current remit fit for a contemporary broadcaster, and if not, how should it change? How should it reflect the digital role of a modern broadcaster?

We believe S4C should be:

- *A National Broadcaster committed to continued investment & programming throughout Wales*
- *A Modern Broadcaster committed to on-screen diversity that reflects modern Wales*
- *A Universal Broadcaster committed to maintaining a universal service funded by the licence fee*

- *A Trusted Broadcaster independent from government*
- *A Quality Broadcaster committed to original TV and radio drama, comedy, entertainment and children's programming*
- *A Responsible Broadcaster committed to fair pay and conditions for the people working for it.*

Equity supports the continuance of S4C as a broadcaster that provides a wide range of different types of content and programmes, for a wide range of different audience groups. Our members work across a range of S4C content including drama, comedy, entertainment and children's programming.

We believe that S4C could do more to address the portrayal of underrepresented groups and would suggest that the public purposes are modified in order to address on screen diversity as a priority.

Equity also believes that S4C should continue to make content available free at the point of use, on as wide a range of platforms as possible. In the changing context of the modern audiovisual industry, where audiences are fragmenting and younger viewers demonstrate a strong desire to consume content online it is imperative that S4C is able to innovate and adapt its delivery mechanisms.

S4C has made full use of both CLIC and its recent inclusion on the BBC iPlayer and Equity has been party to the launch of such services through the negotiation of agreements with both the BBC and S4C for rights clearances. The experience of reaching such agreements has challenged established methods of working and negotiating but we would continue to support S4C in developing platforms for delivery of their programmes.

3. What governance and accountability structures S4C should have in place. For example, should responsibility for S4C be devolved to Wales?

We do not believe that Broadcasting should be devolved to Wales and it would make no sense to just devolve responsibility for S4C in isolation. We believe, however that there needs to be input and monitoring from the Welsh Government into how the S4C and the broadcast industry serves Wales.

One of the outcomes of the Task and Finish Group into Media in Wales in 2012 was that the Broadcasting Advisory Panel would continue to monitor and advise Welsh Government about devolving broadcasting. There has been no report from this advisory panel to date. There does not seem to be an appetite from the Welsh Government for this to happen now, however every alternative should be explored to make sure that the Future of S4C is secured and, more importantly, the financial security of S4C is guaranteed going forward. Our priority would be to support the most appropriate option – which is currently to support the status quo subject to the Westminster Review.

4. What S4C's relationship with the BBC should look like.

Equity believes the current relationship is the correct one. S4C should remain fully independent of the BBC save for its statutory commitments outlined in the Framework Agreement between the two parties. The provision of funding going forward is secured subject to the Westminster review of S4C and we commented earlier on what we would like to see with regards to an increase in that provision.

5. The visibility of S4C: covering issues such as S4C's prominence on the electronic programme guides and smart TV's.

We do not feel it is within our remit as a Trade Union to respond to this question.

Equity would be happy to provide oral evidence to support our position on this matter along with further written background information should the Committee find this useful.

Simon Curtis
National Organiser for Wales