

Background

1. BECTU is the largest sector of the trade union Prospect and represents 2,500 workers in production, craft and technical roles in broadcasting, film, theatre, live events and digital media in Wales.
2. As a trade union BECTU actively champions the industry in Wales including promoting and defending Welsh and English language programming and highlighting the key role of the media in portraying the cultural and real life experiences of Welsh citizens in our communities, both within Wales and beyond.
3. BECTU provided a comprehensive response to a consultation undertaken by the former Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee of the National Assembly for Wales (NAFW), 2011. Much of that evidence is relevant to this enquiry into S4C.
<http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s4718/Consultation%20Response%20-%20Media%2032%20-%20BECTU.pdf>

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?

4. S4C is the only Welsh language television channel in the world. It was launched in 1982 following years of campaigning by Welsh speakers for a dedicated Welsh language channel. This led to the development of the largest independent TV production sector outside of London. It was a time of optimism and significant collaboration between the broadcaster, the employers and the unions. BECTU fears that this is now being dismantled.
5. Our concerns regarding poor decisions made by S4C management and Authority around its digital policies are well documented, in particular that the large number of small niche independent production companies based around Wales were rejected in favour of bulk commissions from five companies that received significant investment

from S4C in return for smaller programme budgets. This undermined the wide range of diverse, high quality and innovative programmes that resulted in a very successful Animation sector, world class film production including an Academy Award nomination, and a dynamic and vibrant pop music scene.

6. The emergence of these fewer, larger companies undermined union recognition as they refused to accept the union's right to represent "staff" workers who were recruited usually on fixed term contracts to replace the predominantly fairly paid freelance workforce. The workers within these organisations usually received pay rates significantly below the TAC/BECTU Agreement and often worked considerably longer hours for no additional pay or time off in lieu. The cuts also had a detrimental impact on the members of our sister unions, Equity and the Musicians' Union, who represent the industry's 'on screen' talent. The significant reduction in programme budgets led to a loss of opportunity and earnings for workers in the sector throughout Wales, a sharp decline in quality which resulted in falling viewing figures and a reputational loss for the Channel.
7. In 2010 the then UK Coalition Government, without any consultation with the people or organisations in Wales, decided to cut the channel's budget by over 36% and announced that the vast majority of its remaining funding would be provided via the BBC's licence fee. The BBC was forced to agree to fund the BBC as well as absorbing some of the costs of funding the BBC World Service and paying the licence fees of the over 75s. (Note that the UK Government has since agreed to provide additional funding for the BBC World Service).
8. BECTU believes that the substantial cuts to S4C were unjustifiable and feels that this demonstrates that the UK Government views Wales as an easy target in terms of inflicting larger than average cuts to our only Welsh language broadcaster. This has been demonstrated again recently when the Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced that it proposed to cut a further £700,000 next year from its already small contribution of £6.762 million to S4C's budget, an announcement made prior to its promised imminent review of S4C. At the same time

it announced consultation on a “contestable fund” of £60 million that could include funding for the Nations and Regions.

9. BECTU is extremely concerned that the half-hourly cost of producing an S4C production has dropped to £10,800, this compares with an average hourly spend of £48,884 in 2006.
10. S4C management and authority have decided to move the broadcaster’s head office to Carmarthen. BECTU has reservations regarding this re-location firstly, the staff were not consulted prior to S4C’s public consultation, this has left many to feel disheartened and uncertainty over the future of the Channel means that few welcome the proposal. Secondly, we believe that a nation’s broadcaster should have its head office in its capital city with excellent communication links. We also believe that the 80% of the channel’s budget currently spent on programming should be available to independent producers throughout Wales ensuring that the channel is representative of its communities and can provide fresh and innovative ideas for the channel and work for creative workers across Wales ideally enabling innovative, creative hubs to develop.
11. BECTU believes that Wales needs an open and inclusive national debate on the future of Welsh language broadcasting and digital media that involves a broad range of stakeholders from the public, industry, academia, politicians and civic society. We welcome Cymdeithas yr Iaith’s efforts in starting a discussion on this crucial topic. The discussion could look at what is required in terms of Welsh language broadcasting and digital services? What it would cost? and what funding mechanisms could supplement essential public funding?
12. Our aim would be for a funding formula that takes us at least to the equivalent levels of finance available in 2010 for TV production and that additional funding for other areas e.g. radio and digital services, should come from elsewhere, the logic being that once austerity is over, given that this is the reason given for the cuts, funding for our only Welsh language TV should be re-instated.
13. Independent research has already demonstrated that every £1 spent on S4C results in a benefit of £2.09 to the Welsh economy, which in itself

demonstrates a low risk to public funds resulting in an excellent return on investment in the creative economy. The creative industries are the largest growing sector in the UK, why should it be treated less favourably than the automotive industry which has recently been promised significant investment from the UK Government?

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?

14. Much of this question answered above – see note on consultation. As a public service broadcaster, S4C alongside BBC Cymru Wales supports the infrastructure for a strong, vibrant TV, Film, Digital and wider creative industry in Wales. Many of the skills required within TV and Film are transferable to Theatre e.g. writers, directors, performers, musicians and craft and technical roles. However it is crucial that these workers, both staff and freelance, receive fair terms and conditions and that the industry is accessible to all from new entrants to the existing workforce.
15. BECTU is concerned that due to ongoing redundancies at S4C and the BBC the broadcasters are losing skilled and talented individuals, many of whom are retiring from the industry before they are able to pass on their skills and expertise to the existing and new workforce. Permanent roles are being replaced by casual employees and freelance workers and responsibility for training and development and other in work benefits are being transferred from the employer to the worker. With such a growing sector in Wales this could have long term implications for future spending potential and wellbeing of the workforce e.g. low pensions, access to mortgages etc.
16. BECTU alongside its sister unions – Equity, the Musicians' Union and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain organise the training and development of industry workers through the CULT Cymru project supported by the Welsh Government's Wales Union Learning Fund, this enables industry workers to access affordable, relevant training at a local level that will help them to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing industry. The project also supports those facing redundancy including at S4C, by informing them of initiatives such as React funding to enable them to return to employment as soon as possible including self-employment.

17. Over half of our members are freelance/sole traders, casual workers or run their own limited companies, this means that the role of the union as a lifelong ally in terms of employment support and career development is particularly important.

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

18. Although BECTU has deep concerns regarding the actions of UK Governments we do not feel that the NAFW is ready at this stage to take on the responsibility for broadcasting. Firstly, the limited numbers of Assembly Members means that it is difficult for them to sufficiently undertake the responsibilities they already have combined with the additional burden of Brexit, and secondly, unless the funding was vigorously ring fenced there is a danger that Welsh language broadcasting would compete with other areas such as Health, Education and Social care for funding which could be difficult to manage.
19. BECTU feels that the NAFW has a crucial role in terms of scrutinising S4C both in terms of its services to the public but also fair treatment of industry workers including fair pay, terms and conditions, diversity and training and development. BECTU would welcome meaningful discussions with the NAFW and the Welsh Government regarding S4C and the creative industries in general including proposals for Creative Wales.

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

20. S4C should remain independent from the BBC both in terms of editorial content and management.