

Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's Radio Inquiry:

The Importance of the Committee's inquiry

The Welsh Government welcomes the Committee's inquiry into radio in Wales. Radio is often overlooked in the discussion about the future of broadcasting in Wales. The importance of the radio sector in Wales was reflected in Ofcom's Communications Market Report for 2017. The report indicated that radio services reached 91.6 % of adults in Wales, the highest reach of all of the UK nations – the UK average was 89.6 %. Listeners in Wales also listened to radio for the longest compared to the UK as a whole which was at 22.7 hours per week on average, the highest figure since 2012– the UK average was 21.4 hours

Digital Radio

We recognise that there have been improvements in DAB coverage in some parts of Wales during recent years and we urge Ofcom to continue to liaise with relevant stakeholders, including the BBC, to ensure that this continues. However, the Welsh Government's position in relation to digital radio switchover has not changed. The Welsh Government has consistently stressed that we would not be in favour of digital switchover for radio until there is a guarantee of at least 97% coverage for DAB throughout Wales. The DAB service in Wales should not be worse than Welsh AM/FM radio coverage at present and should be available in areas where currently the national radio stations can only be received on the AM spectrum.

Despite improvements in coverage of DAB in some parts of Wales, there is still a long way to go before it would be appropriate to consider digital radio switchover in Wales. The Welsh Government continues to be concerned that even when the proposed criteria for radio switchover are met on a UK basis, there would almost certainly be a significantly lower level of DAB penetration in Wales.

Community Radio

Community radio stations across Wales provide a key service for local residents, reflecting the issues affecting people and their communities.

Between 2008 and 2014 the Welsh Government funded a Community Radio Fund to support community radio stations across Wales holding community radio licenses awarded to them by Ofcom. In view of cuts to budgets across the then Culture and Sport portfolio difficult decisions had to be taken with regard to funding and unfortunately, therefore the fund came to an end.

Commercial Radio

The importance of commercial radio in Wales should also be recognised. The commercial radio sector makes a vital contribution when we consider the importance of ensuring plurality of services in Wales.

As a Government we would not wish to see further relaxation or removal of the current localness rules on commercial radio. It is vital that there is an appropriate

level of localness provision in particular local news. This is even more important in Wales considering the weakness of the print media in Wales and the lack of coverage of Welsh affairs in UK newspapers.

BBC Radio Stations

As with the importance of BBC Cymru Wales' television output, we recognise the continuing roles of both Radio Wales and Radio Cymru in providing essential services for the citizens of Wales.

We welcome the commitment across both services towards combining local and international news coverage. This underlines the distinctive nature of the news services provided by both national radio services and value of the service provided to listeners.

As a Government we are concerned that the range of non-news programming generally is narrowing. We therefore welcome the fact that Radio Wales and Radio Cymru continue to provide a comprehensive range of non-news programming. Indeed we see the breadth of programming provided across both services as central aspects of the public service they provide. In our view that breadth should be maintained and, whenever possible, strengthened.

Radio has a crucial contribution to make in providing a platform for Welsh talent to be identified and developed. This applies to the music content featured on both services and, equally, to writers and actors. Radio has a particular strength in allowing people to tell their own stories. It is essential that both national radio services in Wales continue to strive to reflect as wide as possible a picture of life in Wales. Even as new digital platforms proliferate, we do not underestimate the particularly valuable role played by radio in this respect.

As with television, we are concerned that Wales continues to be particularly under-represented on the main UK radio networks. Very little of the BBC's commissioning for UK network radio appears to come from Wales. We would like to see a greater contribution to the radio network being commissioned from BBC Wales; the BBC should set more stretching targets in this regard.

Whilst both national radio services in Wales have important roles to play as sources of information and entertainment, Radio Cymru plays an additional role via the contribution it makes in ensuring that the Welsh language continues to thrive. In this regard, its role is more than just a broadcaster. We warmly welcome the fact that Radio Cymru 2 has been established during recent months to give more choice for Welsh speakers.

We welcome the strengthened partnership which has developed over recent years between Radio Cymru and S4C. There continues to be only one Welsh language radio service and one Welsh language television service. It is therefore essential that the partnership between these two services should be as imaginative and productive as possible.

Ofcom's new role as external regulator of the BBC

We recognise that this is currently a transitional period for Ofcom in relation to its new role as external regulator of the BBC, which we acknowledge is complex and wide-ranging. It is vital that the BBC delivers over the next Charter period against its strengthened mandate and duties to the people of Wales, as well as to the other nations and regions of the UK. This includes its radio output

In our recent response to Ofcom's consultation on its Annual Plan for 2018-19, we expressed concern about a number of aspects in relation to Ofcom's new role as external regulator of the BBC. The Welsh Government provided a detailed response in July 2017 to Ofcom's consultation on its first Operating Licence for the BBC. In our consultation response, we raised a number of concerns about the draft Licence, which we urged Ofcom to address to create a final Licence that was fit for purpose. It was disappointing that the Licence was not amended to reflect a number of important improvements which were suggested and explained in detail by the Welsh Government in its response to the consultation

We will continue to liaise constructively with Ofcom, to ensure that the BBC is properly held to account for the delivery of its services. The Welsh Government and the National Assembly will both be closely monitoring the BBC's progress against the requirements of the Service Licence.

We welcome Ofcom's assurance that the Operating Licence and performance measures will evolve over time and that it expects the BBC to continue improving how it delivers against its remit.

Welsh Language

As noted in the *Cymraeg 2050: a million Welsh speakers* strategy, the broadcast media has played a key part in our efforts to revive the Welsh language over several decades. It is imperative that this should continue and that this provision should increase, and we will do all we can to support and enhance Welsh-language provision, whatever its nature, in future. In the short term we will use our influence to ensure that the offer in relation to radio continues to be up to date and relevant to Welsh speakers of all ages.

Welsh language music has, of course, been an extremely positive way of promoting the language and raising awareness of it. One way the Welsh Government has done this is through the Welsh Language Music Day (Dydd Miwsig Cymru) campaign. Welsh Language Music Day was held for the third time on Friday 9 February. By using PR, marketing and social media methods the campaign reached 74 million people with the hashtags #DyddMiwsigCymru and #WelshLanguageMusicDay. 183 businesses and 318 schools took part in the campaign across Wales, with a number of Welsh language artists performing. 74% of the people asked said the campaign had made them want to learn Welsh.

Radio Cymru is, of course, essential for ensuring that contemporary Welsh language music is aired every day of the year.

When television and radio licenses for stations in Wales are awarded or reviewed, due consideration should be given to the bilingual nature of Wales and the

importance of the Welsh language in the context of the Welsh Government's aim of having one million Welsh speakers by 2050 by specifying in the contract that a set number of hours be broadcast in Welsh along with a statement about Welsh-language web content such as text, streams and clips.

Linguistic diversity, especially the Welsh language in services for Wales, should be set as a target when granting and regulating services for Wales.