

Rhodri Talfan Davies

Director

BBC Cymru Wales

10 December 2018

Dear Rhodri,

Opportunities for Welsh writers and actors

I recently met the Equity South Wales branch who raised their concerns regarding casting and productions by the BBC in Wales. In particular, they are concerned that actors from Wales are not being given a fair opportunity to appear in BBC productions. To get a better understanding of the situation, I would be grateful if you could set out:

- how many actors from Wales (those who live and work here) appear in BBC Wales and BBC network productions? Please can you name the productions they appeared in?
- When recruiting actors, do you use Welsh casting companies?
- Do you have any quotas for employing Welsh and Wales-based actors?

Separately, I met the Writers Guild who told me of their concern that there is not enough opportunity, via the BBC, for established and new writers in Wales. For instance, 'Casualty', despite being filmed in Wales, has not been pro-active enough in engaging Welsh writers to work on their writing teams.

Please can you let me know your view? What more could be done to recruit and develop Welsh writers for both BBC Wales productions and Network productions?

Many of the writers I spoke to said they are not being provided with the opportunity to write scripts for the BBC, and that they would like to be engaged so as to enhance their career opportunities. They told me that there are limited



opportunities, and when a writer is in a position for a number of years, this often stifles the chances for younger or newer writers. How can this type of challenge be overcome? Please can you describe how the BBC is investing in new talent?

I look forward to your response. It is important to note that it is pleasing to see the rise in drama productions made in Wales, but that we should build on this and address the areas that still need to be developed.

Yours sincerely,

Bethan Sayed.

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Chair



Agenda Item 5

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Chair

Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff Bay

CF99 1NA

9 January 2019

Dear Bethan

Thank you for your recent correspondence outlining concerns expressed by Equity South Wales and the Writers Guild.

While I note the points that have been raised with you, my view is that the BBC in Wales provides a number of platforms and opportunities for both Welsh-based writers and actors.

With regard to Welsh and Wales-based actors, the success of the co-productions *Hinterland/YGwyll*, *Un Bore Mercher/Keeping Faith* and *Craith/Hidden* are well documented. Produced by Welsh independent production companies, these companies search for actors through a number of channels including casting agents. The vast majority of the actors in these productions are either Welsh or based in Wales, and further series of *Hidden* and *Keeping Faith* are currently in production/pre-production.

Casualty, *Doctor Who* and *Pobol y Cwm* are produced by BBC Studios – the BBC's commercial arm - at Roath Lock Studios and use a mix of local (Cardiff-based) casting agencies as well as others further afield. They operate case by case with the aim of ensuring the person most suitable for the role gets the part. Having said this, programmes such as *Casualty* have made an active effort to recruit Welsh actors with names such as Owain Arthur and Catrin Mara appearing on the long-running series recently, among others.

In addition, our radio drama team in Wales uses a very large number of actors who live and work in Wales each year, primarily for BBC Radio 4.

A few notable examples from 2018 include *19 Weeks* which starred Eve Myles; four series of *Curious Under the Stars* starring Elis James, Ifan Huw Dafydd, Siw Hughes, Aimee Ffion Edwards and Eiry Hughes; *Das Kapital* which starred Kimberley Nixon; *Tracks: Chimera* which had guest roles for Eiry Thomas, Richard Elfyn, Rhodri Meilir and Carys Eleri. And we're about to embark on a new adaptation of the *Mabinogi* for Radio 3, which will have an almost entirely Welsh cast.

Given this scale of commitment, I hope you will understand that there are no quotas for employing Wales and Wales-based actors. We cast on merit.

Turning to writing, I suspect the BBC directly or indirectly supports more drama writing in Wales than any other organisation. In total, over 30 Welsh language writers are actively engaged in the production of *Pobol y Cwm*, while *Keeping Faith*, *Hinterland* and *Hidden* rely or relied predominately on Wales-based writers.

In addition, our network radio production team actively commission a range of Welsh writers. In 2018 established writers included Shon Dale Jones, Philip Palmer, Alan Harris and Gary Owen.

BBC Wales also runs - or supports - a number of initiatives to support new entrants into the industry.

Over the past two years, the BBC Writersroom programme based in Wales has been offering a number of initiatives for established and emerging Welsh writers.

In fact, since April last year Writersroom Wales has enabled 23 writers to get their first BBC credit. And we'll be launching a brand new Writers Residency opportunity in January, working in partnership with National Theatre Wales. The successful writer will spend twelve months working with the BBC and NTW to develop their writing skills for both broadcast and theatre.

We also work in partnership with other organisations in the industry to provide new opportunities across the media.

The *It's My Shout* training programme, for example, provides practical opportunities in television and film production targeting individuals and groups that would not normally have access to such opportunities. BBC Wales is a partner and sponsor of the scheme - along with S4C - providing mentoring and training both in front of and behind the camera for the participants.

Every summer, *It's My Shout* produces short 30 minutes films in Welsh and English, a number of which are broadcast on BBC Two Wales and are subsequently available on BBC iPlayer. Side-by-side there is also a scheme for emerging talent looking for documentary ideas. These are also broadcast on BBC Two Wales under the title, *New Voices from Wales*.

Additionally, the *Beacons* project – a partnership between BBC Wales and Ffilm Cymru - aims to shine a light on outstanding film talent from Wales, drawing attention to writers, directors and producers, helping them establish their credentials for feature production. The scheme supports between six and ten short films of up to 30 minutes in length and in English or Welsh every year.

I hope my response reassures you that the BBC takes its responsibility towards established and emerging Welsh actors and writers very seriously indeed. However, if you would like to discuss further I would be happy to meet with you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rhodri Talfan Davies'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'R' and a long, sweeping underline.

Rhodri Talfan Davies

Director BBC Cymru Wales