

FUTURE OF PSB TV INQUIRY – Content and Platforms in a Digital World

THE VIEW FROM WALES

My priority is not the future of PSB Television as such but rather the people it serves. Wales is a small country of 3.1 million people, next door to a more populous one – 53.9 million – and it's linked to another small-ish country up north and to a province, all within the United Kingdom. Devolution is the context for any discussion of broadcasting in Wales. A majority of its citizens opted for distinctiveness as a nation within the United Kingdom. I want to consider the Future of PSB TV, not as an end in itself, but as a service to Wales in our linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity.

What content, which platforms, can serve Wales in the digital world and how do we secure them?

Broadcasting is not a devolved area but the consensus among informed opinion is stronger than ever that Wales needs structures which will create a PSB system that gives the nation content and platforms it currently lacks or, to put it simply, give Wales a broadcasting system that will allow it to be seen and heard and experienced - at home, across the UK and around the world.

That 'Wales' - is really and always an 'us'. Our lives, our thoughts, the way that life looks to us, here; what we want to give to the world and what we want to learn from it.

And these structures are the bedrock for the digital future.

I want to highlight 6 structural requirements for television in Wales that have emerged with particular prominence from the recent welter of reports, inquiries and hearings - plus one other very important thing which I'll keep till the end.

For the sake of coherence, I'll go through my 6 points as they refer to the BBC and then turn to ITV Cymru Wales and S4C.

Wales requires:

- 1 a tv menu for Wales which properly reflects the experiences and interests of its citizens**

It's now a truth universally acknowledged that, in the words of BBC Director General Tony Hall, "English language programming from and for Wales has been... eroded.' He also referred to, 'some aspects of national life in Wales [that] are not sufficiently captured by the BBC's own television services in Wales, and I would include notably comedy, entertainment and culture in those categories.'

Now, we in Wales knew this already but indignation at that erosion has grown. The absence of comedy and entertainment is bad enough but 'culture' – that must give us particular pause. That would be, then, the Arts: Theatre, Fine Art, Literature, Opera, Architecture, Music, Dance, Community Arts, Digital Arts... plus discussion about them, that mesh of lived, and interrogated, life which makes up culture; and then add the other genres not seen on BBC Cymru Wales TV such as Science (and that's another huge umbrella term), Religion, Business and Commerce, Leisure, Children's Programming, programming for young people, Agriculture, Soap Opera and Drama. One begins to get a sense of the aspects of life in Wales which are increasingly invisible on television to its own people through the English language. The lack of provision for Arts is particularly damaging to Wales because it reinforces an already unhelpful split between Arts and the creative industries, between culture and broadcasting.

This 'Wales to Wales' broadcasting is crucial to us. There is a tendency in BBC central management to expect Wales to 'do the decent thing' and sacrifice its domestic interests for the sake of the network. Surely, the centre seems to think, we understand that money given to Wales's domestic output leaves less for the funding of quality network output such as drama, some of which even gets made in Wales. But if 'the decent thing' means a kind of cultural suicide then, no, we won't do that unthinkingly.

To broaden the domestic menu we want...

2 proper partnership between Wales and the rest of the UK in decision-making and in funding

We want better funding for BBC Wales and greater freedom to judge how it is spent in and for Wales.

Welsh Government has asked for £30 million to fund an enhanced English language BBC tv service for Wales, or Wales-to-Wales programming. The IWA's own research shows that this is a reasonable, and even modest, figure.

In our view an integrated service is the ideal. Additional funding is need to create:

- television, radio and on-line programmes and digital content services that fully reflect the lives of viewers in Wales.
- an increased scale and ambition for Radio Wales and Radio Cymru to enhance their existing provision and reach new audiences.
- a stronger more identifiable on-line service is specifically for Wales, securing greater prominence for BBC Wales' programmes on the BBC's iPlayer.
- an enhanced web presence and new social media initiatives.

These strengthened services could be used to develop new content not only for audiences in Wales, but also for the network.

It is estimated that the BBC as a whole must make savings of £800 million. In concrete terms that might be two BBC 2s, (or 1 BBC 2 plus all of Radio 4 and all English local radio and all of BBC Cymru Wales and we still wouldn't have hit that figure). The economies the British government is expecting of the BBC are truly staggering and yet we are asking for more money for Wales's domestic tv service. Indeed we are. The 'erosion' of the English language tv service to Wales is so serious, that to deny it serious new funding is to let it fall over the edge of the cliff.

But it's not enough to ensure that we can broadcast to ourselves. We want requirement 3...

3 adequate representation and portrayal of the people of Wales on network tv and beyond

It is ironic that BBC Cymru Wales is enjoying such great and welcome success in making product for the network at a time when its domestic output is tragically low. Wales contributes *War and Peace* but is itself almost invisible beyond its borders. It's about 8 years since those major portrayals of Wales in UK drama through *Gavin and Stacey* and *Torchwood* and 3 since *The Indian Doctor*. No one decries the fantastic success of Roath Lock and its output nor the success

of Welsh Government in supporting facilities for high quality productions nor the backing of the Wales Office for production for the network and the world; but we are even more ambitious than that. We want success beyond our borders and at home. That's what real success looks like from here. What sort of nation wants to be mainly an export economy?

Could it be that we have an industry strategy gap for TV (in its very broadest sense) if we what we mean by that is placing sustainability of the Welsh TV industry at the heart of the investment? Export is fine if it enhances sustainability but not if it detracts from the inward investment that develops indigenous industry.

The stance of wanting our domestic cake as well as the chance to eat it across the border is not provincialism. It's realism. It aims for a future in which tv production in Wales is unfailingly nourished at its roots because from those roots comes all that is distinctive and precious about Wales. TV is a means of making money but it is a medium which literally channels Wales to the world. You have to take care of the source if you don't want it to dry up or produce only watered down output – a kind of Wales-lite. Let's make money and nourish Wales at the same time. Network portrayal will be achieved by devolving network money, which is a nil cost option.

And so we want a fairer BBC commissioning system. The present system has a centralist bias which could be corrected.

Always, the tendency to centralism has to be countered in both management and governance. A realistic sum could be devolved which BBC Cymru Wales management could use with creativity and entrepreneurial flair.

Hence number 4. We want structures which will deliver...

4 arrangements in the management of the BBC and in its governance which allow Wales to have a voice at the highest levels

The Clementi review of the governance and regulation of the BBC recommends that the 'nations' have a representative on the proposed unitary board of the BBC, a non-executive director This is absolutely essential. However, Clementi has left grey areas which are dangerous for Wales.

To have 'a voice at the highest levels' is desirable but whose voice? That of BBC Wales management, or the public, or some honest broker? Who decides what Wales gets to say at the highest levels?

There are three elements in the governance equation which must be balanced in Wales's favour: the top BBC board, the board of management of BBC Cymru Wales and the Audience Council for Wales. The Clementi Review recommends that a National representative (or Welsh Non-Executive Director) should have a seat on the top, unitary BBC board and that this person chairs the Audience Council for Wales. This is likely to be a boost for representation of public opinion and accountability to the audiences since it would give the Audience Council excellent access to the top board but does this to any extent sideline the management in BBC Cymru Wales who could be left having to shout very loudly to be heard at the top table?

What should be the relationship between the Welsh NED and the Director of BBC Wales, a potential chair of a board of management in Wales and a chair of Audience Council for Wales? The IWA recommends a new kind of management board for BBC Wales on the lines of the unitary board at the top – a unitary board for Wales with an independent chair and at least two other non-execs. The independent chair of this unitary board for Wales could also be the Welsh NED on the London unitary board. But then where does this leave the Audience Council? Who is to chair that and what will guarantee that the Audience Council is heard at the top? These are issues that the IWA's Media Policy Group are currently considering.

Which brings me to...

5 means by which the P in PSB (the Public) can dialogue adequately with broadcasters and hold broadcasters to account

The Audience Councils for the BBC remain, despite Clementi, not fit for purpose. They are advisory only. However talented and committed the members are, the system keeps them in thrall to the management. They have a low public profile despite the events they run. Either the Audience Councils should be given teeth with which they could bite back at violations of a new National Service Licence or they should be fully equipped to harness the enormous potential capacity of a digitally based audience outreach and representation system. Tony Hall's Open BBC pledges would seem ideal for a modern system of accountability. However, there remains a role for a group of

dedicated, knowledgeable and feisty people who can't be bamboozled. What structures will deliver the ideal Audience Council? Wales needs to get to grips with this while there is time. Would the recipe for a new and effective type of Audience Council require a change to the system of selection and appointment, and waged members?

Concomitant with all this must be a call for greater transparency from BBC Cymru Wales on figures and research.

Before moving to my sixth point I want to comment briefly on ITV Cymru Wales:

The channel, though it is a commercial broadcaster, is an important contributor to the PSB profile in Wales, an important platform and content provider. The maintenance of its contribution to pluralism via its news and current affairs programming is essential. Its strategies for the production of non-news programming deserve attention. How does the channel see its future contribution to PSB TV in Wales given that it has to maximise its audience to attract advertisers while making a commercial return?

In evidence given to the Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry into broadcasting in Wales, Magnus Brooke: Director of Policy & Regulatory Affairs, ITV plc said:

“as a commercial broadcaster, we are trying to maximise the audience, because that is the audience we sell to advertisers.... as Ofcom has found, there isn't any spare value in the licence which would enable us to do more, that is to do more programming and maximise our revenue.”

Yet there are interesting things afoot such as an exploration of co-commissioning of factual programmes, and even drama, between S4C and ITV Cymru Wales for the network and further English/Welsh back-to-backs for the local market.

And could ITV Cymru Wales do more for Wales's network profile? In 2014 it had its first network factual commission for more than 20 years with *My Grandfather Dylan*, produced by independent production company, Green Bay Media and a further current affairs commission. Phil Henfrey, Head of News and Programmes at ITV Cymru Wales, in the same meeting with the Welsh Affairs Committee, stated that the channel is hungry for ITV network commissions and a matching appetite on the part of Welsh indies would be welcome. So, an open door there.

And on S4C, 3 quick observations: its broad programme remit is a key PSB platform. It could claim, though it seems coy about doing so, that, amongst channels, it offers the most comprehensive reflection of life in Wales, in that it offers almost every genre. If you want to see Wales, look here. Use subtitles if necessary.

And, what would be the future position of S4C and the S4C Authority in relation to the BBC's Unitary Board? It is not clear how the proportion of the licence fee to be provided to S4C would be set, or where responsibility for this would lie. A Review of S4C would have to deal with these issues.

There is a regrettable tendency in some political circles to think broadcasting in Wales is sorted if S4C is sorted. A holistic approach to broadcasting in Wales is best in which Welsh and English flourish together, not to mention the other languages of Wales!

The sixth requirement: we want to see the development of:

6 structures which will deliver for the BBC, S4C and ITV Cymru Wales, and other media providers, a Welsh Government and National Assembly capable of playing a robust role in accountability and in the oversight of broadcasting and communications

On March 2nd the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee cross party Inquiry into BBC Charter Review published its report. It gives a snapshot of what Wales currently wants from its broadcast media and it's clear the AMs themselves want a more active role, really stepping up as agents of accountability with a raft of important recommendations. I'll mention just four of these:

- the establishment 'as a matter of priority', of an independent media forum for Wales to review, monitor and evaluate PSB provision in Wales and to advise Welsh government.

Faced with the complexity of media the Assembly can't manage on ad hoc advice. It needs adequate, long-term expertise.

- the endorsement of the Welsh Government call for £30 million
- the BBC should develop specific, measurable targets for portrayal of Wales in network programming alongside an enhanced accountability to the Assembly

- the fifth Assembly should establish a committee on communications.

This is very significant, especially taken alongside the call for a media forum. There can be no doubt that the message has got through that media matter, they can't be dealt with behind closed doors nor without a properly serviced arm of government.

And that very important thing which I kept till the end?

Before that, one important point on regulation: If Ofcom is to be the regulator, the role of its Welsh Advisory Committee will all the more influential.

Finally, that extra point. It's Everything Else. Everything Else that contributes to a healthy future for PSB TV in Wales, things which are not add-ons but integral elements, such as Training (and we've just suffered the withdrawal of Skillset, the end of Zoom and Cyfle!), Diversity and good Employment Practice.

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