



S4C response to “The Future of Children’s Television Programming”

20 December 2007

S4C is pleased to be able to contribute to this process. It is particularly relevant because of our commitment to serve audiences of all ages, and coincides with our discussions for placing a greater emphasis on and offering further enhancements to our provision for younger audiences.

1. Do you have any comments on the general analysis and conclusions of the report?

S4C generally agrees with the findings and conclusions of the research report into ‘The Future of Children’s Television Programming’.

We regularly conduct research into the views of children and young people by making use of a Children’s Panel and a Welsh Children’s Omnibus Survey. This information is used to inform the commissioning process, and was also used in the lead up to the consultation process for launching dedicated children’s services.

Recent conclusions from research using our Children’s Panel correspond with several of the conclusions in Ofcom’s discussion paper, indicating that it is older children and teenagers who feel least satisfied with what’s on television. They tend to feel that most ‘children’s programmes’ are too young for them and that their needs are not catered for. They want more programmes specifically targeted at them.

The use of the research enables us to keep track of how children and young people’s views change over time. The Omnibus Survey corresponds with the views in the Ofcom report, and indicates that in Wales, BBC1 and ITV1 are the most popular channels for 7-18 year olds (Figure 96 : Top 20 programmes, children 4-15) and that the younger children in Wales tend to watch the dedicated children’s channels.

2. Of the policy approaches suggested by stakeholders, which, if any, do you consider the most appropriate to address the conclusions made in this report?

We feel that it is possible to align a production sector to buy in, and support, a Programme Strategy. The S4C Strategy places great emphasis on creative excellence across all genres of programming, and producers have responded well to a clear vision with improved quality, multi-platform initiatives and an increased channel viewership – across all genres.

We acknowledge that the experience and success of independent children’s production in Wales is not a reflection of the UK experience. S4C agrees that the UK children’s production sector is fragile and that market forces alone will not force increased activity for this genre’s programming.

It is important that any policy measures serve to genuinely incentivise the production of children’s programming, and that any action taken does not contribute towards undermining the market in low cost and low quality content, as this could threaten the sustained competitive and diverse supply base currently in the UK.

Tax incentives

S4C agrees that the option of introducing a tax credit offers both investors and the production sector a speedy resolution. Given the experience of similar funds it can be set up relatively easy and would offer a cost efficient option to facilitate production investment. It is important that it works for, rather than complicates the administrative work of, the producer.

We should make sure that the benefit is targeted so that broadcasters don't capitalise on the tax breaks for reducing costs.

Extending the remit of existing PSB:

Although not imposed on us in the Communications Act, the S4C Authority sets a voluntary target for production of children's programmes. S4C is acknowledged as the UK's second highest single investor in content commissioned from the independent sector in 2007.

Broadcaster-based interventions and Contestable fund

The BBC is required by statute to provide S4C with up to 10 hours of programming per week. All content is supplied to us under a Strategic partnership agreement, ensuring that all programming provided to us is in accordance with S4C's strategic priorities. The partnership works well for both broadcasters.

However, in the case of children's' programming it is important that the total investment in the children's production sector is maintained. We should ensure that the overall spend is not eroded by re distributing funding from one source (or genre) to another. We consider that imposing a levy on broadcasters is not a feasible option to incentivise the children's production sector.

It is important, were a fund made available (for tax benefits or on a contestable basis) that it does not distort competition or drive down costs. The criteria for drawing from such a fund should be made very clear, and it should also be made clear if it is available for in house production.

We firmly believe that establishing a contestable fund should not lead to further fragmentation of the market, and that such a fund should not be offered to enable the introduction of a new and competitive service. The primary intention of extending the provision and introducing S4C dedicated children's content is so as to develop the current service, and offer enhanced services capturing new and emerging audiences or those viewers not currently engaging with our content.

We believe that investment in sustainable frameworks is essential for longer term growth for the children's production sector in the UK, and that implementing any of the policy options in isolation is not the answer. We also believe that any policies measures introduced should be brought in as short term incentives.

In summary, S4C believes that no one solution will resolve the market situation and that a combination of different policy approaches should be adopted. By taking such action it is vital that the commissioning of children's originated content is revived, and that UK broadcasters view children's programming as a positive investment, rather than as a commercial drain.

3. If they are appropriate, should the policy approaches be tailored to different age groups (for example to pre school, younger children, older children and young teenagers), or to different types of children's programming (like drama, factual, entertainment and animation).

We believe that policy approaches should be targeted towards:

1. production that has particularly low levels of activity in the UK,
2. the type of content that is in high demand by viewers and where investment is low (e.g. for teens factual and drama),

3. where the costs of production are high (e.g. animation and drama for all age groups).

We do not believe that policy approaches should be tailored towards a specific age category. Any incentives for content that has commercial potential (e.g. animation) should be reviewed periodically to ensure the continued need for the benefit.

4. What is the role and importance of UK-originated programming for children?

Our research indicates that children want to watch content that reflects Wales' cultural identity. They feel that S4C is unique in the sense that it gives them the opportunity to see familiar places, faces and situations, as well as hearing familiar Welsh accents. Children want to watch drama from Wales, although the range of American and English language drama does also appeal.

Research from S4C's Children's Panel indicates that older Welsh speaking children in particular want to watch new and original programmes in Welsh - not just dubs of their favourite cartoons and direct copies of popular non Welsh language programmes. Acquisitions amongst older children are often considered as lower quality programming.

As well as wanting to watch original dramas, comedies and cartoons in Welsh, they want opportunities to appear on programmes, see their local area and see familiar faces. They are proud to watch successful, unique and popular Welsh language programmes, which are of similar quality to their favourite programmes on other channels.

Children's response to the proposal for dedicated services on S4C suggests that it would improve their command of the language and reinforce their satisfaction in Welsh language content.

5. What is the role and importance of plurality in the provision of children's programming?

As one of the UK's five public service broadcasters, S4C brings plurality through its provision of Welsh language content. This plurality extends to our programming services for children.

We make a significant investment in children's content, reinforcing S4C's commitment to this important area of its service. We commission from a supply base of approximately thirty companies, of which fourteen companies specialise in producing programmes for children. S4C also acquires cartoon series which are then dubbed into the Welsh language for transmission. Our commitment to originated animation is also significant.

We believe that S4C offers services which are culturally and linguistically relevant which displaying a range of different perspectives and voices, and reflects modern Wales.

Our relationship with the independent sector in Wales is the cornerstone of our Creative Excellence Strategy. We consider that the development of a strong and competitive creative industry is one of the functions of a public service broadcaster such as S4C, and recognise the strength of the sector that supplies us.

It is important to ensure the continuation of a skilled and experienced supply chain, able to supply the highest quality and specialised children's programming. The current threat to the market in the UK may lead to a drain on the expertise available, and broadcasters will find it hard to preserve the talent to meet the demands in future.

Even a short term weakness could be damaging as it will be difficult to retain the highly skilled workforce.

Simply relying on S4C, the BBC and to a lesser degree, five and the other satellite channels, as the main investors of originated material in the UK may distort the market even further, restricting competition and the diversity of provision.

6. Should further consideration be given to the provision of public service content for children over platforms other than linear television?

Our research suggests that younger audiences prefer viewing programmes on the television to watching over the internet. This is mainly due to the quality of the picture and the ability to relax. The flexibility of viewing their chosen content at any given time on the internet appeals, and we expect that content has to be made available on this platform and on any new and emerging media.

It is important that Welsh language content continues to feature in the new converged media environment. The Ofcom Communications Market 2007 Nations and Regions report published in May 2007 concludes that Broadband availability in Wales is at 100% for DSL, 32% for LLU and 23% for cable.

A key challenge facing S4C is the creation and delivery of content that engages with a young audience, across a range of platforms. It places greater importance on developing new innovative methods for reaching audiences in the younger age groups. The explosion of new media use amongst children, especially older children and teens, is crucial in assessing the type of content developed and commissioned in future.

7. Does the policy approaches for children's programming need to be different to the policy approach taken to public service broadcasting overall?

S4C believes that the provision of programmes and services for children is a key component of public service broadcasting. S4C is committed to continue with the provision of this content in future. S4C accords the same status, benchmarking and commissioning considerations to children's content as it does to all other programming.

One of the main aims of our Creative Excellence or Programme Strategy is to make our services more attractive and relevant to people of all ages. The need for us to engage with young people becomes even more apparent when looking at the changing pattern of Welsh speaking viewers. 21% of the Welsh population speak the language and the number of young Welsh speakers continues to rise. Responses to the consultation for launching dedicated Welsh language services for children has shown that quality and originality are regarded as the most important key characteristics for television services provided for children by S4C.

In 2007, we extended the provision of news for young people. **'Ffeil'** is now broadcast all year round. The BAFTA nominated series **'Retro'** offers an informed and educational but entertaining series that has proved a great success with the viewers. As part of the partnership with the BBC, **'Mosgito'** was launched providing an important age group with a factual yet entertaining magazine programme. **'Uned 5'** remains the cornerstone of our Friday evening schedule, transmitting from its studio base in North Wales.

A new sports quiz programme **'Pencampau'** was commissioned – aimed at older children. Families are also targeted for the main highlight in our Christmas schedule – the 30-minute 2D film of Gelert is the first ever animation of the famous tale.

S4C's continued investment in original animated cartoons contributes with the launch of '**Holi Hana**' in 2007 – a successful co production with five and with the support of the Welsh Assembly Government's IP Fund, and our catalogue of commissions such as '**Sam Tan**' (Fireman Sam) and '**Superted**' continues to entertain our young viewers.

We continually strive to respond to a challenging and developing audience, and as part of our strategy of promoting creative growth in the sector, recently outsourced the production of our '**Planed Plant**' and '**Planed Plant Bach**' presentation links under open tender. This has offered the viewer an updated and refreshed style with extended interactive elements, available on screen and on other platforms. S4C introduced a new brand, presenting a contemporary image and attitude which has been integrated across all our services and on all platforms.

We make our programming as widely available as possible - offering multiple chances to catch up with programming on our broadband service. We also have a policy of providing English language subtitles on content for the particular benefit of English speaking parents of pre school children.

We believe that these strategic measures have served to offer viewers even more stimulating and informed services, with greater diversity in the provision of this important genre.

The content on offer form a part of S4C's overall public service remit, and reflects the purposes and characteristics of a PSB.