



## Briefing Note: Review of BBC funding

### Evidence regarding the importance of the BBC's funding arrangements for Welsh speakers and the creative economy in Wales

The position of Welsh Language Commissioner was created by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 with the aim of promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language. The Measure states that the Welsh Language Commissioner may, when exercising their functions, offer advice and/or comments to any person. In that context, and in accordance with the Commissioner's role as an independent advocate on behalf of Welsh speakers, we provide the comments below regarding the importance of Welsh language broadcasting to Welsh speakers and to the creative economy in Wales.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has launched a review of how the BBC should be funded in the future, and as part of this it is intended to consider how any changes could affect the funding arrangements for broadcasting through minority languages. The purpose of this brief is to share evidence regarding the importance of public funding for broadcasting through the medium of Welsh.

#### Summary

- The importance of broadcasting in Welsh, culturally, economically, and in the interests of the prosperity of the language must be a core part of the review. There are several specific issues that require attention in relation to broadcasting in Welsh, and the implications of any alternative funding options on Welsh-language provision in the future need to be fully considered.
- Welsh-language broadcasting is dependent on broadcasting services funded by the public purse. It is currently unclear how the BBC, and therefore its Welsh-language services, and S4C will be funded beyond 2027. The uncertainty regarding public broadcasting funding arrangements through the license fee in the future presents real dangers to the prosperity of Welsh culture and the Welsh language.
- Evidence clearly shows the importance of funding Welsh-language broadcasting for Welsh speakers, for the future of the Welsh language, and for the creative economy of Wales.
- It must be ensured that sufficient support and funding is available for the future to ensure that it will be possible for S4C, the BBC and others to provide a suitable offering in Welsh to match the changes in the digital world and to contribute fully to the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 Welsh-language strategy vision. It must be ensured that future funding arrangements strengthen and extend the Welsh language provision that exists today.
- The value of Welsh medium broadcasting should not be considered mainly or solely based on 'value for money'. The role of media in smaller languages is not just providing commercial profit or entertainment.
- The focus should be on the role of the Welsh broadcasting media in highlighting and normalizing the language; teaching and supporting speakers in their use of the Welsh language; increasing its value and status; and strengthening the economy and communities.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 S4C and the BBC are the main broadcasters that provide a Welsh-language offering in Wales. S4C, like the BBC, receives all its funding from the license fee.
- 1.2 S4C is the only Welsh-medium public television broadcaster and is a multi-platform service that includes a television channel, and digital/online provision for audiences in Wales as well as outside Wales.
- 1.3 There is a close relationship between S4C and the BBC, and the Broadcasting Act 1990 requires that the BBC provide no less than 520 hours of content to S4C every year. The BBC is also the main provider of Welsh medium content on the radio, and the only one that broadcasts exclusively in Welsh. There is little Welsh-language provision available on commercial radio stations.

## **2. The importance of broadcasting in promoting regional and minority languages**

- 2.1 Broadcasting plays a vital role in promoting regional and minority languages across the world and in Wales in particular. The 'Oslo Recommendations' on the linguistic rights of national minorities' highlights the importance of ensuring access for speakers of minority languages to broadcasting services that meet their linguistic needs. The recommendations also state that the 'media often plays a key role in promoting and protecting language, culture and identity.'
- 2.2 The UK Government has signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and among the clauses that apply to the Welsh language is Article 11 – The Media. This section contains clauses that refer to important principles in the context of broadcasting in regional or minority languages.
- 2.3 At a British level, one of the purposes of a public broadcasting service is to meet the demands and interests of audiences. According to Ofcom guidelines, public broadcasters are expected to fulfil the purpose of reflecting the cultural identity of the UK. Accordingly, it can be assumed that a public broadcasting service in Wales should meet the requirements and satisfy the interests of the significant proportion of the Welsh-speaking audience.
- 2.4 It is important that the UK Government continues to act in accordance with these principles by continuing to support broadcasting in Welsh.

## **3. The importance of Welsh-language broadcasting for Welsh speakers and for the future of the language**

- 3.1 Welsh-language broadcasting is extremely important in terms of the prominence of the Welsh language and opportunities for people to hear and use the Welsh language on a day-to-day basis. That role is critical today given the prominence of digital media in our lives. Not only does broadcasting through the medium of Welsh provide expression to the aspirations and lives of those people who speak the language, but it also attracts new speakers.
- 3.2 In the above context it is important to remember two things. Firstly, that the Welsh language exists alongside a dominant language in global popular culture, especially when considering the

influence of English-language broadcasting and the English media. Secondly, broadcasting through the medium of Welsh is dependent on those services which are funded by the license fee.

- 3.3 In the context of the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 Welsh-language strategy, it is important that Welsh speakers and people learning the language have access to information and content in areas that interest them. Normalizing the Welsh language in the media is an obvious way of doing that and, currently, the license fee is key to doing this.
- 3.4 S4C's Annual Report for 2022-23 gives us an idea of the significance of broadcasting in Welsh and the contribution such services make:
  - S4C's weekly reach (in Wales) increased to 324,000 – the highest for five years
  - S4C's viewing share is the highest for a decade
  - S4C's catch-up audience is at an all-time high
  - A 10% increase in viewing hours for S4C programs across Clic and iPlayer, and viewing hours for S4C on YouTube almost doubled
  - Unlike the trend among public service media in general, the age profile of S4C's audience has become younger
- 3.5 Although all S4C's provision is important, specific attention can be drawn to the channel's service for children and young people and learners, which is the provision that is particularly important in supporting new speakers and promoting the use of the language.
- 3.6 S4C's online services, including the popular Hansh service, and S4C's live sports offering are essential in not only attracting young people to the service, but also attracting new audiences who may not speak Welsh.
- 3.7 In a period of just one month at the beginning of 2020 Hansh attracted over a million viewing sessions across Twitter, Facebook and Youtube. This provides an idea of the importance of these services in terms of providing content and experiences through the medium of Welsh for children and young people.
- 3.8 S4C has also established a language partnership with the Welsh Government and others to help fulfil the Welsh Government's commitment to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050. This resulted in collaboration between the channel and organisations such as the National Welsh Learning Centre. This has led to the development of dedicated resources for all learners to accompany several popular series such as *laith ar Daith*.
- 3.9 BBC Cymru's Welsh radio provision and BBC Cymru Live online services also play a key role in maintaining and strengthening the position of the Welsh language and its culture. The BBC Board has recently decided to provide more hours of original Welsh-language content from BBC Radio Cymru 2, which is testament to the success and importance of this provision.
- 3.10 Looking to the future, the broadcasting media will be central to the efforts to revive the Welsh language. Ensuring that the Welsh language is heard and used on the broadcast media and digital services is a huge challenge. The ways in which the BBC and S4C are funded from 2027 onwards will be crucial towards responding to this challenge, and to ensure that the Welsh language is heard and seen as a normal part of people's lives in Wales.

## 4. The importance of the Welsh-language media to the creative economy in Wales

- 4.1 We must recognize the importance of broadcasting through the medium of Welsh to the viability of the language economically as well as in the community.
- 4.2 The broadcast media give the Welsh language an important economic foothold by ensuring that Welsh-language skills are valued in the workplace, and by creating work opportunities in Welsh. The creative industries sector is an area of employment where there is a clear demand for Welsh speakers, especially in the radio, interactive media, advertising, film and animation sectors.
- 4.3 A wider economic contribution from the Welsh medium broadcasting industry includes supporting independent companies to grow and supporting supply chains in areas across Wales.
- 4.4 This economic contribution is particularly significant in those communities where the Welsh language is strongest. Without a doubt, the Welsh medium broadcasting industry contributes to the viability of these communities.
- 4.5 In their annual report for 2021-22, S4C refers to research commissioned by the Arad research company. The research found that S4C contributed £197.4m to the UK economy in 2019-20, and £141.1m to the Welsh economy. This means that for every £1 of income that S4C received in 2019-20, an economic impact of £2.03 was created on the UK economy, £1.45 on the Welsh economy and £0.19 on Carmarthenshire where S4C's headquarters is located.
- 4.6 Another example of the economic contribution of broadcasting through the medium of Welsh is that a research report by Arad on behalf of S4C reported that the filming of the first series of Y Gwyll/Hinterland contributed £1 million to the local economy of Ceredigion.