

## **Arts Council of Wales Consultation Response to PSB Review Proposals for Nations**

The Arts Council of Wales is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on public service broadcasting in Wales and, particularly, the future arrangements for Welsh language television in Wales. This response focuses on matters relating to the arts in Wales, and does not consider other aspects of Welsh language broadcasting which will evidently need to be taken into account in determining the best way forward.

The arts in Wales have benefited in four clear ways from the attention of the three public service broadcasters: i) news and information programming about current or forthcoming arts events, ii) programmes that analyse and explain the work of artists and arts organisations, either in radio discussions or television documentaries iii) made for television artworks such as music programming, film and drama and iv) broadcasting of performances, such as WNO productions (S4C) or *Cardiff Singer of the World* (BBC). In our view a continuing commitment to all these areas of arts programming constitutes and should continue to constitute an essential ingredient of public service broadcasting in Wales.

Attendance at arts events in Wales is rising and coverage of the arts in the main morning newspaper is also growing. Both are indications that the arts are a valued ingredient in the lives of an increasing number of people. This is the case across the whole of the population, but it is particularly noticeable among Welsh speakers. In light of these facts, there is no reason why the arts should disappear from the agenda of the ITV channel in Wales - certainly for as long as the commitment to non-news programming remains – and every reason why the arts should remain highly visible in the output of the other two broadcasters, BBC Wales and S4C.

Participation in the arts in Wales is highest in Welsh-speaking communities. More than 40% of Welsh speaking adults attended a play at least once in 2003/4 compared to 22% of English speakers and 31% of Welsh speakers participated in the arts compared to 18% of English speakers (Source – Beaufort Omnibus). While there is no evidence to suggest that these high figures are a consequence of coverage by S4C or BBC Radio Cymru, it is evident that the arts play a very significant part in the life of the community and there is every reason to believe that the level of television coverage by S4C helps to reinforce the role of the arts within the Welsh speaking community. These high levels of attendance and participation are also undoubtedly linked to the health of the language. They help to reinforce the use of the language and support a culture that ensures a breadth and richness to the life experiences of so many.

Arts programming raises awareness and creates a much needed critical forum, generating not only radio and television audiences but audiences at performances and exhibitions. This extends to coverage of the key festivals and events that showcase the arts through the medium of Welsh, including the Urdd Eisteddfod and the National Eisteddfod.

Drama and music output provides opportunities for actors, directors and writers in both the languages of Wales, producing both economic and cultural benefits. For this reason we would fully support the extended quotas for production outside London and would hope that BBC Wales and the independent sector will be able to take full advantage of them. Moreover, we hope that S4C will be enabled to increase its output of quality drama both through increases in its core funding and through increased levels of co-production with other broadcasters.

We believe that creative talents should be given every opportunity of working through radio and television in Wales, and through the medium of Welsh. While evidently beneficial in itself, this also allows more creative artists and support workers to pursue their careers in Wales. For instance, while young actors trained at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama will look forward to a whole world of opportunity, a full range of opportunity should also be available to them within Wales in both languages. In this field would urge the broadcasters to seek a more profitable interaction between broadcasting and the stage.

Public service broadcasting is a fundamental part of the arts ecology in Wales in both Welsh and English. Any changes to future broadcast provision will need to take account not only of broadcasting considerations, but also of the potential impact on the wider arts economy. The arts sector itself will also wish to explore with broadcasters the opportunities to exploit new distribution technologies so that artists can reach the widest possible audience, not only in terms of age or social class but also in terms of geography.

The geography of Wales means that events in the South East, for example, are not easily accessible from the North. We applaud S4C's experiments in creating access to arts productions which might otherwise be geographically inaccessible to audiences around Wales. S4C's relays of WNO productions from the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff, for example, can help to create a greater sense of national ownership. Plans for further large-screen relays, and the exploitation of broadband technology should help extend this beneficial effect in the years to come.

## **Conclusion**

Given that the arts are but one strand of the considerations which Ofcom will take into account, it would not be appropriate for ACW to make structural recommendations from this standpoint alone. ACW is conscious that the current arrangements have served the arts well, and would urge that any changes should be very mindful of the need to build on successes to date.

The option which retains S4C, and promotes the development of the relationship with BBC Wales, seems very attractive from this perspective. However, should there be a change to a more commercial, competitive alternative, then great attention will need to be given to how the current support for the arts can be safeguarded. There are evident risks to this approach.

ACW would welcome further opportunity for involvement in discussions and consultation as the future arrangements emerge and are implemented.