



THE LEARNED SOCIETY OF WALES
CYMDEITHAS DDYSGEDIG CYMRU

CELEBRATING SCHOLARSHIP AND SERVING THE NATION
DATHLU YSGOLHEICTOD A GWASANAETHU'R GENEDL

Welsh Affairs Committee: Broadcasting in Wales inquiry

October 2015

Learned Society of Wales Response

1. The Learned Society of Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Committee Review into the future of broadcasting in Wales.
2. Learned societies exist in large part to recognise and appreciate intellectual excellence and merit. There is a direct parallel with the BBC, justifiably renowned for its excellence as the foremost public broadcaster. While the LSW understands the logic of the present Review, it is concerned that the excellence and independence of the Corporation should not be put at risk. Nor should there be any doubt about its being able to maintain high quality production, responding to its various audiences and maintaining its global reputation. The Fellows of the Learned Society with experience of broadcasting systems abroad are strongly of the opinion that we should maintain what is one of Britain's iconic institutions, internationally recognised for its values. That is not an argument against change, but a counsel for care and balanced judgement in assessing proposed new arrangements.
3. We consider that the public purposes of the BBC remain substantially valid. The adjective is 'British' so a key responsibility today is to promote and explain British values, citizenship, and respond to multi-ethnic UK civil society in all the rich diversity of its multiculturalism. That role of highlighting and nurturing what unites our citizens and presenting civic values positively is particularly pertinent. But at the same time, the BBC must reach out to reflect the nations of the UK as well as to respect regional diversity. Post legislative devolution, there is a particular, pressing need to explain, report, and assess the work of Legislatures in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. If the BBC is not to continue to do this, then what other body of like influence and authority can or will? So the role of representing the UK and its nations in a balanced way must remain a top priority. An essential element of our democratic model is that our institutions and politicians should be held to account. The Corporation has a key role in reflecting our society without favour and connecting government, civil society and citizens.
4. This is particularly true in Wales where no written press reaches more than 8% of the population. The nation is dependent to a large extent on the Corporation for the coverage of Welsh politics and its relation with Westminster and further afield. That obligation extends to both TV and Radio, and to both the English and Welsh languages. The Society insists that reserve funding for S4C at a sufficient level to ensure good programming must be maintained. We are concerned at the continual reduction in investment in programming for Wales, and this must be reversed. There is also an acute need to ensure the delivery of good reception for TV and Radio throughout Wales and for this to be carried through as technology evolves.
5. Its distinguished record of bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK is a basic element of the BBC's reputation and of obvious benefit. It needs likewise to reflect the UK accurately and comprehensively to itself. We would like to see BBC services become much more widely reflective of the present and past of Wales. It should address our country's politics, our history, indeed the range of subjects which can be termed Welsh affairs, and it should do so in both our national languages. The performance of just such a mix of educational, cultural, political, and other roles is an obvious requirement of a public broadcaster. By the same token, the BBC should do much more to disseminate the best of Wales beyond the borders of the country. The substantial recent BBC investment in Cardiff

is most welcome as is the benefit of the network productions from Tiger Bay. They are quality outputs generating substantial income for the Corporation. But the LSW is concerned that such UK-orientated achievements could be at the expense of substantial development of a distinctively Welsh 'product.' We want more for Wales and to see a bigger Welsh cultural projection across Wales and outside Wales. This lack needs to be corrected. Again the Learned Society stresses the responsibility of the public broadcaster to take greater account of devolution and do more to represent the constituent nations of the UK. This should rightly entail a greater level of accountability to the people in the individual nations, going beyond existing structures.

6. The BBC's fundamental purpose of informing, educating and entertaining is even more relevant today. With its reach, the Corporation is uniquely able to deliver balanced information and to present educational programmes. It has a worldwide reputation for natural history programmes. The Society supports the case for more educational programming, noting literacy, numeracy and foreign language training as particular needs across the diverse communities of the UK. Similarly we support the creative and multifaceted cultural mission of the BBC. Its brief is in part entertainment, in part cultural in character, and it has a special opportunity to inspire, to fuel aspirations, and motivate, particularly the young.
7. Much of the foregoing supports current policies and argues for more specific efforts, especially in Wales. This is not an argument against efficiencies or recognising the role of other providers and platforms, and of course the BBC must respond to changing habits and interests of listeners and viewers. But the Review should start by acknowledging excellence and treading carefully to ensure that the unique quality and reputation of the BBC is not diminished but enhanced by new arrangements.

The Learned Society of Wales (LSW) is an all-Wales, pan-discipline educational charity, operating on an independent basis and providing public benefit including expert scholarly advice on a variety of public policy issues related to science, engineering, medicine, arts, humanities and social sciences. Established in 2010, the society has access to the considerable strengths of over 380 distinguished Fellows based in Wales, the UK and beyond.



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