

Meeting between the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip and BBC Cymru Wales - 8 February 2023

Agenda

1. Content Update
2. BBC Centenary/Future Strategy Update
3. Talk Disability Update
4. St David's Hall/BBC NOW
5. Governance Update (Non-Executive Director for Wales)
6. Policy Update (Media Bill/Expert Panel)

Note of the Meeting

16:00 – 16:30 Wednesday 8 February 2023. Teams Meeting.

Attendees

- Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip, Dawn Bowden MS
- Rhuaneedd Richards, Director, Content and Services, BBC Cymru Wales
- Rhys Evans, Head of Corporate Affairs and Public Policy, BBC Cymru Wales
- [WG Official 1]

Summary

Rhuaneedd Richards began by addressing the issues surrounding the Welsh Rugby Union, highlighted in the recent “BBC Investigates”. Rhuaneedd stated that it was a difficult programme to air but one which was required and one which the BBC were proud of. The Deputy Minister agreed that it was a story that was needed to be told and offered congratulations on highlighting the problems within the organisation.

Rhuaneedd Richards also highlighted the BBC’s coverage of the opening weekend of the Six Nations. She confirmed that coverage went well, with just over 76% of all viewers in Wales watching the Wales V Ireland match.

Rhuaneedd Richards updated the Deputy Minister on the BBC’s coverage of the World Cup in Qatar saying that the experience had been very positive, with positive audience feedback.

Rhuaneedd Richards confirmed that the relationship with Creative Wales continues to be extremely positive, with ongoing work to bring six major new dramas to air over the coming year. The Deputy Minister congratulated Rhuaneedd Richards on this and reiterated the pride in Wales continuing to be one of the primary locations for programme commissions across the whole of the UK.

Rhys Evans confirmed that this year will see Cardiff host the BBC “City of Comedy”. Rhys highlighted the positive work between Creative Wales and the BBC in bringing the “6Music Festival” to Cardiff in April of last year as a major factor in choosing the city. The comedy festival will run over three days and will include a series of workshops, discussions and performances. It will be centred around the Sherman Theatre.

It is hoped that the festival will help to showcase the comedy sector in Wales and as a positive genre for growth. It is hoped that two specifically Welsh comedy programmes will be commissioned for broadcast across national BBC channels on the back of the event.

Rhys Evans also highlighted the new Owain Wyn Evans hosted BBC Radio 2 early morning breakfast show. The show, which begins in early 2023, will broadcast from Central Square in Cardiff, the first day-time Radio 2 regular broadcast outside of London. Rhys also confirmed that, in line with other BBC Radio stations, there are plans for at least half of Radio 4 programming on a Friday and Saturday to be broadcast from Cardiff by the end of 2023.

Rhuanedd Richards confirmed that Tim Davie would be attending the “BBC in Wales” centenary celebrations on 13 February at Central Square in Cardiff. The celebrations will concentrate on all aspects of the BBC’s presence in Wales over the past 100 years and will provide an opportunity to showcase the work of BBC Cymru Wales.

Rhuanedd Richards confirmed that filming had started on the new BBC Cymru Wales drama “Steeltown Murders”. Set in Port Talbot, the true-life drama focuses on the story of the murder of three women in the Port Talbot area in the early 70’s and the pioneering use of DNA to catch the killer. The programme is being produced by Severn Screen Productions.

Rhuanedd Richards also confirmed the soon to be released 6-part drama “Wolf” produced by Hartswood Studios and the drama series “Lost Boys and Fairies”, both co-commissioned by BBC Cymru Wales. It was also confirmed that the “Dr Who” 60th celebratory programme is set for broadcast later in the year.

The launch of “Talk Disability”, BBC Cymru Wales’s new commitment to disability on and off screen was also raised. The initiative will see twelve months of programmes, initiatives and content designed to inspire conversations about disability across Wales. Central to the commitment is the announcement of new BBC Wales eight-week traineeships specifically for people with disabilities, created in partnership with Disability Wales. Placements are due to start at the end of March 2023.

The future of St David’s Hall was also discussed. Rhuanedd Richards confirmed that although some concerns do remain regarding its potential sale, the letter received from Cardiff Council alleviating fears was generally positive. However, it was agreed the detail laid out in the contract of any sale would need to reflect the council’s commitments in St. David’s Hall retaining its status as a world class venue for arts and musical performance.

Rhuanedd Richards updated the Deputy Minister on the appointment of a Wales representative on the BBC Board. It was confirmed that this would take place by the end of July and that CMS would lead on the appointment at UK Government level, with comment from Welsh Government. It was also confirmed that the Welsh Government do have the power to veto on any final decision.

Rhuanedd Richards also confirmed that the BBC had provided evidence to the Co-operation Agreement “Expert Panel” and will continue to engage in discussion as is required.

Meeting between the First Minister and BBC Cymru Wales

Agenda

- Content update
- Across the UK
- Update on the TV Licence Fee
- Report of the Expert Panel on Broadcasting

Note of the Meeting

Microsoft Teams meeting: 11:00 – 11:30, Tuesday 5 September

Attendees

First Minister, Welsh Government

Elan Closs Stephens, BBC Board member for Wales and acting BBC Board Chair

Rhuanedd Richards, Director BBC Cymru

Desmond Clifford, Director General, Office of the First Minister

Gerwyn Evans, Deputy Director, Creative Wales

[WG Official 2 (note taker)]

Summary of discussion

Elan Closs Stephen said that it was her first meeting with the FM as Acting Chair of the BBC. The first Chair of the BBC from a state school and a Welsh speaker.

She said that she is very proud of her role and the contribution of the BBC to the Welsh economy – it is about £200m and 2,000 jobs, about 11 per cent of the creative sector in Wales, a 54 per cent increase in this sector over the last 10 years. The wage profile, she said are 7 to 10 per cent higher than similar roles.

Her job as Board chair is to grow that further and bring more jobs to Wales.

The flat license fee over the last two years poses some challenges but there is a bit of a concern as to whether UK Govt will honour the increase in the license.

Rhuanedd Richards said that the partnership working with Welsh Government officials has been invaluable. She said that we have invested in six major dramas this year as the Year of drama with five making it to the network, in addition to Pobl y Cwm, Casualty and Dr Who. A number of other productions are underway to put Wales on the map for drama production. In November, we will have a new Dr Who series, which wouldn't have happened without the partnership with the Welsh Government. The BBC has spent a million pounds on Eisteddfod coverage and been out and about across Wales. She said that we have re-launched BBC Breakfast on Radio Wales. She said it now has a harder news edge and the latest Rajar figures have shown an increase in listeners for BBC Radio Wales. She pointed to the new BBC News app which gives greater prominence of Wales coverage.

She said that BBC is planning its General Election coverage for whenever it is called over the next year. She said the BBC is particularly concerned about attracting those who don't access BBC services and they are keen to ensure factually accurate coverage of the

differences between England and Wales. A lot of work will be done to cover the Rugby World Cup. She said that they are looking at expanding Radio Cymru 2 to focus on Welsh learners and families where there are fewer Welsh speakers in a household. A plan has been developed for the BBC Board. She pointed to the international experience of the BBC Orchestra.

Elan Closs Stephens highlighted the 'across the UK' programme of work to develop meaningful production hubs across the UK, for example, in Cardiff, we're talking about the climate change and scientific reporting with some 80 staff moved or moving. Rhuanedd has said that some people haven't wanted to move and it has created opportunities for people in Wales. It's a massive change programme with some £700m spend and some 400 jobs moving. However, how do we develop get KPIs to see that Welsh – and other area – voices are heard and the impact on Welsh universities. She said that there is a perception that if you're not in London, 'you cannot hack it in London'. That is against everything she believes in and what's people to grow their careers across the UK.

Rhuanedd said that in terms of BBC Network, there will be weekly shows for Radio One, Two, Four, Six and World Service coming from Cardiff. She pointed to more Welsh scientific voices on the Network too.

The First Minister formally congratulated Elan on her appointment and the BBC Board are lucky to have her and it is of course good for Wales. He said that it is a bit of a golden age of BBC broadcasting in Wales and we have developed this wider eco-system around the BBC. He said many of the companies are based in the Economy Minister's constituency so he can't make the decisions so the First Minister gets to see more on it. He said it is fantastic to see this investment. He said it is great to see the BBC using those landmarks events like the Eisteddfod, Royal Welsh etc showing what will be of interest to wider UK audience. The First Minister said that he would be keen to support BBC Radio Cymru 2 and highlights hwb, the Welsh language resources that will be of interest. He said that if we have resources that could be used he would be keen to help facilitate this.

The First Minister said that he saw the BBC Singers who were on fantastic form and he said he really enjoyed seeing them.

He said the area that concerns people in Wales is the loss of sport on the BBC and he appreciates that this is not of the BBC's own making but these are events that bind the nation together. He highlighted the Urdd's campaign to find ways of using the language. Rhuanedd said that it is a priority for the BBC to bid for such events but it is difficult with the funding settlement Elan said. She said though that this has provided benefits in that we have spotted women's football that we could pick up. She said the freeze on the license fee over the last two years, which contravened an agreement with the UK Government, was about £200m lost that had to be found.

Elan said it was important for a view for the national governments on the license fee. She said her discussions with the Culture Secretary has been good and rational but that has not always been the case. She said that there has been a lot of talk of a 'hybrid' license fee where you get your news and current affairs but you may have to subscribe to other areas. She said that the Board has not discussed it in detail but will do. She said that it would disadvantage those who can't afford it and it would skew things to the more commercial aspects rather than the 'universality' of the service.

Elan said that the amount of money over the next few years will cause issues. She said do we believe having a public service broadcaster in Wales or not. The First Minister said that we strongly support public service broadcasting but we have been agnostic on the license fee but a two-tier license fee would be difficult to support as it would drive people away from all the services for what it provides. Elan said that there are lots of models that we can explore to help the UK Government. In Italy, for example, it added to the electricity bill, she said.

Rhuanedd said that we noted the publication of the co-operation agreement Shadow broadcasting report. She said in her letter recently submitted, we wanted to put on record to challenge some of the assumptions in the report. She said she spends some 70 per cent of her time on the future of broadcasting. She said she's happy to engage on these issues.

The First Minister said that it is a report to the Welsh Government and not a Welsh Government report. It discharges a commitment within the Co-operation Agreement. He said that we now to engage with the Co-operation Agreement partners. It is important for people to engage with the report and to debate it, and thanks the BBC for their letter in this regard. Elan said there are other opportunities to model.

The First Minister said he would welcome that engagement. He appreciated being briefed and continue to work together where we can but of course welcomes being scrutinised too.