

Acen

### **General**

The fact that S4C has undertaken detailed research into the media needs of the children of Wales is to be welcomed. The research commissioned into viewing habits of children and young people is important not only for S4C but for other bodies involved with linguistic development and planning in Wales.

The consultation document has already motivated key stakeholders - including Acen - to place a new focus on the under 16 audience, first language Welsh speakers and learners, and to consider anew their needs.

It could be argued that establishing and marketing a new service for children on S4C would keep that new focus alive and could lead to creative and considered thinking across the board in the short term. It could attract more viewers - and commercial stakeholders. The long term future of any service for children and young people, however, depends on the nature, quality and relevance of the content.

Acen agrees 100% with S4C's reasons for using the new digital broadcast spaces to fulfil the needs of children and young people. We are not so sure, however, of the statements made in the consultation document about the broadcasting timetable. We believe that there are important factors to be considered.

## **Broadcast Hours and Target Audiences**

### **The broadcasting timetable**

Please see our comments on the broadcasting hours below.

### **Target Audiences**

Acen would argue that there are more than three audiences that need to be considered. Our experience in schools strongly suggests that interests and levels of maturity change substantially at around seven years of age. Grouping all 5-11 year olds together, therefore, may be a mistake.

Similarly, consideration should be given to the different levels of maturity and differing interests within the 11-16 audience.

It is interesting to note that specialists (Sonna et alia) now talk of many categories and sub-categories - very young children (who watch with adults or older children or under the supervision of others), younger children or 'tweens' (9-12 years of age) who are a bridge into teenage and finally teenagers. S4C should consult with child psychologists on this but our general advice - especially in the heavily targeted digital age - is to keep the categories as small as possible to ensure that content is relevant to the audiences.

We agree with the suggestion in the research section of the consultation document that branding and alternative ways of marketing to different audiences is of utmost importance.

## **Important key characteristics for television services for children on S4C**

### **The Youngest Categories**

There is increasing concern about children's low levels of fitness and about the amount of time that the youngest children spend in front of various screens. There is, immediately, a problem here. On the one hand, S4C, in common with all broadcasters, wish to see viewing hours increased. On the other hand, there is political and social pressure to make children more active and less passive during leisure time.

The challenge facing S4C is creating a new bridge between the two needs by providing viewing and on-line experiences that are directly connected with activities which could develop children's mental and physical potential. This, of necessity, means much closer working with families and agencies, schools, clubs, medical establishments. Provision for children on S4C must be attractive, appealing, imaginative and fun but it must also be 'healthy'. There may be an opportunity here to work with the Assembly's education department and the health trusts to share costs and specialisms. .

Associated with this there is an opportunity, as new ways of networking with children and the adults in their lives are developed, to think much more about direct contact between children and individual characters or personalities. Children invariably seek out programmes after seeing characters in a show or pantomime or in a film in the cinema. This quickly establishes a sense of ownership. S4C could, in partnership with theatre in education companies and local drama companies, bring characters alive in communities, away from the screen. .

### **Older Children and Young People**

As 'children' grow older, the challenges facing S4C increase. The audience gradually becomes more independent and more aware of international provision available to them. The competition is immense - in terms of programmes and marketing machinery. Here again, though, S4C does have its own advantages.

- 1 There is only 1 Welsh language channel. That channel has its own unique language. Through promoting and popularising the language itself, and the culture associated with it, S4C is in a unique position to capitalise on the loyalty that is created to the language and therefore the channel.
- 2 S4C is close - geographically and institutionally - to its audience. It is therefore in a good position to co-operate with schools, youth clubs and movements, pop groups and fashion and companies which offer work experience, thus ensuring a true reflection of all these activities on the screen.
- 3 Wales now has a large number of companies that specialise in on-line experiences. This is a resource S4C should capitalise on as they consider provision for older children and young people. Recent research by Grunwald Associates shows that 71% of young people between 9 and 17 years old use the web at least once per week to 'network'. The web has become a 'safe place' to discuss problems, to seek support, information and advice and to generally 'practise' at being an adult. Games and role play activities are very popular. The challenge for S4C is working with others to develop experiences where the dynamic between web and screen are attractive and holistic, inspiring loyalty from these young Welsh people.

There are two further reasons for developing a web-based service. The first is a commercial reason. The research by Grunwald Associates shows that 55 percent of young people surveyed by the company in the last month responded to activities advertised on the websites - e.g. quizzes and competitions. Of these young people, 90% said they would be willing to hear about specialist 'goods' such as courses in colleges and career opportunities. As S4C is searching for new revenue, this could be one solution. The second reason is about creative talent. Young people now spend hours on 'MySpace' and other blogging websites every day, creating diaries and personal profiles. According to Grunwald 20% update their websites every day. Shouldn't S4C capitalise on this creative energy?

### **Learners**

The points made above are just as relevant to learners of the language. An increase in networking opportunities between screen and community experiences would be of huge benefit to learners of all ages, by increasing contact hours with the language and the opportunities to use the language in a pro-active way. This could lead to an improvement in young people's language skills before leaving school aged 16 or 18.

Learners working with first language Welsh speakers on S4C-centred projects could start to break down the boundaries between the two audiences.

However, learners have specific needs, as they start on a lower level of the language continuum and need advice and leadership as they move upwards.

With the youngest children, consideration must be given to ways of encouraging language acquisition - on screen and off screen. Multi-media resources have already proved popular among parents and teachers. This is a field that could be developed further - possibly through sister-websites such as [www.dysguars4c.co.uk](http://www.dysguars4c.co.uk).

In schools, it is imperative that S4C becomes part of the attempt to develop the full potential of the National Curriculum (Welsh as a second language). We believe that there is an opportunity to work with the Welsh Assembly Government to develop on-screen and web experiences to help teachers and young people working on the new Foundation Stage, Key Stages 1-4 and the bridging period between school and community. There is also room to develop programmes and activities in support of the National Curriculum in schools.

### **Language of the Service**

We believe that the nature and quality of the language used should be flexible, contemporary and appropriate to the content. It should, however, be fluent and grammatically 'correct'. There is an opportunity here to positively influence the language skills of young people who may not often hear Welsh spoken naturally in their communities, and who therefore cannot know 'instinctively' if their language patterns are correct.

### **Special Needs**

We trust that the new service will give special consideration to children with special needs and will ensure that they are portrayed positively, with an emphasis on their valuable contribution to society.

### **Summary**

In summary, the main points we would like to make are:

- 1 That there is an opportunity for S4C to use the new digital spaces to provide a very special service for young people in Wales - first language Welsh speakers and learners of the language.
- 2 That careful targeting is necessary, looking anew at the audiences suggested in the consultation document.
- 3 That consideration should be given to a new role for S4C as a hub for a wide variety of experiences available to young Welsh speakers and learners, involving the development of new partnerships.
- 4 That new ways of benefiting from the creative energies and talents of young people and of involving them directly in channel's success should be considered.
- 5 That there is an opportunity to consider, with others, the specific needs of learners of the language in relation to the language continuum and the national curriculum.

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