

## Response by Wales Animation Group

We are supportive of S4C's intention to establish a channel for the children of Wales, and welcome the opportunity to voice our opinion as the animation sector in Wales. I write as the Chair of the Wales Animation Group, and hope that individual members will also take the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

Children's programmes as part of public television is under threat in the UK. Advertising restrictions and commercial pressures generally have created a crisis in the way that original programming is funded. ITV have cut their investment in this area of television despite being formerly second only to the BBC in terms of volume of programmes commissioned. According to James Thickett, Research Director of OFCOM, "The evidence thus far shows that there is an obvious threat to the supply of high quality original programmes for children in the UK".

This is a matter of concern for parents. According to OFCOM two thirds of parents believe it is important that original programmes are available to their children, while 80% believe that children's TV programmes contribute to their education and development.

Original programmes are popular among children. In multi-channel homes where children have a wide choice of original programmes and foreign buy-ins, over 70 of the 100 most popular programmes are produced in the UK. Television is incredibly important to children - OFCOM figures show that fewer children are watching programmes made for adults, while more children are viewing programmes made specifically for them.

The lack of investment by commercial channels means that the BBC is now the main provider of television for children. Because of this, children will have only one window on the world apart from programmes imported from other countries. BBC plays an important role in children's programming - but it can't do it all. The Secretary of State for Culture, at the outset of the BBC's Charter Review, stated that more than one source of public service broadcasting is necessary. OFCOM and the BBC have warned of the dangers of allowing a BBC monopoly.

S4C has a history and tradition of responding to the needs of young Welsh speakers, a group that is growing in number. Welsh producers, and especially animation producers, have a track record of creating high quality programmes, not only for children in Wales, but across the world. Members of the Wales Animation Group have been responsible for programmes that have won many international awards and sold to hundreds of countries.

We see, here, an opportunity for S4C to respond to the increase in the number of Welsh speakers under the age of 15, as well as benefiting from the opportunity to create original Welsh programming that could be seen across the UK and abroad. A strong public service broadcaster is needed to be responsible for providing original programmes for children - S4C's children's channel can offer this across many broadcast platforms.

The animation sector is small but has a wealth of high quality talent. This is reflected in the production companies and in colleges and universities, where three animation courses have won Skillset approval. A new channel for children, commissioning original Welsh content, can ensure that this talent is given the opportunity to develop and blossom in Wales.

We realise that the channel's resources would be limited. There is a danger that this could lead to a service over-dependent on acquired or dubbed programmes, or programmes of low quality. This would be a disservice to the children of Wales, and would miss a golden opportunity to create an

alternative to BBC services for children, as well as being a confident statement of S4C's ambition to be at the forefront of provision of children's programmes in the digital age.

It will be necessary to make the most of the available resources and funding. The animation sector can do this. Our programmes have an international appeal, as well as being inherently Welsh. The sector is forward-thinking in its approach to development of new technologies and content - especially with content on new platforms. Animation companies have a track record of attracting investment and adding value to S4C and its productions. This would be of great benefit to any new service.

The animation sector in Wales considers a new children's channel as a very exciting development in the history of S4C, and we undertake to contribute talent, specialism and enthusiasm which will be key to its success.

Yours faithfully

Robin Lyons  
CHAIR