

Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru (Welsh Independent Producers)

Response to S4C Authority's Consultation on a new television Channel for children

Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru (TAC) was formed in 1984 as a trade association to represent the interests of independent producers who produce programmes for Welsh broadcasters. We offer a wide range of services, including industrial relations. We also act as a lobbying and representative body in discussions with broadcasters, the government, government agencies and a variety of other bodies.

TAC welcomes S4C's plans to introduce a new public service channel for children in the Welsh language.

We know that S4C is one of the main purchasers of original children's programmes in the UK, with most of those commissioned from the independent sector in Wales. We are proud of the contribution the sector makes to the channel's output and of the fact that S4C has the confidence to consider establishing a new specialist channel.

Evidence shows that young people are increasingly leaving the main television channels and favouring those specialist channels that provide programmes specifically for young people. Independent production companies have developed the experience and expertise necessary to provide a wide range of programmes of a high standard, in line with S4C's Creative Excellence Strategy. A number of Wales' production companies are also extremely successful on an international level and continue to co-produce, attract investment and resources and create excellent productions for the international market. The nominations received and the awards won in British and International Awards Schemes is proof of this. The Assembly Government has acknowledged the importance of these companies to the Welsh Economy by establishing a structure, through Finance Wales, for grant applications to develop the Creative Industries.

The establishment of a new specialist channel would provide a challenge and further commercial opportunities for the sector. As a result of the digital age and the trading agreement between TAC and S4C following the Communications Act 2003, the sector will be more than willing to provide convergent content which would answer the needs of young people. TAC would like to see the principles of the current Trading Agreement made relevant to co-productions to enable companies to benefit from their creative input and investment in the development of projects.

Ofcom, the body that regulates communications in the UK, have stated that children's content is a key element of public service broadcasting and are currently reviewing this important genre. Pact, our sister body, is already campaigning to ensure the future of programme-making for children in the UK, following a drop in investment by some commercial broadcasters due to commercial pressures and the ready availability of popular and cheap programmes acquired from foreign countries.

A wide-ranging consultation with children and young people on the matter is crucial. And it should be remembered that older children are more likely to go on-line rather than television. Convergent platforms have to be used to appeal to this group and resources must be allocated to ensure that the new service is available on broadband and mobile devices. Adequate funding is essential to create original, exciting and challenging

content of a high standard for an audience who take pleasure in discovering and using cutting edge technology.

TAC agrees that children's programmes should be broadcast simultaneously on the main channel and the new channel and that an advertising campaign is needed to direct children to the specialist channel. It should also be listed in the children's section of electronic guides. Option 2 would be the most appealing, i.e. a continuous, uninterrupted service 7 days per week. A patchy service must be avoided, if possible. This would enable the sector to concentrate on providing programmes appropriate to the target audience. If the service is to be carried across both channels, care must be taken not to spread resources too thinly. Producers are concerned that when the analogue service is switched off, resulting in a drop in advertising income, the current budget will be put under increasing pressure to sustain the new service.

Depending on the result of the consultation and a positive response from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to a new specialist channel, the sector looks forward to further discussion and commercial opportunities to create and provide a wide range of convergent content which will appeal to the target audience.

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