

Task and Finish Group on the future outlook for the media in Wales

Response from Neil Taylor LL.M, MCIPR

English language TV Broadcasting in Wales.

Introduction

Since Devolution TV News producers have taken the view that political news in the Devolved areas will be reported there so network political news has become 'English' news. The BBC has improved and makes it clearer that changes to laws and regulations that only apply to England are announced as such. However details of the position in the devolved areas is not usually mentioned reported.

This is relevant because of the fact that around 70% of people in Wales can watch TV from English transmitters. Along the populated North and South Wales Coasts it has been estimated that the majority of TV aerials point towards them. The number of English people from the North West living in North East Wales is also an issue when viewing habits are concerned.

The people may be English and support English sports teams but they live in Wales and what the Welsh Government does affects them. Another point to be borne in mind is that people tend to watch local news from the area they were brought up in as opposed to the one they live in. The same will apply to Current Affairs programmes and as will be seen the difference between programmes made for Wales and network programmes is so small there is no incentive for people who have moved to Wales to watch Welsh TV.

From January 2009 ITV's commitment to Wales was reduced with non-news production down from 4 to 3 hours a week. It has been further reduced. In May the Western Mail reported on an internal BBC document suggesting that current affairs programmes Week In Week Out and the Welsh element of the Politics Show could be scrapped as well as coverage of the Welsh Political party Conferences.

This followed reported cuts to BBC2. Director General Mark Thompson confirmed that one of the cost-cutting proposals under consideration would involve turning BBC 2 into a high definition vehicle for network dramas, documentaries and films "Currently, BBC Wales uses BBC 2 for programmes including Scrum V Live, am:pm and Dragon's Eye – although the latter is repeated on BBC 1 after Question Time."

The Western Mail also published figures produced by Ofcom for 2008 showing only 1,193 of the 2,483,495 hours of television broadcast in the UK, were made in English for the Welsh audience – equivalent to one hour for every 2,081 hours broadcast. That amounts to 0.05% of the programmes we in Wales could receive, and that was before Wales switched to Digital TV with over 40 channels.

During the Assembly election campaign The First Minister met many who were not aware of what the Welsh Government had achieved. He said: "They can identify things like free prescriptions, bus passes and so on. But so many of the things we've done people weren't aware of."

The reality is that the people of Wales have little, if any, idea of what the Assembly Government and our AMs are doing. The low turn out in March's referendum confirms this. The people of Wales need to know more about what the Welsh Government and the opposition parties are doing. TV is an important vehicle for that knowledge.

Both the BBC and ITV are making further cuts to the programmes that inform the people of Wales about what is happening in the Assembly. The BBC is ending am:pm certainly on Wednesdays and Dragon's Eye is ceasing in its present form. ITV could well be ending its English language Current Affairs programmes in Wales.

The viewing public need to be reminded of the political and current affairs programmes broadcast to Wales as what they report affects them. This is something that the Assembly should be involved in. There is no reason why the BBC cannot announce such programmes on its English Regional channels in areas neighbouring Wales.

It appears that the more powers the Assembly has, and will get, the less it is reported to the people affected. Democracy dictates that our politicians are held to account and as regularly as possible.

An analysis of English language programmes made for Wales and broadcast to Wales on the 3 English language channels for weeks beginning 1,8,15 and 22 October 2011.

Programmes, including News, are as advertised (TV Choice magazine) not as broadcast. Non scheduled programmes have been added where known about. At weekends the time news is broadcast is often much less than advertised on both channels. For week day lunchtime news on ITV 5 minutes is used as its starts at 13.55.

Total Welsh production in hours & mins week beginning 1 October 2011

Type of Programme	BBC 1	BBC 2	ITV
News	5.10		4.05
Politics	0.50	1.15	0.30
Current Affairs	0.30		0.30
Sport	0.45	2.30	
Entertainment	2.00	1.00	0.30
TIME	9.15	4.45	5.35

Total hours broadcast for the week: BBC1 153.75 BBC2 139 ITV 165

Percentage of Welsh production: BBC1 6% BBC2 3.42% ITV 3.38%.

Of the 457 hours 45 mins. broadcast by the 3 channels 19 hours 35 mins., 4.28%, was Welsh produced for Wales.

Notes. The hours are calculated to the early morning News which sometimes starts around 1.00 a.m. on the BBC channels on ITV it is 5.30 a.m.

Dragon's Eye is broadcast on both BBC1 and 2. There was no am:pm on Wednesday because of coverage of the Conservative Party Conference. This coverage includes PMQ's and a discussion on them. There was a non scheduled programme on BBC1, a Week In Week Out special on University of Wales degrees scandal.

Non News Production made for Wales W/C 1 October 2011

	BBC1	BBC2	ITV
Saturday			
Sunday	1.05		
Monday	1.00		0.30
Tuesday	0.30	1.15	0.30
Wednesday	0.30		
Thursday	0.30	1.00	0.30
Friday	0.30	2.30	
TIME	4.05	4.45	1.30

Non news production 10 hours 20 mins: BBC1 2.65%, BBC2 3.42%, ITV 0.9% being 2.26% of the total for the 3 channel.

Total Welsh production in hours & mins week beginning 8 October 2011

Type of Programme	BBC 1	BBC 2	ITV
News	5.10		4.05
Politics	0.50	2.45	0.30
Current Affairs	1.00		0.30
Sport	1.45	0.30	1.00
Entertainment	0.30	1.00	1.00
TIME	9.15	4.15	7.05

Total hours broadcast for week: BBC1 154 BBC2 138.75 ITV 164

Percentage of Welsh production BBC1 6% BBC2 3.06% ITV 4.32%

Of the 456 hours 45 mins broadcast by the 3 channels 20 hours 35 minutes, 4.5%, was produced for Wales.

Note. There was a non-scheduled programme on BBC1 on Friday. The Lions – New Zealand 1971. The night before the Wales/France Rugby game. It was scheduled for Network BBC2 on the 19th.

Non News Production made for Wales W/C 8 October 2011

	BBC1	BBC2	ITV
Saturday			
Sunday	1.05		
Monday	0.30		0.30
Tuesday	0.30	1.15	0.30
Wednesday		1.30	0.30
Thursday	0.30	1.00	0.30
Friday	1.30	0.30	1.00
TIME	4.05	4.15	3.00

Non News production 11 hours 20 minutes:

BBC1 2.65%, BBC2 3.06%, ITV 1.83% being 2.48% of the total for the 3 channels.

Total Welsh production in hours & mins. week beginning 15 October 2011

Type of Programme	BBC 1	BBC 2	ITV
News	5.05		4.05
Politics	0.50	2.45	
Current Affairs	1.00		0.30
Sport	0.50	0.30	1.00
Entertainment	1.00	0.30	0.30
TIME	8.45	3.45	6.05

Total hours broadcast for week: BBC1 147.3 BBC2 141.3 ITV 164.5

Percentage of Welsh production BBC1 5.94% BBC2 2.65% ITV 3.7%

Of the 453 hours 10 mins. broadcast 18 hours 35 minutes, 4.1% was for Wales.

Note. Saturday's early evening news was reduced from 10 to 5 minutes. There was a non-scheduled programme on BBC1 on Sunday night Scrum V a 50 minute discussion of the Wales France game. ITV had a non scheduled programme on Thursday "That Semi Final" for an hour. It replaced Sharp End meaning there were no political programmes or Assembly reports on ITV Wales.

Non News Production made for Wales W/C 15 October 2011

	BBC1	BBC2	ITV
Saturday			
Sunday	0.50		
Monday	1.00		0.30
Tuesday	0.30	0.45	0.30
Wednesday		1.30	
Thursday	0.30	1.00	1.00
Friday	0.30	0.30	

TIME	3.20	3.45	2.00
-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------

Non News production 9 hours 5 mins:

BBC1 2.24%, BBC2 2.65%, ITV 1.22% being 2% of the total for the 3 channels.

Total Welsh production in hours & mins. week beginning 22 October 2011

Type of Programme	BBC 1	BBC 2	ITV
News	5.05		4.00
Politics	0.20		1.00
Current Affairs	1.30		1.00
Sport		2.30	
Entertainment	0.30		
TIME	7.25	2.30	6.00

Total hours broadcast for week: BBC1 147.42 BBC2 138.75 ITV 164.5

Percentage of Welsh production BBC1 5.03% BBC2 1.8% ITV 3.65%

Of the 452 hours 40 mins. broadcast 15 hours 55 minutes, 3.42%, was for Wales.

Note. Saturday's early evening news was again reduced from 10 to 5 minutes. It was billed as 10 minutes on 29th. but only lasted 5 minutes. Also ITV's Saturday early evening news was advertised as 10 minutes down from 15 again the same on the 29th. The Assembly did not sit this week so no Dragon's Eye or am:pm. ITV had an hour long Sharp End Special about the EU. BBC2's production was Scrum V Live and Sport Wales both on Friday.

Non News Production made for Wales W/C 22 October 2011

	BBC1	BBC2	ITV
Saturday			
Sunday	0.20		
Monday	1.00		0.30
Tuesday	0.30		0.30
Wednesday	0.30		
Thursday			1.00
Friday	0.30	2.30	
TIME	2.50	2.30	2.00

Non News production 7 hours 20 mins:

BBC1 1.91%, BBC2 1.8%, ITV1.22% being 1.62% of the total for the 3 channels.

Non News Production made for Wales 1st to 28th Oct. hours & mins

Week	BBC1	BBC2	ITV
01/10/11	4.05	4.45	1.30
08/10/11	4.05	4.15	3.00
15/10/11	3.20	3.45	2.00
22/10/11	2.50	2.30	2.00

There is not a week where the non news production comes anywhere near half a days production on any of the 3 channels. For the study period of October there were an additional 4 non scheduled programmes 3 of which related to the Rugby World Cup amounting to 2 hours 50 minutes. Also for the last week the Assembly was not in session so political reporting was less than normal.

Days where non news production was the same as England

Week	BBC1	BBC2	ITV
01/10/11	1	4	4
08/10/11	2	3	2
15/10/11	2	3	4

Only BBC1 has something like a Welsh service when considering days when there is a difference in programming from neighbouring England. For W/C 22nd BBC2 only had 1 day when there was a difference and this was its Friday Night's Sports programmes. As for ITV most of its days, 4 out of 7, were the same as England.

It would be extremely difficult to argue that Wales has an English language TV Service even though there are 3 English language channels. For October 20 hours 35 minutes was longest time that the 3 channels broadcast Welsh programmes to Wales which is less than 1 day's production. Part of this time was because Wales reached the semi-finals of the Rugby World Cup. The average time was 18 hours 26 minutes less than S4C broadcasts for a day. The Snapshot which was October 2011 is more like a picture when the comparisons below are looked at particularly during the Summer when there are no political or sports programmes.

Comparisons with earlier periods

Non News Production made for Wales W/C 25 July 2009

	BBC1	BBC2	ITV1
Saturday		1.00	
Sunday			
Monday	1.00		
Tuesday	0.30	1.00	
Wednesday			
Thursday		1.00	1.00
Friday			
TIME	1.30	3.00	1.00

Non News Production made for Wales W/C 17 October 2009

	BBC1	BBC2	ITV
Saturday			
Sunday	0.30		
Monday	1.00		0.30
Tuesday	0.30	1.45	
Wednesday		1.30	
Thursday	0.30		1.30
Friday		2.30	
TIME	2.30	5.45	2.00

Non News Production made for Wales W/C 20 February 2010

	BBC1	BBC2	ITV
Saturday		2.00	
Sunday		1.00	
Monday	0.30		0.30
Tuesday	0.30	0.45	
Wednesday		1.30	
Thursday	0.30	0.30	1.30
Friday	0.25	0.35	
TIME	1.55	6.20	2.00

For the earlier periods the 20 minute Politics Show slot may not be recorded. For non news production BBC2 has been the leader contributing more than a third. Following reports that BBC2 could be transformed into a network only service then there will be a considerably reduction in non news production. The establishment of the National

Assembly which now has law making powers makes it more essential that broadcasting comes under it's control.

Neil Taylor NUJ NEC member for Wales.

2 November 2011

Appendix to submission by Neil Taylor NUJ Wales

Western Mail 5 November 2011

POLITICIANS and others in Wales should wake up to the diminishing quantity of English-language TV programmes about Wales, according to former BBC Wales Director Menna Richards.

Last night Ms Richards – who stepped down in February after more than 10 years in the top job – gave the Welsh Political Archive Annual Lecture at the National Library in Aberystwyth.

She said: “At a time when BBC Wales’ central role in political and cultural life has never been more important, its ability to fulfil its ambitions in the face of a punishing financial squeeze is bound to be challenged. Nowhere more so than in its English-language services.

“It’s striking that the recent debate around broadcasting has been about the future of S4C and understandably so. Though I have found it surprising that the future of English-language television programmes in Wales is apparently of so little concern to politicians and others.

“It’s instructive in this regard to compare Wales with Scotland.

“The BBC in Scotland is faced with making similar tough savings but I’ve always found it curious that the level of interest and engagement there is so much more intense.

“Scottish newspapers and politicians complain, write, criticise and attack the BBC’s senior management in London.

“The BBC’s top team would tend to sigh theatrically at what they saw as an excess of emotion in Edinburgh and Glasgow but you’d know that, usually, Scotland would get some concession just to keep them quiet.

“Because a fuss was being kicked up. There was a public debate. Newspapers were agitated. Politicians were angry.

“The BBC centrally needs to hear from politicians, newspaper editors and other opinion formers that they are worried about the threat to English-language services in Wales as well as the dangers facing S4C. You can bet they’d be doing so in Scotland.”

Reflecting on the row over the BBC taking on responsibility for funding S4C out of the licence fee, Ms Richards said: “Following last week’s announcement the BBC’s total contribution to S4C will be well over £90m. That’s £76m of new money and around £20m that it already spends on its Welsh-language programmes for S4C including Pobol y Cwm and Newyddion.

“Even if BBC Wales spends a similar amount – around £20m – on English language TV, that’s still a disparity of more than £70m. To borrow a devolutionary metaphor, this is the elephant on the doorstep. When will someone begin asking questions of the BBC Trust about the disproportionate nature of the Corporation’s investment in Welsh and English-language services for Wales?

“These are tricky arguments that some would prefer to sweep under the carpet because no-one wants a debate that pitches one language against the other. So let me be clear: S4C must be properly funded to continue to provide the service for which it was set up. But that cannot be at the expense of programmes in the English language. The principles of the debate must be around fairness and, above all, making certain that all audiences in Wales are given the television and radio programmes they want and deserve.”

Ms Richards said that while it was understandable that politicians in Wales had been reluctant to press for the Welsh Government to fund S4C while the UK Government was spending £100m a year on the channel, such considerations no longer apply.

On the BBC Politics Show Wales slot on Sunday 6 November Menna Richards said that the BBC had lost 100 hours of English language broadcasting over the last five years including much comedy and drama. Such programmes will include classics such as High Hopes which I thoroughly enjoyed.

A number of people will say that such series are too Welsh, Valleys Welsh in particular, for network showing. That is nonsense as we in Wales have regular helpings of English regional Soaps such as EastEnders, Coronation Street and Emmerdale. One of my favourites Sitcoms was Last of the Summer Wine which is Yorkshire based with Yorkshire humour.