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FAO Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism
Cc Cefin Campbell MS, Delyth Jewell MS

Dear Deputy Minister,

Further to the publication of the Expert Panel's Report on a Shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales I am writing to kindly ask for clarification and further information on some of the points raised in the report, particularly those related to the research conducted by the Panel as part of their exploration of broadcasting in Wales. This will help aid our understanding of the conclusions. I have also included further context and additional information in relation to some of the narrative in the report. I hope this additional information will be of use to the ongoing work in this area and should there be any further information you require, please don't hesitate to contact me.

I would be grateful if you could provide information as to the methodology and sample size of the 'Broadcasting Trends' research report, commissioned by the Panel. I would very much like to gain a greater understanding of some of the figures cited in the report as they are not familiar to me.

Similarly, it would be useful to understand what is meant by the phrase 'Welsh network programming' to help understand which area of content is referenced.

I would also like to understand the inclusion of the following statement: "*There is a significant data deficit in respect of broadcast and communications media as experienced by the people of Wales and no organization has the responsibility to address it at present*". I strongly believe the BBC provides extensive data and information with regards to audiences and consumption habits, as well as in relation to funding and hours of broadcasting in Wales in its Annual Report and Accounts. These documents are laid before the Senedd and scrutinised as part of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, International Relations Committee's work. This is in the addition to the data and research collected and published by OFCOM. It would therefore be useful to understand what the panel feel is missing and not available.

The report also states that "*The Panel was concerned that there seemed to be very little future thinking or innovation to consider what broadcasting and communications might look like in Wales in the future. At present there is no organisation tasked with developing a strategic vision, specific to Wales in this field*". I would strongly disagree with any suggestion that there's little future thinking or innovation taking place as to future trends and platforms. Teams across BBC Wales and the wider organisation are in daily discussions about future developments with the various product teams across the BBC, looking to future-proof, innovate and ensure audiences in Wales can view content of their choice on the platform of their choice now and into the next decade.

I was also surprised and disappointed with the panel's comments about drama production and the role of co-commissioning. Specifically, my colleagues and I would like to gain a greater understanding of what the panel means when it says it has a "*concern that drama specifically for audiences in Wales in the English language is becoming a thing of the past. Network tastes in terms of subject matter and story may not always reflect Wales in a way that resonates deeply enough with audiences here.*"

The notion that a drama series only shown in – or commissioned for - Wales is somehow a more authentic viewing experience for audiences here is subjective and I note that the panel provides no evidence basis to support this contention.

The reality is that the BBC has never in its history provided a richer range of drama reflecting Welsh life than it does today - shows like *Hidden*, *In My Skin*, *The Pact*, *Keeping Faith* and *Steeltown Murders* – and this has been the fruit of co-commissioning between talented commissioners in both BBC Wales and network television which has leveraged greater investment and delivered greater on-screen ambition. The idea that these shows lack an understanding of Welsh sensibilities doesn't square with the audience impact and appreciation they delivered in Wales.

The current partnership benefits audiences everywhere. Looking at *Steeltown Murders*, for example – a true life drama series of a cold case that made history, set in Port Talbot and the surrounding areas – almost 625k viewers in Wales tuned into the series at some point, equivalent to 20% of the population. Across the UK, the first episode was the 3rd most watched programme that week (source: BARB). Once you combine the TV viewing to iPlayer, the 28-day consolidated figure across the whole series was an average audience of 5.7M viewers, with nearly half the audience (48%) viewing on BBC iPlayer.

More recently, *Wolf*, another BBC Wales co-commission with BBC One Network attracted a total of 10.5m BBC iPlayer viewing requests during the first two weeks, totalling 6.2M viewing hours – making it the most consumed title across all BBC iPlayer during that period. This was a series which featured a strong Welsh cast, clearly located in Wales and included the use of the Welsh language. Other dramas such as *The Way* and *Lost Boys and Fairies* will also have strong portrayal of Welsh communities and will include the Welsh language in the script.

This level of portrayal is a fundamental part of our agreement between BBC Wales and Creative Wales so I would really value an opportunity to understand why the panel came to this conclusion.

There are also a number of assertions in the report that I think would have benefitted from greater context and analysis.

For example, the report states that "*the number of local opt-out hours for Wales of daily, weekly news and current affairs in the English language on TV are down to 367 hours (from 429 in 2021) which is additional cause for concern. Investigative long form current affairs is now only occasional in the BBC Wales Investigates programme. Wales Live, established a few years ago, is a weekly magazine format continuing on BBC One Wales, but it doesn't fulfil this long-form investigative remit.*"

In fact, the reduction in hours of local opt-out hours for Wales of news and current affairs in the English language on BBC TV in Wales in 2022 can be attributed to the reduction in the number of government press conferences shown on TV since the pandemic ended. The hours broadcast have returned to those similar to pre-pandemic averages (source: BBC Annual Report and Accounts). Except for the COVID press conferences, there have been no other material commissioning changes to the amount of airtime given to BBC Wales news and current affairs programming during this period.

I would also challenge the analysis of current affairs. BBC Wales launched the *BBC Wales Investigates* brand in 2017, with the aim of producing hard-hitting current affairs content for all platforms - TV, radio and online. It wasn't intended to occupy a regular 'slot' in the schedule: instead, the investigations are broadcast when new evidence is uncovered or the investigation reaches a conclusion regardless of the time this takes.

This was a strategic decision taken to release the investigative journalism team from the confines of a regular 'slot' and to focus on making a greater impact and reaching new audiences. This decision was taken to protect our investment in this vital area of output as well as adapting our approach to ensure we serve all audiences across all devices and services. I consider the change to have been a success, given the impact and reach of recent hard-hitting investigations into football betting, the Lin and Megan Russell case, the Clydach Murders and the recent report into complaints by former players and staff at the WRU.

The report also states that "the *Panel has a very real concern about the number of hours of 'education, factual and religion' on BBC Wales (in 2022 down to 165 hours, from 212 hours in 2021).*" In fact, the number of originated hours in these genres are higher than pre-pandemic levels as the numbers cited by the panel include repeats which increased significantly during the pandemic period.

I hope this information has been useful to you and I would be grateful if you could also help us by providing the information requested above so that we can fully understand the conclusions reached.

Yours sincerely,



Rhuanedd Richards
Director, BBC Wales