

**Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales****Additional Submission to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee Inquiry: 'Radio in Wales'**

At the Committee's session on Thursday February 15, we were asked several questions to which we would now like the opportunity to respond.

**The Memorandum of Understanding**

We were asked about our views on the proposed Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government, Welsh Government, National Assembly and Ofcom. We are aware how difficult it is to draw up such a memorandum between the different parties and that this document is based largely on the equivalent MoU involving the Scottish Government.

It deals primarily with the appointment of a Member from Wales on the Ofcom Board. We have long believed it is vital to represent the interests of Wales on the main Ofcom Board, and we note that the appointment of a Scottish Board member has already been announced. This sets a clear precedent which can be followed by the Welsh Government.

We understand there are reservations that the appointment is to be made by Welsh Government ministers with no input from the National Assembly or its relevant committees. It has however been a complex process getting agreement on the appointments procedure, and we are concerned that there should be no delay in the appointment of a Board Member from Wales in order that the interests of Wales can be represented at the highest level in Ofcom as soon as possible.

The MoU goes on to agree a process for Ofcom to consult the National Assembly on its strategic priorities as set out in its Annual Plan. It says clearly that Ofcom will consider any representations from the Assembly's appropriate committees through this process in formulating its Annual Plan. This is to be welcomed.

**The Deregulation of Commercial Radio**

In our evidence to the Committee, we argued that the Committee should take the opportunity to make representations to the DCMS in London on the deregulation of commercial radio. Without repeating the substance of our evidence, it revolved around the failure of the DCMS to acknowledge the existence of – or indeed the importance of – nations news (or all-Wales news) as part of a regulatory requirement on news provision for commercial radio in the future. It is promising legislation sometime in the next four years, and in the meantime Ofcom has been asked to review the existing regulations with a view to paving the way for that further legislation.

Neil Stock of Ofcom said he was happy to receive representations from the Committee and this is to be welcomed. But it is also important that the DCMS is made aware of the views of the Committee. Whatever the decisions taken by Ofcom, it is the DCMS who will draw up any legislation.

We were also asked to provide information about the demand and provision of nations news or all-Wales news. In 2016 Ofcom conducted research on news consumption in the UK which was published in June 2017, as part of its range of market research reports which examined the consumption of content, and attitudes towards that content, across different platforms. The aim of

the research was to inform an understanding of news consumption across the UK and within each UK nation. It examined the sources and platforms used, the perceived importance of different outlets for news, attitudes to individual news sources, local news use and news consumption in the nations. The research showed that one third (33%) of UK adults claimed that they consume news through radio, and this has remained stable over recent years. We attach a link to the Ofcom slide pack for this research<sup>1</sup>. The very last slide is of particular interest as it examines the level of interest in news about each UK nation. It shows that the percentage of respondents in Wales that were 'very interested' in news about the nation was higher than the percentage in England or for the UK as a whole (although lower than Scotland and Northern Ireland). Combined with the 'quite interested' category, the level of interest in news about Wales reached 80%.

In 2016, The BBC Trust also conducted a Review of the BBC's Radio Services for the UK Nations<sup>2</sup>. In relation to 'nations' news the report stated that, *"The BBC nations' news and radio services are a very important part of the BBC's offer in each of the devolved nations. They are highly distinctive, very focused on delivery of the BBC's public purposes and are seen as high quality by their audiences. These services play a particularly important role because Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are devolved within the UK in many important policy areas and each has a strong and distinct sense of identity. These services allow the BBC to properly inform citizens in each nation about news which is relevant to them including government policy areas affected by devolution such as education, agriculture, the environment, health and housing. Our research found clear audience demand for this output."*

### **The work of Ofcom's Advisory Committee for Wales**

We were asked about the value of the work carried out by the Advisory Committee, and perhaps it would be helpful if we reiterated a few of the achievements of the ACW over the last few years. The Committee was responsible for, or instrumental in, the following achievements:

- The fact that 999 calls can roam across networks - of particular importance to rural Wales
- The inclusion of coverage obligations in the Nations in the spectrum auction for 4G
- The Channel 3 licence ensuring that ITV Wales maintained its programme obligations, with a separate licence for Wales
- Ofcom recognition of the lack of plurality in Wales' broadcast market
- The emphasis on representation and portrayal of the Nations in Ofcom's Operating Licence for the BBC.

**Glyn Mathias, Hywel Wiliam**

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/103570/news-consumption-uk-2016.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/103570/news-consumption-uk-2016.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our\\_work/nations\\_radio\\_news/summary\\_report.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/nations_radio_news/summary_report.pdf)