

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
Cynyrchiadau Ffilm a Theledu Mawr yng Nghymru / Film and Major TV Production in Wales
CWLC(5) FILMTV18
Ymateb gan Joio / Evidence from Joio

Context

Our response to the above consultation should be read in the context that our company – Joio – is one of the few indigenous Welsh companies to have successfully secured funding from the Welsh Government’s Media Investment Budget in a TV project. To the best of our knowledge BANG is also the only Welsh language project to have received funding from the MIB fund.

This was our first attempt to secure funding from WG and the funding was essential in realising the project. We wish to reinforce the importance of this investment in bringing BANG to the screen and the legacy that has followed. However, while we are incredibly thankful to WG for investing in the project, we believe all parties involved would agree it was a very drawn out process and incredibly frustrating.

Having made an initial approach to Pinewood (who were managing the fund on at that time on behalf of WG in June 2016) to discuss investment in BANG we eventually received the funds in December 2017. The series had finished shooting and had been broadcast on S4C by this date.

The application and decision-making process was lengthy and complicated. There was a great deal of confusion and frustration caused by a lack of communication and information on Pinewood’s part and I think it was particularly problematic that Pinewood did not have a representative based in Wales who was easily accessible to us.

We were not always confident we knew how the process of awarding the investment would play out and what the timescale would be. This made planning our production and the cash flow incredibly difficult.

Members of WAG’s Creative Industries team were incredibly proactive and helpful throughout the process and we don’t think we would have successfully accessed the investment without the dedication of members of this team.

BANG was successfully produced in 2017 to popular and critical acclaim and is the first Welsh language drama series to be exported to foreign territories including Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and the USA.

BANG recently won an award at the New York Film and Television Festivals and has been nominated in the Celtic Media Festival. The series was also shortlisted for a Writers' Guild of Great Britain award alongside Line of Duty and Taboo.

Economic Impact

£2,561,928 of BANG's £2,829,996 total budget was spent in Wales.

Over 90% of the budget was spent in Wales. This is significantly higher than the minimum Welsh spend we were required to spend in Wales under WG's requirements for investment. Much of the spend that wasn't spent in Wales was paid to Welsh actors represented by London agencies and represents our legal costs and WG's legal costs which were managed by London based firms.

The production company Joio is based in Neath and holds a bank account at a branch in the town centre. BANG was filmed entirely in Port Talbot with a mostly Welsh cast and crew. The production therefore has clearly had an impact on the economy of the area especially as the intellectual property is Welsh-owned.

This is an important point to emphasise. BANG is owned by a Welsh company and all benefits will flow back to Wales. It allows the company to build on its success, generate further business and continue to employ Welsh talents.

Cultural Impact

BANG's impact has been – and continues to be – transformative. BANG wouldn't have been possible without additional investment. Banijay Rights's investment and WG's investment through the MIB allowed us to realise a drama series that has been S4C's most successful drama series since Y Gwyll/Hinterland. However, unlike Y Gwyll/Hinterland, there is only one version of BANG which is filmed 80% in Welsh language. The reach of the series was very high for an S4C drama series and discovered a new audience for the channel in the South Wales valleys and outside of Wales.

Unlike many other shows, BANG is conceived in Welsh and written in Welsh.

Viewing figures for the series on-demand via S4C's catch-up system and the iPlayer have been record-breaking for an S4C drama and we know the series has

been watched by a significantly large younger audience and by families in bilingual homes. Anecdotally we have received many reports that BANG is the first time partners (where one doesn't speak Welsh) have sat down to watch a Welsh language drama together.

Locally the series has successfully promoted the Welsh language at a time when the local authority is constructing a new Welsh medium secondary school in the centre of the town and Swansea University have plans to open a BANG store in the shopping centre in Port Talbot to promote adult Welsh lessons.

The project's legacy therefore is still being felt in very real ways that will dovetail into WG's ambition to create one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Since BANG also only exists as one programme (unlike Hinterland, Keeping Faith and Hidden) the Welsh language is being positively exported to other countries which has a positive impact on people's perceptions and attitudes towards the language.

We established a successful partnership with Neath Port Talbot county council and had contact with many local schools, charities and other organisations based in the town.

It is important to reiterate that the WG's funding of the project was key to its realisation and all that has followed.

Value for Money

BANG was made for £350,000 an episode which is a very modest budget for television drama. WG invested £350,000 in the project but on such a modest budget a relatively small investment like this was key.

It should be noted that the legal fees and costs payable to Pinewood for their role in the production are comparable to the costs other companies going through the process of seeking investment from the MIB would have occurred despite our lower global budget.

Skills

We believe there isn't a skills shortage in Wales in terms of crew. Large scale investment by the BBC, S4C and Welsh Government over many years has led to an army of highly-skilled technical teams, make-up artists, costume assistants etc. who are amongst the best in the world.

We believe there needs to be a campaign to invest in the work of Welsh producers, directors and writers. We need to ensure that these key talent groups are enabled to live and work in Wales to create their best work and do not believe currently that the system is enabling them to do so.

Many of the projects WG has funded have relied on importing these key talents and it would be interesting to look at a system that backs the Welsh talent that is currently here.

Other

During the many years WG has been investing in the film and television sector it has always been the big budget American shows that have secured the headlines. We have always felt the government should be actively supporting the indigenous productions and particularly the Welsh language productions which realistically have fewer investment opportunities open to them.

By supporting the Welsh talent and the intellectual property generated in Wales that Wales can help build and maintain a sustainable sector that is able to export its programmes worldwide. While we understand (and appreciate) the arguments for attracting productions to Wales with investment it will always be true that the key roles in the production will be taken by individuals who are being parachuted into Wales and that any profit will flow back to companies in London, Los Angeles and New York.

In our opinion, WG should be endeavouring to fund the ambitious Welsh project that can promote Welsh talent and increase the diversity and scope the television drama projects coming out of Wales.

The projects realised by S4C in 2017 – BANG, Un Bore Mercher/Keeping Faith and Craith/Hidden have made an impact beyond Wales, with an easily accessible investment model supported by WG we could achieve so much more over a longer timescale.

We would be happy to appear before the committee to provide further evidence should they wish us to.