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Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Broadcasting in Wales](#), HC 620

Wednesday 9 November 2022

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Members present: Stephen Crabb (Chair); Virginia Crosbie; Ruth Jones; Ben Lake; and Rob Roberts.

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee member present: Kevin Brennan.

Questions 1 to 31

Witness

[I](#): Guto Harri, Broadcaster and Communicator.



Examination of witness

Witness: Guto Harri.

Q1 Chair: Good morning and welcome to this sitting of the Welsh Affairs Committee. Today, we are beginning our inquiry into broadcasting in Wales. We are delighted to be joined in our first session by Guto Harri, an accomplished broadcaster in his own right, who has long experience in the BBC, having started out with BBC Wales before going on to a number of national roles. More recently, he has sat on the board of S4C and done other things that have brought him into contact with the broadcasting landscape in Wales. We look forward to questioning you.

We are also delighted to be joined by Kevin Brennan, the Member for Cardiff West, who brings his extensive experience as a member of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. He is guesting on our Committee as part of this inquiry. Welcome, Kevin.

Mr Harri, as someone who grew up within BBC Wales, if you had your time again, what would you say about the opportunity for someone like you, from Wales, to become a national Welsh broadcaster and a UK national broadcaster? Are those opportunities greater or fewer than when you were starting out?

Guto Harri: Bore da. Thank you very much for the invitation—it might have been the last thing I wanted, but here we are, so make the most of it. Yes, I will come around to that but, if you will allow, I will use the opportunity to say penblwydd hapus to S4C, which is 40 years old this month, and happy birthday to the BBC, which is a century old this year. They are both institutions that we can all be proud of; they are the best of Wales and the best of British in so many ways, and I am very proud to have worked for both and for ITV Wales—so I don't leave them out.

To address your question, yes, I think they have a track record in Wales—S4C, in particular, over the past 40 years—of not only nurturing creative talent, but developing the craft skills that have made Wales such an important place for the media, and such an attractive destination. The great success of broadcasting in Wales, including Welsh language broadcasting and Welsh broadcasting, is that we have in Wales now a thriving independent sector, which is very creative and selling Scandi crime to Scandinavia and political thrillers to the US.

In a thriller called "Byw Celwydd", a Conservative-led Government is in charge of Wales—it is only in the land of fantasy that that would happen, but "Byw Celwydd" has shown that it could work. Plaid Cymru also take the helm at one point later in the series. But they managed to sell that to America. They have sold TV formats all over the world—to Japan and China. So it is a fantastic success story and something which, for me, is too rare in Wales—a thriving independent sector of small producers. They might start off doing stuff for subsidised public sector organisations, but they end up taking advantage of the global market out there.



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If I could make a plea right at the start, I would encourage this inquiry to think of how to encourage that organic development, and how to unleash it, not restrain it. There is a tendency in general—perhaps even more in Wales—when we see something free, organic and going somewhere, to try to pin it down and over-govern it, making it answerable to too many different separate bodies. That is a mistake. We should have the confidence to think that these are great organisations; they should be unleashed, encouraged to grow and encouraged to make the most of it.

The final thing to say is that it is a challenging time. It is challenging, in that we now live in a world of infinite choice, in media terms, and of fierce competition. Getting noticed as a public service broadcaster can be hard, and getting noticed as a Welsh language public service broadcaster can be even harder. As well as adequate funding, there needs to be the right attitude—a bullish attitude to see the opportunities in this brave new world, and not to see it just as a threat.

Q2 Chair: That is helpful, thank you. Broadly, you struck an upbeat and optimistic note. What would give you reason to be concerned, or even reason to be pessimistic, about the future of broadcasting in Wales?

Guto Harri: The concern is that it is drowned out—that we struggle to notice what is available—when the choice is so vast these days. When we had a choice of four TV stations, or even four radio stations, in many ways—I am old and haggard enough to remember that—you had a 25% chance of being watched if you were S4C and there were only four choices. Now, it is not like that.

Where S4C has maybe not succeeded so far is in matching the fantastic programmes that are often commissioned, with an aggressive, upbeat, ambitious communications strategy. That means that those wonderful plays that have been commissioned—those dramas—such as “Bang”, filmed in Port Talbot, are actually sold abroad. It is good gear when you get it. But a lot of people, even in Port Talbot, not to mention the rest of Wales, probably did not realise it was on when it was.

You have got to fight your corner. It may be a Welsh tendency—it is certainly a tendency among broadcast institutions in Wales—to be a little downbeat, always moaning that there is not enough money or that there is something else round the corner that is a threat. There is a great big world out there, where there is a lot of money to sustain creative production, wherever it is in the world.

There is also a big audience out there. There is more than 100 million quid every year to produce Welsh language programming. That is quite a lot of money, and there are quite a lot of good programmes. We should be upbeat and positive, but also determined about it.

Q3 Rob Roberts: Bore da, Mr Harri. It is always a great enjoyment for us all when the interviewer is on the other side of the desk, but we’ll be gentle—it’s okay. We appreciate your time. What do you think should be the role of public service broadcasting in Wales in the modern era?



Guto Harri: Public service broadcasting is basically filling gaps where the market cannot deliver what is needed. In a world where some people think that Netflix or other streaming services offer them all they need, somebody has to produce programmes that are not going to work on a global stage, because people want to know about Pontypridd, Cardiff, Wales or the UK.

The joy of something like Netflix is that you can have a story about a sweaty bunch of nasty blokes in Columbia, speaking a language that most people in the UK don't speak, yet "Narcos" can become a global hit, because it touches on universal truths. I am all in favour of getting the universal from the specific, but you also need the specific from the universal.

We need examples of things such as "Bang", filmed in Port Talbot, or "Un Bore Mercher", which some of you will know as "Keeping Faith", which are literally rooted in the landscape of Wales. They have recognisable Welsh characters and characteristics, and they are filmed in Wales, creating jobs and opportunities.

The public service extends to filling the gaps, so that people see the world that they know intimately on telly, and hear it on the radio; it is not just about going universal, and blankets, at all times.

Q4 **Rob Roberts:** Would that have been a different answer if I had asked, "What should be the role of public service broadcasting in the 21st century?", without saying, "in Wales"? Would that have been a different answer generally?

Guto Harri: There is an added ingredient in Wales because the market is going to struggle to cater for the Welsh language, which is small but precious. I had the joy of interviewing you in your native Welsh.

Rob Roberts: I fumbled my way through it.

Guto Harri: It's important, although it may be small. One of the problems I had with the phrase "the many not the few" is where in that phrase, with its utilitarian bent, is the recognition of the preciousness of a half million people who speak this ancient language, which means an awful lot to so many of us? You need specific provisions to ensure that that language gets a chance to survive and thrive, to move into the modern age and to be on platforms where confident, young Welsh-speaking people, often living outside Wales, are keen to encounter it. You need an infrastructure and ecosystem that will support that.

Q5 **Rob Roberts:** Do you feel that public service broadcasters in Wales are receiving adequate funding to deliver the things that they need?

Guto Harri: You will probably hate me for saying this, but one of the things that is depressing is that various Secretaries of State have complained to me that, when they meet people from the world of television, they think, "This is going to be fun today. They are going to talk about the latest stars that are filming. Maybe they'll even invite me on



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set." Matt Hancock was very keen to go on set, and he has now fulfilled his ambition many times over, but he said, "All they ever want to talk about is adequate funding, even when it has been secured," as it was recently by, I think, the last Conservative Government but two.

There is a lot of money for Welsh language programming. There is more than £100 million a year when you add the programmes that are produced for the BBC for S4C, so I do not think, necessarily, that it is a matter of funding. I do think, and have thought for a long time, that it is better to produce less and have something that a lot of people will get out of the mix than it is to sustain a linear channel where you have Welsh from dawn until dusk, but audiences are tiny, and great programmes that are overlooked because they are not marketed properly. As so often in other walks of life, sometimes a little less is a lot more—not that I am advocating a cut in funding; I think it is pretty good.

Non-Welsh speakers in Wales can sometimes feel vaguely cheated that there is not enough that reflects their world. Most of them are very proud of the Welsh language and have ownership of it, but a lot more money goes into Welsh language programmes in Wales than goes into English language programmes that are rooted in Wales. Even though Wales has become a significant production centre for "Doctor Who", "His Dark Materials" and other network programmes, there is nothing particularly Welsh about "Doctor Who" or "His Dark Materials" that says, "Thank God that was produced in Cardiff, not anywhere else in the world." So it is about showing the gritty reality of life in Wales, and S4C has probably contributed more to that than so-called network broadcasters.

Q6 **Rob Roberts:** I want to move on to a slightly different topic. You worked in Downing Street for—I was going to say "the previous Prime Minister", but he is the previous Prime Minister now. When you were there, obviously, Government policy was to privatise Channel 4. As far as you are aware now, what is the future of that policy, and what do you think its impact on Wales might be?

Guto Harri: I am not sure it is for me to get into DCMS strategy on Channel 4 outside of Wales for the purposes of this; I will stay out of it. I was aware of the arguments on both sides, and the to-ing and fro-ing. A few decades ago, it would have had a lot of impact for Wales, but now, even though there could be a knock-on effect on the work that some companies in Wales sell to Channel 4 outside of Wales, I think the direct impact is less significant.

Q7 **Rob Roberts:** My final, brief question is this: in terms of news coverage as a public service, have you always felt that public service broadcasting in Wales has reported the news in an entirely neutral and impartial way, or has there been a tendency towards one political outlook rather than another?

Guto Harri: I struggle to see what you are getting at there! As I said when I was proud to take on the role as presenter of "Y Byd yn ei Le", which was trying to do things slightly differently, journalism in Wales could



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be a lot more muscular and a lot more probing than it is; it should make politicians in Cardiff feel uncomfortable.

I have just been at the receiving end of arguably the most brutal press and media in the world here in London, but that is right. The Prime Minister I served has always been very clear that he wants a robust press, because a strong, robust, independent press that is prepared to kick you and hold you to account is a driver in our democracy for taking better decisions. I am not sure that the press and media in Cardiff and across Wales are sufficiently robust and questioning in holding the Administration in Cardiff to account, as they should, nor that they are remotely as tough as the press and media are here in holding this Conservative Government to account.

Q8 Chair: Before I bring in Ben Lake, can I just follow up by asking why you think they are less robust?

Guto Harri: In London, there is a strong newspaper section and there are very distinguished editors. They tend to not be shy about their views of the world or about putting forward those views. We do not have much of an independent press in Wales. WalesOnline is heroically doing its best, and there are still some local papers. There are Welsh publications. The whole world heard about *Golwg* when I got my job in No. 10, and *Barn* is an excellent magazine—I will not name all of them. They do their best, but there isn't a *Spectator*, a *Daily Telegraph* or a *Daily Mail* to condition the landscape.

What you do have is a very dominant public service media presence, which is now really well resourced. I was part of a tiny team covering Wales in Parliament before power was devolved—there were four or five of us. There are now vast numbers of people covering the Welsh Senedd in Cardiff, as there should be, but there seems to be—dare I say it?—a slightly beige, soggy consensus about it.

How often do you hear a challenge about the fact that one in five people in Wales are on NHS waiting lists; that educational standards were so bad at one point that they stopped measuring them; and that there was one FTSE 100 company in Wales when power was devolved, and there is still one FTSE 100 company in Wales? Child poverty was meant to be the top priority for a Labour-led Administration, and years down the line Mark Drakeford had to admit on “Y Byd yn ei Le” that it remains a shocking indictment of poor administration in Cardiff.

A robust press that was a little less cosy and a little harder hitting—as they are happy to be about the Conservative Government in London—and that applied to Cardiff a bit of the feistiness that they bring to the debate about Westminster would do everyone a world of good.

Q9 Virginia Crosbie: That was an excellent answer. I just want to ask for your thoughts about one issue. It seems that the media in Wales is a training ground for a lot of MSs and politicians. Could that be part of the issue? We also have the likes of Nation.Cymru, which I understand is



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financed by UK taxpayers' money, which goes to the Welsh Government, then to a book grant and then to Nation.Cymru. There are things like that going on.

Guto Harri: The media in London sometimes nurtures people who end up working for the Government in London—I am living proof of that. The problem—I don't mean this to be insulting—is that we have a one-party state, in many ways, in Wales. There is very little prospect, other than in fictional TV dramas, of an Administration being formed in Cardiff that is not led by Labour. A very powerful party of Opposition has recently joined forces with it and has decided not to challenge the Labour Administration. The Administration needs to be held to account as a matter of healthy democracy, but that party has chosen to prop it up.

That is not healthy, and then, if you are trying to cut your way, it is always a gamble to give a hard time to a politician when you want a long career as a journalist. You may be tempted not to do that if you think that that politician is going to be in power ad infinitum.

Mark Drakeford has been a prominent feature of the scene, from the legislation to devolve right through to becoming First Minister, so if you had upset him back in 1996, your journalistic career in Wales would have been quite hampered for a long time since. That is not very healthy. There has to be a prospect at some point of a change of Government. I appreciate that is a challenge for the parties; it is not for Labour to give to the others.

Chair: We will bring in Ben Lake, who is going to drag the questioning back to the core issues in front of us.

Q10 **Ben Lake:** I shall behave. I will come back to the script, Chair. Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi, Mr Harri, am ymuno gyda ni bore 'ma. Mae'n bleser eich gweld chi yn eich sedd. *[Translation: Thank you very much, Mr Harri, for joining us this morning. It is a pleasure to see you in your place.]*

I am supposed to ask about the growth of on-demand and subscription services. I am interested to know your thoughts about how public service broadcasters should respond to the rise of on-demand and streaming services.

Guto Harri: That is a really good question. The starting point for most public service broadcasters, certainly a few years ago, was to be frightened of these great big global mammoths with these massive budgets that were going to dwarf anything the BBC network or ITV in London, not to mention in Wales, could put together, but now we can all see them as opportunities as well. There are companies in Wales that have sold directly to Netflix.

Netflix commissioned a series called "The Crown", which you may have read a little about recently—there is a slight controversy about it. "The Crown" managed to do two episodes on Welsh issues that were more refreshingly insightful into Wales in many ways than anything any homegrown public service broadcaster had ever produced. There was an



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episode about the now King being taught Welsh in Aberystwyth and staying in Pantycelyn. I don't think you have seen that anywhere else. It took Netflix to commission something that showed that. The episode on Aberfan was very poignant—not just because everything about Aberfan is very poignant. It was extremely insightful into the Welsh psyche. Again, that cannot be a negative thing.

For a very current, topical issue, I know that a lot of fellow Welsh men and women, my mother among them, were frustrated last Saturday that they could not watch the near miss that Wales had against the All Blacks—for the first hour at least—on free-to-view S4C.

I have to say that when one of the biggest companies and best known brands in the world is not only staging a game in my native Cardiff but offering a very strong team of commentators, in the language of heaven, on the Amazon platform globally, in a funny sort of way that is great progress for the status and prominence of the Welsh language. It is hard to weigh up; if you really want to watch it in Welsh, then there aren't many people who do not have access to Amazon, one way or the other. They can watch it and they will find that the coverage is technically as good, and the Welsh was immaculate—as it always is.

It is tough to get the balance right between not losing an important source of audience and a justification for revenue for S4C, with the opportunities for the Welsh language to grow into a more modern and normal part of modern life.

Q11 Ben Lake: Sticking with the example you gave of last Saturday's near miss—as you generously depicted it—how confident are you that Welsh language provision will be a feature of plans long term? Do you think there needs to be any sort of Government consideration of that?

The argument is—whether it is right or wrong, I would be interested to know your thoughts—that the Welsh language provision will be set up for the first few years, the viewing figures, partly because it is a subscription service, will go down and then they have a convenient excuse to dispose of that provision. What do you say to that argument?

Guto Harri: I know historically there has been provision in the contracts that rugby union has had, and maybe other sports, that whoever gets the rights—usually S4C—there has to be somebody who is allowing people to watch those big events in the language of heaven. I am tempted by that, although I am also instinctively anxious about an overbearing, over-regulated diktat that sometimes distorts what ought to be for public service broadcasters.

I can see the attraction of a ubiquitous platform and—notwithstanding my mother who struggles with the iPad—it will not be long before things like Amazon are ubiquitous. So it will be hard to argue that everyone who wants to watch couldn't watch—and watch affordably.

Q12 Ruth Jones: Just to ask, following on from the sport behind the paywall, Wales is very much an armchair nation watching sport—



Guto Harri: And playing it rather well at times.

- Q13 **Ruth Jones:** At times, yes—leaving Saturday aside. As somebody who did watch it on Amazon Prime on Saturday, I am very aware that lots of constituents could not access that. Putting the converse argument to you, how do you deal with people who say, “I would like it”? What happens if it goes to different platforms for different events, and then you have to have a subscription for Amazon, for Netflix or for whatever? That then comes down to cost, and we know that in Wales the cost of living is biting. How are people going to deal with that to access their sport?

Guto Harri: That is a very good question, and it is frustrating for all of us that when you want to watch various things you end up with five or six different subscriptions and you pine for the days when there were only a few terrestrial channels. But then you realise there were only four of those, and you were often frustrated. It is a good question, and one for the Committee to have a think about.

Somewhere in the mix should there have to be a consensus that a platform makes a bigger effort when it has the rights to something very exclusive and hugely desirable, be that Wimbledon across the UK or rugby in Wales—should there be an added responsibility on them to make that accessible? Maybe that is one way to go, or the market in time will consolidate and some of those things will come together. Again, there you just want to make sure that things like rugby in Cardiff on a Saturday are not thrown overboard. It is a good question and worth considering, but I don’t start from the basis that it’s a bad thing for a global platform to be hosting something that is happening in Cardiff and doing so with the option of us tuning in and listening in the Welsh language. I think that is a very positive thing for Iaith Cymraeg.

- Q14 **Kevin Brennan:** Bore da; good morning, Mr Harri.

Guto Harri: Bore da.

Kevin Brennan: I am quite surprised at your taking that position, because obviously, under Mrs Thatcher’s Government, S4C was created by an Act of Parliament specifically in order to provide a Welsh language service that was free to air, through the guise of a public service broadcaster, and in order to help the precious jewel—as I think you have described it—of the Welsh language to survive and flourish, and of course vital to that is to have popular events and programming available on that platform, free to air, to the Welsh public.

I understand what you are saying. It’s nice that people can see there is a button that says “Do you want the commentary in Welsh?” when they pay their Amazon Prime subscription in California and watch the rugby—actually, I don’t know whether the rights are territorial; they are probably territorial to the UK, so that’s probably not true. But I am quite surprised you take that position rather than taking the position that this is a legitimate intervention. If you believe in the concept of public service broadcasting, why would you lock this kind of content in a cupboard, away from the public?



Guto Harri: Again, it is a good question, but for me, the point is that we have to acknowledge an environment that is dynamic. Back when people like my father went to prison to get S4C established and others were prepared to starve themselves to death—I understand all the sentiment behind it, but back then a linear channel was the prize. The linear channel was the default—

Q15 **Kevin Brennan:** The Welsh language was the prize, not the channel.

Guto Harri: Well—but the format. So, for me, the prize now is, again, video content in the Welsh language that is accessible on platforms that people use in this day and age. We are in transition at the moment. Some people will not transit from a linear channel to a more promiscuous dipping in and out and leaving one platform for another—those may not quite be the right words, but I think that is the challenge.

You cannot expect the next generation or even mine, people as old as me, who will dip from one thing to the other for everything else, to accept, when it comes to the Welsh language, that that will be something where you sit down and at 6 o'clock you will be able to see it and at 7 o'clock you won't.

S4C is now available on Clic and on iPlayer. I think the challenge is to make sure that the prominence of Welsh language programmes on iPlayer and on Clic and the prominence of Clic as an app—or, if it was decided just to use iPlayer, the prominence of Welsh content on that—are worthy of the public service remit that is being fulfilled.

Q16 **Kevin Brennan:** To respond briefly on that point, prominence is obviously a changing concept in a world of streaming and when linear broadcasting—it isn't disappearing, by the way, but there is a decline. There is talk that the Government are not committed now to the media Bill or perhaps are dragging their heels a bit on the media Bill. It would guarantee prominence and update the prominence regime for broadcasting, including Welsh language broadcasting and all public service broadcasting.

Prominence in the world of the app is a different thing altogether. In the deregulatory, free market philosophy you were just espousing, public service broadcasting presumably should not be given prominence, in this world of the competing app, in the way Parliament has always intended it should be because we think it has value.

Guto Harri: You make it sound very black or white, whereas I think, on most matters, I'm a 50 shades of grey kind of guy—

Kevin Brennan: No comment.

Guto Harri: It is not unrestrained free market stuff. Last time I checked and, indeed, when I was involved in promoting the White Paper, there was a commitment to the funding of S4C at a decent rate for the next few years, including for digital transformation. There was a guarantee of prominence. There was a recognition of its unique role in the rich cultural heritage of the entire United Kingdom, not only in Wales.



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Those were really positive things and, to boot, I managed to persuade this former nurse and best-selling author from Liverpool to put out a tweet in the Welsh language. She was the Secretary of State at DCMS at the time. My disappointment then was that there was not even recognition from prominent broadcasters in Wales that this had been secured. I nudged people. I rang some people and said, "Have you seen that the DCMS Secretary has put out three things that you have been calling for for a long time? Maybe you want to recognise them and say, 'I'm going to bank that'." The problem otherwise—

Q17 **Kevin Brennan:** On the prominence—

Guto Harri: Prominence was granted then, and there was no "Great. We'll have that." You have to understand why some people then think, "Well, that was a bit of a thankless task. Nobody seems to care as much about prominence as we thought they did, because they have not actually grabbed it when we have offered it."

Q18 **Kevin Brennan:** So the reason the Government are dragging their feet on the media Bill is not because they are no longer interested in it, and because Channel 4 privatisation is off the table, and therefore Wales is not important and there is no Guto Harri in Government to speak up for Wales.

Guto Harri: I will not get into this Government, but I will come back to the point that prominence is, as I said, unprompted, important. Prominence on the right platforms that people choose to use in a world that is evolving dynamically is an important thing. Even if it is a thankless task, I encourage the Government of the day to do the right thing on all occasions.

Q19 **Chair:** I am going to bring in Virginia in a moment, but can I ask a supplementary question? You spoke earlier quite movingly about the precious Welsh language and the importance of the linear channel of S4C as a guardian of the Welsh language. You then went on to talk about the inevitability of the new platforms and how important it was for Welsh to stand up as a modern language on these global platforms.

Do you see a time in the future when the linear channel effectively withers away because its audience becomes increasingly elderly, and younger generations look to these new platforms? Do you think there is a diminishing importance of the linear channel as a guardian of the Welsh language?

Guto Harri: I think, as with so many things, that the death of linear television is much exaggerated and it has a lot of life left in it yet, but the direction of travel is inevitable. If you are planning for success for decades to come and to reverse decades of decline in the Welsh language by ensuring its survival and that it thrives in the modern world and holds its own, you should plan now: how do you get spotted in this world where everything is here?

Something like *The Economist*, if I can use a parallel, used to be a magazine that came through the post or you bought it in the newsagent's.



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Now *The Economist* is doing particularly well on Snapchat. I started reading it at a very young age, but I was a bit of a political geek in those days. Most young people do not read *The Economist*, but it is surprisingly popular on Snapchat. Again, there is a world where, if you hire the best and you put as much effort into the marketing and communications as you do into the creative process, you will reach these audiences, and they are potentially bigger. The number of people who watch S4C now outside Wales often equals and sometimes exceeds the number of people watching it in Wales.

There are interesting questions to think about there—about the content and the impact—but it is a good thing. I have a son in Taiwan, for instance, who is Welsh speaking. He wanted to tune into a game and could watch it on Amazon, even if my mother in Cardiff was pissed off that she could not see it on S4C. Again, we have to not switch off the channel, and not chuck someone in the pool to see if they can swim, but we have to plan for a world that is transitioning.

Chair: Thank you. I will not ask for the Welsh language translation of one of your phrases there.

Q20 **Virginia Crosbie:** I first wanted to start by saying diolch yn fawr—thank you—for all you have done to encourage me to speak in Welsh on the media. I had a memorable interview with you talking about Sue Gray in Welsh on S4C.

I have a question that relates to the Welsh media and what it does for politics. Does it represent Wales in terms of politics? I also want to talk about whether it reflects culture. I know you have touched on some of this. You have produced some great programmes. I remember you did one on S4C talking about how Adam Price, the leader of Plaid Cymru, does not support nuclear. My personal experience is that Ynys Môn is covered by five members of the Senedd. Health is devolved, yet 25% of my postbag is health, so could the media do more to communicate the politics, certainly about devolution, and who is responsible for what?

Guto Harri: Yes, that is important. The misunderstanding means that constituents are not served as well as they should be. They need an appreciation of who is in charge so that they can take their gripe to the right place. God forbid that any politician is praised, but some of you deserve praise, so the praise must be granted where it belongs. The challenge is that, every time people decide that that has to be done, this rather dull piece is done: “Now, this is what the Welsh Senedd is responsible for, and this is what Westminster is responsible for.” It’s boring.

It is in the telling on a day-to-day basis about where a decision is taken, who took it and what that means for your kid, your partner, you or your community. It should be woven into everything, and the problem is that it is not. Maybe structurally there are people who cover Westminster and there are people who cover the Senedd. Actually, the people covering politics in Wales should be equally versed in both, because the decision on



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Wylfa was taken in No. 10 Downing Street, yet it has an impact on the lives of your constituents, and on the energy independence of Wales, which is hopefully a matter of concern to the Government in the Senedd.

Those of us who tell the stories have to become so familiar with how the structures work that we do not bore people with: "Now you need to know that this is about 80 people who sit in Cardiff, or 60 people who do this." You just say, "This was a decision taken by him, or by her, or over there," and bring it to life, and say, "What does it mean for you? Do you want your kid to be taught certain things about sex education in school?"

Start with the debate. "No, I don't," or "Yes, I do." Who has decided that he or she has to be taught x? Take your gripe there. Journalism is exciting. Journalism is critical. That is where you need engaging, dynamic, interesting, well-produced journalism for the sake of democracy, and for the sake of audiences. If your journalism is more exciting, guess what? More people will watch as well.

- Q21 **Virginia Crosbie:** Exactly. Was it Sean Taylor who heads up Zip World who said that there is more to Wales than sheep and rugby? You mentioned Cardiff. The feeling that I get is that it is very Cardiff-centric. We had a big meeting yesterday with the Welsh Government about the Menai bridge, and there were lots of concerns that Cardiff is not focusing on north Wales.

When the Prime Minister came to Wylfa it was just mentioned that it was in Wales rather than north Wales. We see this again and again. Do you think that that is because we are very Cardiff-centric in terms of our media? For me, on Ynys Môn, I have "Rownd a Rownd" and S4C, and I have a lot of investment on Anglesey, but I do not think that that is extrapolated across the rest of north Wales.

Guto Harri: I always hesitate to balkanise Wales. We are small enough as it is. There is this idea that a north Walian does this and a south Walian does that. It may be because my dad was from Anglesey and my mum from Carmarthen, but I always hesitate to go there, because what is in our interest is to have a conversation where we appreciate that what happens on Ynys Môn, if there is to be a nuclear power station there, helps people in the south Wales valleys to have cheaper bills down the line.

It is joining the dots, rather than separating us again. When plans for Wylfa went backwards a few years ago, Ministers in Cardiff said, "This has nothing to do with us. This is not a devolved matter." Well, you may not have formal powers over this, but if you do not feel like picking up the phone to the company that is about to pull out, destroying jobs in an important and much-loved part of Wales, you are again not focused appropriately in Cardiff, not to mention in Westminster.

- Q22 **Virginia Crosbie:** My last question relates to the cultural role. We have had some great representations to the Welsh Affairs Committee about how important the Welsh language is, how we have so much to offer, and how we are really not getting the money from overseas visitors. Part of that is that there isn't a Welsh tourism Minister—clearly, with the tourism



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tax coming into place. S4C does a great job talking about the Eisteddfod, and really promoting the culture. Do you think that there is a lot more that we could do to promote the culture of Wales as a tourism destination?

Guto Harri: Yes; if you look at some of the crime dramas, at something like “Y Gwyll”—or “Hinterland”—which is set in Ben Lake’s neck of the woods, it doesn’t have to be a tourist information film for you to think, “My God, apart from that grisly murder, that’s a really beautiful landscape. Note to self: next holiday, consider going there, if I can find out exactly where it is.” Before you know it, you’re teaching Americans about Pontarfynach and places like that, if they can pronounce them. Again, I think that is something that should be woven into the fabric, rather than having a tsar, a commissioner or a separate Minister to promote it.

Chair: Rob has a quick supplementary question, before we ask Ruth to come in.

Q23 **Rob Roberts:** We spoke a bit about this already—the coverage around news, and what is devolved and what is not. It’s boring; you are completely right. Our constituents and viewers in Wales, particularly in north Wales, watch “BBC Breakfast”, “Good Morning Britain” and “Sky News”, because they are the three that you would watch in the morning.

Every morning there is a UK Government Minister, and there is never any representation from Wales—or from Scotland for that matter, for the same reasons. In line with that, how can we cut through? How can we get that notice and that attention, when all the things that people watch all the time are UK Government-centric?

Guto Harri: At the risk of upsetting colleagues from many years in the media, I tend to be a radio man; I tend to think radio in general is more intimate, immediate and intelligent. Certainly in the morning, I prefer radio to television, and you have the options of Radio Cymru, Radio Wales, LBC Radio—which is now available across the UK—and there are Welsh correspondents for GB News.

There are options where a lot more prominence is given to news that is closer to you. Those outlets have got to compete and be relevant. They have got to give people the right mix of knowing what Putin is doing in Ukraine—which is appalling—and what’s going on at COP27, as well as what’s going on down the road in Delyn.

Q24 **Ruth Jones:** You have very clearly identified that you are optimistic about the Welsh language going forward. You are not quite so optimistic about linear TV such as S4C, for instance. We know now that funding for S4C is coming entirely from the licence fee. Is that sustainable going forward?

Guto Harri: At the moment, the BBC is compelled to allocate a decent sum of money to S4C, and that is a good thing. The challenge, which is a very important one for this Committee, is to work out how you guarantee that going forward.



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You can see a world of tension where the BBC will perhaps struggle to bring in an amount of money, and it will grow less accommodating to the idea that a substantial allocation of its precious funds is going to another channel. There is tension there; I'm not quite sure how you answer it.

One of the successes of the last few decades, and I think particularly Ron Davies and Rhodri Morgan are responsible for this—not to mention Conservative Governments—is that the Welsh language is now owned by Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers. There is a pride in its success, and hopefully that sustains it.

One of the realities, if you are gently drawing me into the discussion about devolving broadcasting, is that if you do end up in a situation where Ministers in Cardiff are deciding whether to take money off broadcasting to give to schools and hospitals or to economic regeneration, that is a brutal Darwinian world in which the Welsh language has to compete.

Although I think the argument for devolving broadcasting is intellectually and politically a no-brainer, the paradox is that most people who care about the future success of Welsh-language broadcasting would shudder at the idea that it could be at the mercy of the Government in a one-party state in Cardiff.

Ruth Jones: I was not going down that route, but it is very interesting—

Guto Harri: I pre-empted that question.

Q25 **Ruth Jones:** Yes; I am sure we will pick it up in future parts of our investigation, so thank you for that.

You mentioned local radio. For example, we have heard concerns about the fact that the amount of Welsh language coverage at Radio Ceredigion has been reduced recently. Do you think that local community radio in Wales is sufficiently supported, both financially and with other resources?

Guto Harri: The danger is that we want to centrally decide what is needed out there. The proof is, do people want to listen? If they do not want to listen, as long as that organisation—that platform—has been given a fighting chance, you have to ask, what are we offering that service for?

One of the things I have felt over the years is that, for Welsh-speaking colleagues, it is not a duty to watch Welsh-language programmes and listen to them, but if you do not, your argument for asking for more money, more privileges and more opportunities is thoroughly weakened by the fact that you are not taking advantage of what is there.

Having done the phone-in programme on Radio Wales in your neck of the woods, I know that there is a strong audience, and they are great company and great speakers. Radio Wales is very dynamic like that. I know a little less about Radio Ceredigion and how the audience there would choose Radio Ceredigion over Radio Cymru. There is an argument that Radio Cymru should be prioritised and Radio Ceredigion could be cannibalising what is already a small audience.



Q26 Kevin Brennan: I want to challenge you on the phrase “one-party state”. There are four parties in the Senedd, and the Labour party in Wales has never held a workable majority in the Senedd because of proportional representation, which, of course, was part of the original Labour proposals when you knew Ron Davies very well back in the ‘90s and we were hanging around this place together.

I want to pursue the point about the devolution of broadcasting. It is interesting that when you talk to people from broadcasting in Wales privately, they tend to say different things from what they say in public. Leaving aside your phrase “one-party state”, is this proposal to devolve broadcasting to Wales a solution in search of a problem?

Guto Harri: That is a good one. I know the Senedd has its own inquiry at the moment that is looking into this, and I participated in one session what felt like quite a long time ago now.

Intellectually, to argue that Nadine Dorries, who was at the DCMS when I served in Government here, should be responsible for Welsh broadcasting, not Jeremy Miles or Eluned Morgan or Mark Drakeford, is a tough one for a devolutionist, not to mention a Welsh nationalist. It is a really hard argument to make intellectually, and yet you are right: in private, they all shudder at the idea, and they are happier somehow that Jeremy Hunt and whoever is in the DCMS at the time—

Q27 Kevin Brennan: It is not just about who is Secretary of State; it is also the complexity of trying to unravel things like Ofcom and the BBC, and how you devolve the licence fee. It is all those sorts of issues that mean that when I speak to people, they are not necessarily saying, “It’s because we’re afraid that Enver Hoxha will become First Minister and there’ll be a one-party state.” It is because of the way broadcasting works in practice and a fear that it would diminish, rather than enhance, Wales’s opportunity to be a leader in broadcasting, media and the creative industries.

Guto Harri: I think it is both. First, there is this “familiarity breeds contempt—and babies.” It is something about the rules of the game. It is not like putting broadcasting in the mix with schools and hospitals and all that, because, as we have discussed, broadcasting is part of what is meant to be a pressure on democracy to be better. It is therefore important that those who are on the receiving end of broadcasters are not able to influence those broadcasters disproportionately. Just sending it up the M4 helps to a certain extent, weird though it may look in practice. You are right.

The other thing is, what do you devolve? Creative decision making, commissioning and all that is already devolved; it is in Wales that those decisions are made. In terms of finance, if the allocation of the BBC licence fee just went according to where you draw the map, the amount allocated to Wales would go down. If you devolved it so that only licence fee money raised in Wales would be spent in Wales, that would mean that the amount of licence fee money spent in Wales would fall, which is not something that most people would argue for.



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It is complex, and it is for others to work through that. I see the tension on both sides. Nine times out of 10, when the argument for change is not overwhelming, you're better with the devil you know.

- Q28 **Ben Lake:** A lot has been made in recent years of the growth of social media and how that impacts the news environment. What are the opportunities and challenges of the growth of social media platforms on the way that news is circulated?

Guto Harri: I remember thinking years ago that Facebook in particular—I tend to use Facebook; I find Twitter a brutal, hostile environment—was ideal for Welsh speakers. As scattered as we are, which is quite thinly in some places, you have a meeting place online where you discover there are an awful lot of people like you.

The internet has meant that there are a whole load of undesirable people there, too, but for Welsh speakers, it is fantastic to see what is going on in terms of social media. That can be harnessed to promote Welsh content in a better way and to create a sense that the community of Welsh speakers is not territorially limited.

A few decades ago, I remember there literally was a powerful movement—Adfer—advocating that everyone went to live either in Virginia's constituency or yours, like the Navajo, and we would have a reservation for Welsh speakers. That was never a solution for me. I grew up in Cardiff and I am proud to be a Welsh speaker from Cardiff from when it was a lot less Welsh speaking than it is now. Opportunity online for the language is vast and the Welsh media has yet to harness that as effectively as it should to promote content, whether that be news or creative content.

Stephen Crabb: Any final questions? We are coming to the end of our hour with Mr Guto Harri. Any final supplementaries from colleagues?

- Q29 **Kevin Brennan:** You said something striking earlier about content for non-Welsh speakers on Welsh media, and I think you said that they can feel cheated. Do you think more should be done to address that and how so?

Guto Harri: Yes, in theory. I think the good people at S4C are conscious of that and therefore drama series have been commissioned that are shown first in Welsh and have been recorded in Welsh.

- Q30 **Kevin Brennan:** There are some who are very resistant to that being done. What is your answer to that?

Guto Harri: You could say that S4C has contributed more content for non-Welsh speakers in Wales than any other organisation, but then it has quite a lot of money.

The danger when you start painting by numbers is that I cannot imagine a broadcast authority in Wales or a Welsh broadcaster commissioning "Gavin & Stacey". That came organically from two great people who found each other and thought, "Wouldn't it hilarious if you brought your world of Essex to my world of Barry Island?" and that is where the magic was



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made. "Gavin & Stacey" has done more to put south Wales on the map than almost anything else, apart from "The Crown"—or even more than "The Crown".

That is the challenge, but I am hesitant to suggest that there is a structural governance answer. It is more to do with having good people placed in the right places who are proud and bullish about their Welsh background and prepared to push that forward where it matters. That is more of a cultural and personal thing than it is about structures and organisations.

Q31 Stephen Crabb: Do you think there is a deep-seated problem about public service broadcasters attracting younger viewers or is that the kind of lazy thinking that has crept in? Are we overstating it?

Guto Harri: We often confuse content with platforms. People say, "Young people don't sit down and watch the 6 o'clock news". No, but I have two boys who are 20 and they read stuff on the BBC website or seeded from the BBC website on to the platforms where they are at—you mentioned *The Economist* on Snapchat.

If you look at who is producing the content, there is a value and real premium to something that has the stamp of credibility from being from one of the most trusted news organisations in the history of broadcasting in the case of the BBC. There is a premium on that and young people are conscious of it.

Whether they choose to sit down at 6 o'clock to see it in one neat package is ultimately a bit like the conversation about S4C: it does not matter, as long as they do not start to think that citizen journalism is journalism and that stuff produced by YouTubers meets the ethical, legal and cultural quality of established broadcasters in the UK. Over time, those who care will appreciate that, and maybe the broadcasters need to be more proud of it as well.

Chair: That brings us to 11 o'clock. Guto Harri, thank you for your time and reflections. It has been an interesting, insightful and enjoyable session. Diolch yn fawr.