



HOUSE OF COMMONS

# Welsh Affairs Committee

## Oral evidence: Broadcasting in Wales, HC 620

Wednesday 1 March 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 March 2023.

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Members present: Stephen Crabb (Chair); Virginia Crosbie; Wayne David; Geraint Davies; Ruth Jones; Ben Lake; Rob Roberts; Beth Winter.

Questions 130 - 152

### Witnesses

I: Toby Ellis, Station Manager, Director and Broadcaster, Pure West Radio and Terry Mann, Station Manager, GTFM Radio.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Toby Ellis and Terry Mann.

Q130 **Chair:** Bore da, good morning. Dydd gŵyl Dewi hapus, happy St David's day, and welcome to this meeting of the Welsh Affairs Committee, where we are continuing our inquiry into broadcasting in Wales. We are delighted to be joined this morning, as we look at the role of local radio in the broadcasting landscape, by Toby Ellis, station manager, director and broadcaster from Pure West Radio in Pembrokeshire—good morning. We are joined virtually by Terry Mann, who is the station manager of GTFM in south Wales—welcome, Mr Mann. We will go straight into it; I ask my colleague Beth Winter to start the questioning, please.

**Beth Winter:** Dydd gŵyl Dewi hapus i chi and croeso. It is lovely to have local radios, including one from my constituency, GTFM. The first question is: do you feel that Wales is losing its voice among Britain's radio stations and what can be done to lift it up?

**Toby Ellis:** I feel that radio is in a very strong place now, especially in Wales and in Pembrokeshire, in our county. We have a great thriving local radio station that is broadcast online and has a huge, diverse demographic. We have various specific Welsh language shows and we include the Welsh language as much as possible. It is in a very good place moving forward. With the exciting news of the small-scale DAB application, there is even an earmarked specific Welsh show and Welsh station that could potentially launch on that. I feel that it is in a good, strong place.

**Terry Mann:** We are in an optimistic situation in the sense that community radio is bringing genuinely local radio back to Wales. A lot of places do not have it at this level. That is a positive thing. Our sustainability is the issue. On the bigger picture, commercial radio has partly left the party and is doing a lot of programming from outside Wales, but that gives an opportunity for stations like ours to fill the gap and reinvent local radio. Younger generations are hearing local radio like ours for the first time and a lot of them tuned in during the pandemic.

Q131 **Beth Winter:** What do you contribute towards the landscape of radio in Wales and beyond with the coverage?

**Terry Mann:** The reduction of localness by the commercial stations is disappointing. I am bound to say that because I produced the first show ever broadcast in Wales in 1974 by independent local radio, when it was local radio and had full newsrooms and all of that. Personally, I regret that. I have seen it come and go in my career but, as I say, it gives the opportunity for community radio to fill the gap. The only issue is sustainability.

We are broadcasting through three FM transmitters. Beth, you know that we have opened one recently in Aberdare, where you are. We have two more on the stocks and then we turn our attention to DAB, all of which



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we have to do with external grant funding to build these things. It costs about £50,000 a year to run our station and to keep it going with volunteers.

**Beth Winter:** We will come on to the sustainability issue later. That is all from me now, diolch yn fawr.

Q132 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Mr Mann, you just used a phrase “reduction of localness”. What did you mean by that?

**Terry Mann:** It depends which way you are looking at it from. From the point of view of somebody who has produced local radio since the beginning of my career and jumped ship every few decades to follow it from the BBC to commercial and now to community, localness to me is looking out the window and saying, “Oh, it’s snowing, it’s not meant to be snowing. The weather forecast said it wouldn’t”, and following on from that kind of ramification to roads being closed, taxi firms ringing in to say that they cannot get up a hill and that sort of thing. That then snowballs, excuse the pun. That is localness to me, not just the local news and the traffic.

Q133 **Chair:** It is current, very real-time, local information being communicated through the station.

**Terry Mann:** Yes. It is being present in the community you are serving.

Q134 **Rob Roberts:** Good morning, gentlemen. There has been lots of innovation over the last five years in broadcasting generally, particularly in visual broadcasting, in streaming services and Netflix and all these things. I am interested in how you compete with that type of thing and how listening trends have changed among the public over five or 10 years.

**Terry Mann:** That is a very interesting question. Since the beginning of my career, radio has been forecast to disappear because it would be replaced by a visual medium like TV. When the internet came along, everyone said, “That’s the end of radio”, but it is not. Even in this digital generation, there does not seem to be any sign of radio going away. Younger people are not adopting traditional radio platforms. They do not know how to work granddad’s transistor radio in his potting shed. They do not have a clue how to work them; they listen on devices. However, radio is still being consumed by over 90% of the population, according to RAJAR, and there is no real sign of the appetite diminishing, although there is an age shift in the number of things that radio does.

To me, radio is not just the records. Streaming services can do that and they do it very well. It is what is in between and the relevance and the connectivity with the audience. That is still very much alive even though the BBC has faded out the word. It does not use the word “radio” at all; it talks about “sounds” now.



**Toby Ellis:** Radio has evolved a huge amount, especially during the pandemic. We had to switch up the way that we broadcast. Many stations now do not even have radio station studios and hubs per se. People are broadcasting from home, so the technological advances have had to happen, which meant that it opened up a different realm to us in accessibility. Pure West Radio is an online radio station and our issues have been about accessibility. Hopefully, I will come on to the issues that we have had to get on to FM and DAB, the more mainstream methods. As an online station, we amassed some 50,000 listeners a week during the pandemic—when our average before was about 21,000—because people were told to stay at home and they had the connectivity. With that you get younger demographics, you get people who may be digesting radio in a different fashion through smart speakers. You can now say, “Alexa, play Pure West Radio” and our radio station will play, so now we are dealing with the likes of Amazon instead of Ofcom to get these things moving forward.

You also have social media. We have a very big social media base as an online station. If I was to interview you today, for example, about this inquiry, we would do what we are doing right now. It would be broadcast on to our social media platforms. We get a reach of half a million a month on our Facebook alone. That makes you a local station broadcasting to people in Pembrokeshire but also all around the world. You get expats tuning in, you get people who are no longer in the county able to access that information. Radio is more accessible, to a degree.

The traditional methods are still very important and I feel that they have been very discarded by Ofcom. They are driving towards a digital future, which is very exciting, but when you get the DCMS saying that FM will not be turned off until 2030, it is a problem when they are not issuing FM licences.

To go back to your question, it is important that it is available on many different platforms and that it is accessible. With that, you get a wider demographic as well.

Q135 **Rob Roberts:** If you had 20,000-odd listeners before the pandemic and 50,000-odd during, what is it now?

**Toby Ellis:** We have managed to maintain 40,000 listeners a week. The issue why we have not grown and developed is because we are not on FM and DAB and we are not broadcasting into our designated spot because we are not able to obtain that licence.

Q136 **Rob Roberts:** Apart from the technological changes that you are talking about, have you had to make any changes to your programming and the type of things that you offer to try to keep people in, or has that remained relatively constant?

**Toby Ellis:** Our USP is local—hyperlocal. As Terry was saying, we produce good local content. If your dog has gone missing, you will get in



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touch with us. We will put a shout-out on the radio and if someone has seen it, we will relay that information and hopefully we can find your pooch. Great result. We have features like that.

During the pandemic, it was very much focused on local community groups and people supplying and being there for one another—the neighbour-next-door features and awareness, allowing people to know exactly who is where and doing what in the community. It is instrumental. As Terry said, radio is a wonderful medium, it is very powerful and it has stood the test of time, even through all the very interesting technological changes that have happened.

**Q137 Geraint Davies:** Terry, what are the main difficulties faced by local radio in funding and staffing? You will know that the BBC local radios are out on strike now, following a move—just after they grilled Liz Truss—to reduce the amount of local radios in England on the basis that they needed to switch towards digital. Is there a cut generally away from local journalism and is there a staffing shortage? Is that due to demand or supply cuts?

**Terry Mann:** We have no shortage of volunteers. If I could explain our structure, I am station manager but in an honorary capacity now—a voluntary capacity—as someone who has retired after 50 years in the industry. My deputy is the only person who has a salary at the station and there are about another 50 volunteers. It is a volunteer-based station and our trustees are volunteers, and so on.

On sustainability, we pay for it. We are a registered charity. You have to be not for profit to have a community radio licence. You do not have to be a charity, but we are and have been since 2004. That allows us to collect cash in buckets at Sainsbury's or whatever, as well as take advertising, which we do.

The Welsh Government, in contrast with the UK Government—this is something the UK Government could pick up on—advertise their public service announcements with us. In fact, during the pandemic, our only advertising was the “keep Wales safe” message and other messages from the Welsh Government, for which they pay and book through advertising agencies. The UK Government do not do that as yet. When they are doing the recruitment of police officers, for example, which they have been in south Wales, those campaigns are not carried on community radio; they are only on commercial radio. That has a big audience, but we have different listeners to a large degree.

However, as I said earlier, it costs us about £50,000 a year to run the station. When I joined it in about 2006, the turnover was about £185,000. It had six staff and was largely supported by Government grants, which was mostly EU money because it is a regeneration area, coming through the Welsh Government. Since austerity, that has all disappeared and we have had to learn to cope on about £50,000. That dropped to about £35,000 in its worst year, at the beginning of austerity.



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There are no grants apart from specific ones to build transmitters or for projects. We finance day to day by advertising sales and sponsorship sales, which we are allowed to do, and our charitable fundraising activities.

**Q138 Geraint Davies:** Could you do a lot more with more money or are you hitting the target market you want to?

**Terry Mann:** We could do with some visible means of support. We are not expecting handouts—we are quite happy to earn our living—and in this economic crisis, there are greater priorities for public money, for example. The help is appreciated. Through the pandemic, we were kept alive by the Welsh Government advertising and the Government covid grants helped a great deal, and so on.

To underline the fact that we are being left, in effect, to provide local radio in the UK, as the BBC is having to pull back as well, it would be helpful if community radio had some more support. I would be happy in the current climate just to have UK Government advertising paid for alongside commercial radio, because our rates are very small. If they invested in advertising in community radio, they would reach a lot more people. They would also help us survive. We are quite lucky in Wales to have the support of the Welsh Government and MSs across party, which, in England, the stations do not have.

**Q139 Geraint Davies:** Toby, do you have any comments on funding and staffing and whether there is enough support for proper journalism, or whether you need more money to get more interest, more coverage and more quality?

**Toby Ellis:** It is a very interesting point because there are different parts of radio stations. Our hybrid model, which Ian O'Neill from the DCMS felt was the future of radio and was the way to do it, is similar to what Terry has said. We have 65 staff, 60 volunteers and five full-time staff. However, it is reaching out and doing more community initiatives and events. For example, we will be organising for the local fireworks events, the local carnivals, the Pembrokeshire County Show. Instead of us just turning up and broadcasting, we get involved with more of the logistics, booking the artists and the like. You then branch out to where you can use the radio station as an auxiliary and also get involved in other areas.

I feel that the future of radio is a bit like an octopus. You have to spread your tentacles and do many different things, as well as what you do best, which is, of course, broadcasting. That is a strong arm we found, finding funding from various different advertisers through doing the events, but also through the third sector, supporting them a great deal.

We have a guest here as well, Meg from Haverfordwest High Radio. She is one of the presenters on the local station—the school station—and is an excellent presenter. She has been with us for just over a year, as the station launched in November 2021. We have a wonderful radio club on a



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Friday afternoon. We have 30 students and we teach them about radio, and then they go away and run Haverfordwest High Radio during breaktimes and lunchtimes. It is those grassroots initiatives where we get funding from the local council. We get funding from Dyfed–Powys that enables us to deliver the training to run the radio station for them, but ultimately it is feeding the radio station. Hopefully, Meg will be on Pure West Radio at some point.

**Q140 Geraint Davies:** Do you have enough material going in from the journalistic point of view? Do you have enough funding, staffing? You mentioned that you could not get licences. What are the big threats to you and other radio stations?

**Toby Ellis:** The biggest issue we have is accessibility, and I know that this is a problem in other parts of the country. As I said to Mr Roberts, it is great that we have a worldwide platform now and we can broadcast to the world through app and through smart speaker, which is fantastic, and through social media and YouTube and the like, but ultimately our demographic and our USP is providing a local radio station to Pembrokeshire. We are not able to get on to FM. The community licences are unavailable. Ofcom has said that it is not allowing any community licences to be applied and will not be awarding any because of the DAB roll-out.

That is all good and well. The DAB roll-out is a very exciting time for radio and will create a lot more opportunity. However, as I said, DCMS is also saying, when the audio content is revealed, that FM will not be turned off until 2030. In my eyes, you should be rolling out an FM licence opportunity for stations like us, because if we had an FM licence on a community level—or you could even allow us another local commercial community radio licence, because the current local radio is now regional. It broadcasts outside of the county. Ofcom has allowed that to happen and that is fine, but we are a very good, strong local station with great grassroots, great connections in the local community. If we are able to expand into the FM market, we will be able to get more advertisers and sponsors on board because we will have a bigger local demographic, thus creating more revenue, and hopefully, more of those volunteers will then become employees.

**Geraint Davies:** Thank you very much. You made the licensing point very strongly and I think we have heard that.

**Q141 Rob Roberts:** This question is, very briefly, for Mr Ellis. When we prepare for these things, we read a short biography, and yours says here, “Station manager, director and broadcaster”. I suspect if I tie a brush to your belt you will be sweeping the floor as you go. These things always run around a small number of people generally. What do you do to get young people interested in this type of thing? Do you do apprenticeships and all those types of things, and how can you keep young people interested in radio broadcasting as opposed to all the other distractions and media that they have available?



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**Toby Ellis:** The likes of TikTok have exploded during the pandemic. Also, during the pandemic, people were told to stay at home and you had to use your imagination. If you were a musician, you were not able to do gigs and you had to perform in front of a camera. That is what us broadcasters do now. Unfortunately I cannot roll up in the morning wearing my pyjamas and do the breakfast show any more or any other show. I have to look presentable, as I am today, because we are being broadcast.

A lot of these youngsters think, "I need to go down this route now. I know I can have a huge fan base on online platforms such as TikTok and YouTube". To be a broadcaster, you have to have some important attributes, but you also have to be very confident and be willing to do it. We can teach that, and it is quite a difficult skill. Some people do not have it; some people do. Also, we find some little hidden gems who we know have something and we can work with them.

This is down to the grassroots level of education—the colleges, the schools identifying some pupils. Haverfordwest High Radio is a great example. Some of these students will not even put their hand up in class or speak to any of their peers. You put them in a studio with a microphone and you can't shut them up. They are full of confidence. For whatever reason, radio is a powerful medium to allow them to express themselves, potentially because you do not see anybody else. It is just you and the microphone and you can be yourself. However, there is a great support from our local council and from the local education board to allow students access.

This is the important thing, which I alluded to earlier. A lot of stations now have shut their studios. People are broadcasting from home. If we did not exist, where would those students go? Where would they be able to find out about radio? How would they be able to develop their personal skills, self-esteem and confidence? They would not be able to, because there would be no local studios. Is a presenter going to say, "Come around my house and have a look at my bedroom studio"? It is not going to happen. This is why it has a very important role in developing young people such as Meg, and also within the community in being a wonderful point of connectivity for people to be able to connect with one another.

**Chair:** We are slightly pressed for time, if that is okay.

Q142 **Ruth Jones:** Thank you, gentlemen, for your time this morning. I know that we are talking about community radio here, but I want to ask your thoughts on BBC Radio Wales, for instance. BBC Wales does not have any local stations; it is very centrist. Is that enough to represent Welsh life and communities? You have already alluded to it in part. Mr Mann, I will go to you first, given your experience within the BBC.

**Terry Mann:** I started off in the BBC; it trained me to go out and launch commercial radio. I worked for it again in the early part of the 2000s and found that it was largely the same as before, except they had computers.





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The attitudes were the same—there were a lot of very good attitudes, mind; I am not criticising it. Yes, Radio Wales does provide a service. It is a national radio station for Wales and there is nothing wrong with that. We provide a local dimension.

Something I did not mention earlier, which I will briefly, is that the dimension of the internet is massive. During covid, we had a huge audience start to follow us on the internet and we have over 35,000 weekly followers now, 25,000 of them on Facebook. They are a younger demographic than we think our radio audience is, which is interesting. There is no shortage of youngsters, as we have been hearing. Schools are very enthusiastic about starting radio stations, which is perhaps surprising in the current climate, but they are. Our chairman runs a radio station in the school he works at. It is very true that kids who often have problems expressing themselves suddenly start shining in this environment. It is something that we have noted as well.

**Q143 Ruth Jones:** Mr Ellis, I am interested in your thoughts about the BBC, and centrist versus regional.

**Toby Ellis:** As Terry said, it serves well as a national station. As I said to Ms Winter, the Wales language is very strong thanks to the likes of BBC Wales. There has been a huge amount of injection into a focus on Welsh language. I know that it has some very ambitious targets of getting more people speaking the Welsh language, which we support. It is very prominent. Our neighbours in Carmarthenshire have the most speakers of the Welsh language in Wales now, which is very exciting. Whenever we have visitors we always greet them with, "Bore da, shwmae?". BBC Wales has a part to play in it, but it is complemented by local stations, local services, online stations that also deliver Welsh heritage and Welsh factual information.

**Q144 Ben Lake:** Nation Broadcasting has proposed that community stations should be free to become wholly commercial services. What are your thoughts on that?

**Toby Ellis:** I was chatting to Mr Mumford outside. He is a long-standing colleague of ours from Nation Broadcasting. Radio is in a very interesting place and we have a bit of an uphill struggle. I echo Terry's words in the sense of the costs involved. The small-scale DAB roll-out is quite substantial. You are looking at between £30,000 and £50,000 per polygon. To give you an idea, for us to cover one polygon area, that would cover only half of our patch, so we would have to have two services and two polygons. Broadcasting can get quite expensive.

However, if you allow access into community radio and the shackles are off, shall we say, and there are no restrictions on finances, there is no reason why it cannot be feasible. Ultimately, this is one issue that you will probably hear echoed a lot this morning. Ofcom is far too restrictive in what it sets out and what it allows. In my eyes, if Ofcom was allowing stations to broadcast outside of their area and they had no restriction on



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funding as a local commercial licence holder, why should that have to happen as a community licence holder?

I agree with that statement. Yes, you are focused on your community and put restrictions on the wattage of your transmitters and the like so that you are not beaming out across huge areas and you need to be more concentrated. The beauty now is that the online element can tap into other areas and smart speakers, if people want to find out what you are doing. We had someone tuning in from Scotland yesterday by accident. They wanted Pure Scotland Radio but they got Pure West Radio, and they said, "You've got a new listener".

People stumble across us by accident sometimes, which is great. We have 3 million-plus visitors just to Tenby in the summer months and hopefully we capture a lot of them, so that they can find out about the local news and information. However, if we had a community FM licence—it would be nice just to have the opportunity to have one, let alone have any financial restraints on it, because it is not available. Accessibility is a huge problem. You then have the restraints of a community licence, which I believe is capped at £50,000 turnover. If it did open up a round of licensing for community stations on FM, which I think it should because FM is not getting turned off until 2030, in some seven years, it would have a lot more appetite from online stations like us.

Q145 **Ben Lake:** Thank you very much. Mr Mann, do you have anything to add?

**Terry Mann:** On the issue of funding, I think that community radio was screwed down to the ground by lobbying from the commercial sector when it was muted to make sure that it could not earn more than certain amounts of money. I would welcome a liberalisation of that, although I do not find that it is an issue in running my station at all. We do not trigger the thresholds that would take us over the line.

I do not agree, though, that we should be only commercially funded. Having the other sources of revenue from the local community, which wants to help keep the station on air, is a vital role. If we had to survive on the advertising that we currently bring in, we would not last very long at all. There is a key factor here. We are not in RAJAR, the audience measurement system, so radio advertising agencies who book space on behalf of the bigger clients like the Welsh Government cannot quantify the audience delivery we bring. Having worked in commercial radio most of my career, I know that that is a key issue because they cannot guarantee that their campaign, including community radio, will reach the target demographics on the community side. That is a key issue.

As for whether we should join RAJAR or find a way of doing it, last time we asked, it was £10,000 a year. As I told you, our turnover is only £50,000, so that is a non-starter. However, it is a major issue in attracting commercial advertising, especially from larger-scale clients. Right now, the smaller-scale clients that we would normally rely on, the



high-street shops, are not spending, because they are literally trying to survive with their electricity bills and not many people coming through the door.

**Chair:** Before I bring in Virginia Crosbie, we are running short of time, so if I can encourage our questions and our answers to be as concise as possible, that will help us to get through all the material.

Q146 **Virginia Crosbie:** Thank you, Chair; I will be brief. Toby, you are such a fantastic advocate for the sector. Your enthusiasm is palpable. Tony Jones from MônFM was meant to come here today but sadly could not make it. However, it is great to have both of you representing community radio.

My question relates to funding and the UK Government's community radio fund. I was surprised to see that only 3% of all applications to this fund were from Welsh radio stations and only 1% of those were successful in their applications. The criteria seemed very specific. Do you believe that there needs to be more help in accessing these funds and filling in the forms? In particular, you mentioned school radio stations. Is the fund adequately marketed across Wales?

**Toby Ellis:** I will be as concise as possible. Terry is probably better to answer this because he is a recipient of an Ofcom licence and probably has applied for these funds, whereas we are not in that position. I do not know how accessible they are or are not. I only saw this week that there was an announcement of a lot of radio stations winning awards. I noticed that there were not many Welsh community stations in there, but I do not know how many community radio licences would have gone for the funding pot in the first place, so I am not best placed to comment on that.

However, I will add that it is important that community stations have much better access to funding, generally speaking—not necessarily just through Ofcom, but through the national lottery and the Welsh Government, because of the benefits that they have for the community on a grassroots level, which we have demonstrated here today. It is difficult to access that funding, broadly speaking. It should not be exclusive to commercial funding. It is a very important part but, as Terry said, it is very difficult to get your hands on at the moment. Therefore, there should be more support out there, yes.

**Terry Mann:** My reply is that we applied and got funding for the DCMS-funded Ofcom fund way back in time. The most recent funding we had from it was to finance the employment of my deputy for a couple of years, which would have been in about 2017 or 2018, I think. The point is that the funding for this from the UK Government has not expanded very much at all. There were literally only a few of us. We were the first one in Wales and only the fourth in the UK 20 years ago, at the beginning of this, so there were very few of us around. There are now hundreds, literally—over 200—licensed community radio stations all applying for the



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fund, or able to apply for the fund, and the fund has not expanded by that proportion or anything like that proportion to do that.

Some of us do not bother to apply because you need a specific scheme—for example, employing somebody to join your team to do a particular job. If you have a particular scheme, you can apply to the fund. You are not necessarily successful, because there is a quite reasonable pecking order and you get in the queue. The fund could be expanded a good deal and that would encourage more of us to apply for it.

**Q147 Wayne David:** Mr Ellis, you have alluded a few times to the unsuccessful bids that you have made for licensing from Ofcom. However, other applications have been successful in other parts of Wales. What would you say is a real problem that you have come up against? Is it something structurally with Ofcom or the nature of the application, or what?

**Toby Ellis:** It is not the nature of the application, because we have not been able to put in an application. That has been the issue. It has said that there is no community licence available for us in Pembrokeshire. There is no local commercial radio licence because that is already occupied until 2025. That is it. There is no opportunity for us. However, we can apply for a small-scale DAB licence. That roll-out has taken some time. We are waiting for the award on that, which is very exciting because it means, hopefully, that we can explore the DAB market. That is great, but what about FM? The DCMS has said it is not turning that off until 2030 but it is not opening any FM licences in community or local radio. That is a problem.

**Q148 Wayne David:** What is its response to the point that you are making?

**Toby Ellis:** That it will not be opening up a round of community licensing or local commercial radio licences.

**Q149 Wayne David:** Going on from that, that implies that there is a real problem with Ofcom. Is that the only problem or are there other problems as well?

**Toby Ellis:** From what I have personally come up against—I have spoken to other people in the radio sector and I am sure that you will hear more from Mr Mumford—there are problems with Ofcom, yes. We understand its vision and where it needs to go but stations like ours have suffered. We are coming up to our fifth birthday on 4 April and it has been a huge uphill struggle for us from day dot. Have I been deterred a few times? Yes, many times. I have thought, “Do you know what, I could go and stack shelves in Tesco and have less stress and probably be on a lot more money”.

We do it because we are passionate about what we do. We have a lot of people who get incredibly galvanised by it. It is a wonderful thing. Radio has been part of my life from a very young age and I know what it has done for me personally and all the people we have helped support over the years. There should not be the restraints that we have. We should be



able to access more people. If we had an FM community licence or a local radio licence, we would be more self-sufficient, we would create more jobs and we would be able to do what we do better—create a radio academy, create a BTEC in the local college. We cannot do that because of financial restraints.

As Terry said, we do not want to go begging for money when the money should be spent in other areas right now. The NHS locally is in an awful state. The waiting times in our local A&E are shocking. I would rather money be spent on nurses and getting those people cared for than being put into local radio, when we can get by. However, with the correct licences and the correct support from Ofcom and Government, we certainly would be able to flourish further.

Q150 **Wayne David:** Thank you very much. Mr Mann, do you want to add to that?

**Terry Mann:** It is absolutely true that there is a list around the corner of people who want to apply for FM local radio licences. Ofcom acknowledges that. Its view is that the UK Government told it to prioritise small-scale DAB. It has limited resources and its decision was to stop—literally to stop dead. It shocked quite a lot of people that it stopped licensing FM community licences to concentrate on DAB. It has said that it may return. When it has several phases of DAB licence, it may return to local community FM licensing, which, as you say, has a long shelf life still. I think that should happen. That is the issue. It has said that it does not have the resources to license FM licences and DAB and it needs to concentrate on DAB. My understanding is that that is an interpretation of the Government's wish.

**Wayne David:** Thank you, that is very helpful.

Q151 **Chair:** Thank you. Before I bring in Ben, could I press you on this issue? You have both spoken compellingly about the role that your stations play in your communities and that you are filling an important gap there. You have just talked about the difficulties that you are encountering in being able to grow your stations and the hurdles in your way presented by Ofcom. Is it ignorant or unaware of the work that your stations do, the roles that you play? Is it behind the curve on that, or is it that its vision of the future for radio does not include small local stations like yours?

**Toby Ellis:** It is probably a combination of everything that you have mentioned, to be honest. There is such a focus on driving forward to the digital world, which is very exciting, but you cannot forget about community local stations. More of them are popping up now. With the way that radio has changed and evolved over the years, there have been huge job losses, huge redundancies, with multiple offices and multiple studios closed. In my honest opinion, we need those studios back open because we need the youngsters. We need the next breed, the next generation coming through, to see what a studio is like, not what someone's bedroom studio is like.



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Unfortunately, I think that the future of radio is in the hanging balance because of the way that Ofcom is going about its business, maybe because that is direction from Government and maybe also because it is prioritising too heavily on small-scale DAB. However, in my honest opinion, after applying for a restricted service licence—we had an RSL last year and we were on FM for 28 days—it is not that difficult for it to audit us and to look at what we do. It is down to us. We put the equipment on the mat and we have all the various different criteria to tick. It puts the onus on us. It is up to it to decide to screen us and check us or not. It is not that difficult to do what it needs to do to allow it.

Yes, you have to have laws and guidelines. You cannot just allow any Tom, Dick and Harry to broadcast on the radio. I totally respect that, but for a station like ours that has been broadcasting for five years, we like to think that we have earned our stripes. Ofcom, in my opinion, needs to look at the way things are run and the way licences are issued.

**Chair:** Thanks. We are slightly pressed for time. Ben Lake, you have been very patient.

Q152 **Ben Lake:** I will ask Toby this question. What role, if any, do you think that local radio has in supporting and promoting the Welsh language?

**Toby Ellis:** Massive, just because of the audiences that we can put the Welsh language in front of. Television is great and it has stood the test of time. Radio has gone through all of its hurdles. It has taken on the likes of Spotify, TIDAL and Apple Music. People love to hear a voice; they get that connectivity. It is in our human nature to be able to connect with one another, to hear voices—familiar voices. We build very strong relationships with our listeners, and our Welsh show is one of the most popular, and is increasing in popularity, because we can put the Welsh language in front of people in Pembrokeshire and around the world through the other platforms that we have.

**Terry Mann:** There is a massive interest in Welsh. Obviously the Welsh Government is bilingual; it is Welsh first, technically, if you look at it. If I can compare it to when I arrived in Wales in 1974, when the language issue was a divisive issue, we were quite controversial in launching a mix of languages. Although English was dominant at Swansea Sound, we had bits of Welsh coming in as if they were meant to be, which was unusual. No one had done that before.

Now, the majority of the students who come into us for work experience, for example, have an understanding of Welsh. The most important thing is that youngsters now have a career path if they learn Welsh, which they did not have 50 years ago. Unless you wanted to work for the University of Wales, the National Museum of Wales or the BBC, you did not need Welsh and it did not help you to get a career. Now it is a positive benefit to speak Welsh. That is coming through. Youngsters get it; older people do not. Often, people who have not had the opportunity to ever learn it, perhaps because they took another language option when they were at



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school for commercial reasons like getting jobs—they took German or French or something—are more resentful of the language and rather resent it being forced down their throat, as they put it. There is an older, negative reaction to putting Welsh in front of them, especially in an area like ours, which is predominantly English speaking.

However, RCT was one of two places—Cardiff being the other, I think—where the number of Welsh speakers did not drop in the most recent census. I do not have an issue or a problem with that at all. I think that that is to do with people being confident about saying that they speak it. If you ask them outright, “Do you speak Welsh?”, they will say, “Well, I’m learning” or whatever, but they do not tick the box on the census. I do not think that that is a problem. I think there would be a million Welsh speakers or more within the Welsh target because we have seen such a huge difference in interest.

The Eisteddfod is coming to RCT next year. There is a lot of excitement about that. I am on one of the steering committees for it and we are trying to find ways of introducing Welsh to a larger number of people. We are all doing our best to embrace the different atmosphere that surrounds Welsh now.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. It is just approaching 10.15 am—I sound like I am on radio—so we ought to bring this first panel to a close. Thank you very much, Mr Toby Ellis, and thank you very much, Mr Terry Mann, for your excellent input this morning. It has been extremely useful and interesting.