



Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Broadcasting in Wales, HC 620

Wednesday 7 June 2023

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[Watch the meeting](#)

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

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

Questions 330 – 401

Witnesses

I: Nigel Walker, acting CEO, Welsh Rugby Union; and Ian Davis, Chief Commercial and Engagement Officer, Football Association of Wales.

II: Sioned Wiliam, Director, Cwmni Da; Dyfrig Davies, Chair, Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru; and Siân Price, Creative Director, Yeti Television.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Nigel Walker and Ian Davis.

Q330 **Chair:** Welcome to the Welsh Affairs Committee, where we are continuing our inquiry into broadcasting in Wales. We have two panels this morning. We are delighted to be joined for the first panel by Nigel Walker, who is joining us virtually. Nigel is acting chief executive of the Welsh Rugby Union. We are joined in the Committee Room by Ian Davis from the Football Association of Wales. We are really delighted that both of you could be with us this morning.

Can I start the discussion with a question directed to Mr Walker, if I may? There is probably no one better suited to come and talk to us about the role of broadcasting and the impact on sport in Wales than you, Mr Walker, with your background as a rugby player and athlete, as a broadcaster, and now running the Welsh Rugby Union.

With the news last night of London Irish being suspended for next season



from the English professional rugby system, taking it to three professional teams that have dropped out of the English top tier, and given the well-catalogued difficulties and financial challenges in Welsh professional rugby with the regions over the course of the last season, do you feel that the entire model of professional rugby, UK-wide, is broken?

Nigel Walker: I do not think I would use the word “broken”. It is in need of a reset. There was devastating news early in the season when Worcester and Wasps went bust and ceased to operate, with London Irish going the same way last night, as you say. None of us in Europe is immune from the challenges. The game has to reset, the funding models have to change, and the salaries paid to players have to be reviewed.

We have been going through that process. It has been an uncomfortable one. We announced early in January a six-year framework for professional club rugby—regional rugby in Wales—and that reset started then. As I say, it is uncomfortable. Many people will ask, “Why should the players bear the brunt of it?” It is not the players’ fault; it is simply that administrators have, if I can use the expression, got carried away, and the wages have spiralled out of control. What we are seeing and feeling, coupled with Covid, which is still having an impact, is that those two things together have meant the game is becoming unsustainable.

Q331 **Chair:** In the reset that you talk about, Mr Walker, is it inevitable that the number of professional regions in Wales will drop to three from four?

Nigel Walker: It is not inevitable. A report conducted by a company called Oakwell—and this recommendation is in the public domain—suggested that we should look at three, or possibly two, regions. That was debated by the Professional Rugby Board, which is made up of members of the Welsh Rugby Union, and the four regions. After lengthy discussions, it was decided that we would proceed with four, and the reset that is in the process of taking place is based on four regions.

Q332 **Chair:** To help lead us into the discussion about broadcasting and the relationship with sport, can you give us a sense of how important broadcasting revenue is to the professional game in Wales—both the national team and the regions?

Nigel Walker: It is incredibly important, because it is about 40% of the income received. It is also the vehicle for transmitting the game to the whole of Wales. Certainly, where the national teams are concerned—male and female—it is incredibly important. As a former head of sport, I know how important it is to get the equation right between the amount of money offered and the number of hours and minutes that it produces.

There is always a tension between it being free to air and available to people in their living rooms without too much fuss, and the revenue generated for national governing bodies, of which the Welsh Rugby Union is one. We are always playing with and countering that tension, and we have to hope that we finish on the right side of the line. The Six Nations, for example, is free to air in a partnership between ITV and the BBC, but



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the autumn internationals are currently with Amazon, which is behind the traditional paywall, as they say.

- Q333 **Chair:** Given the involvement of the private equity group, CVC, which has come into professional rugby with very significant investment and its eyes clearly set on the prize of squeezing out more return from the professional game, which, by and large, means more returns from the broadcasting rights, is there an inevitable pathway to all professional rugby, including the Six Nations, disappearing behind a paywall?

Nigel Walker: No, I do not think that is inevitable, and it is for people like me and my colleagues who sit around the table. The rights for the Six Nations are negotiated en bloc by Six Nations Rugby Ltd. I have a seat at that table. My counterparts in England, Scotland, Ireland, France and Italy have a seat at that table. CVC has a seat at that table now, because of its injection. It is incumbent upon us to make sure that we continue to achieve the right balance of as much revenue as we can get into the game without losing control of the game.

I do not think it is inevitable and, as a former employee of a public service broadcaster, you would expect me to say that we have to get the balance right. For me, that balance would still see a number of international and regional games being free to air.

- Q334 **Chair:** If CVC wants it to be the case, and if it means more revenue coming into the game, are the unions really strong enough and in a position to prevent that?

Nigel Walker: Like I said, it is a tension, and you have to achieve that balance, but, from conversations I have with my colleagues, there is certainly no desire for the appeal of money to overtake our responsibility to make as many games as possible free to air.

- Q335 **Wayne David:** On that point, which is pretty fundamental, given the difficulties that are being experienced at the moment, we are likely to see that pressure and that tension between the two aspects that you mentioned become more and more acute. It is going to be potentially extremely problematic.

Nigel Walker: Mr David, I know that you will be aware of the difficult and protracted discussions that have been taking place in Wales over many months. We have resisted that temptation. It would have been relatively easy to continue to pay moneys that we could not afford and hope that CVC moneys, or the equivalent, were going to bail us out. We have taken the step to cut our cloth accordingly. It has been incredibly uncomfortable and we have received a huge amount of criticism, of which you have been aware, but we are not about to sell the game to the highest bidder. You might get away with it in the short term, but in the medium and long term you will pay the price.

- Q336 **Chair:** Mr Davis from the Football Association of Wales has been sitting here very patiently and listening to this discussion. To bring you in on



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this, Mr Davis, could you perhaps give us a sense of the relative importance of broadcasting revenues for the health of the professional game and the grassroots game in Wales?

Ian Davis: I echo Nigel's comments. We sometimes forget that we are a not-for-profit organisation. Any money that we get goes back into the game, and our game is so important to us. Football is in a strong position. That money goes back into programmes to get more girls and boys playing football, so that we can find the next Gareth Bale or Jess Fishlock.

Like Nigel said, our revenue from broadcast is around 40% to 50%. It used to be 70%, so we were very reliant on it. Broadcast revenue is really important, but so is the balance between that and eyeballs, because we know that the more people watch, the more people will play. We have to be very careful as custodians of the game to make sure that we deliver not only for the Welsh public but also for people who want to play the game. It is key to our development. We are a business. We might be not for profit, but we have a business to run.

Q337 **Mr Roberts:** Good morning, gentlemen. Ofcom did some research last year, saying that the outcome was a global trend towards globalised markets for broadcasting and that sports rights deals tended to be conducted on a multinational basis, leading to, in its words, a less transparent accessible rights bidding process. Does that mean that it will be more difficult for public service broadcasters in the UK to compete with that, because it happens on such a grand scale?

Ian Davis: It is a really good question. We have not seen that so far. As you probably know, our TV rights are sold centrally via UEFA through our centralisation deal, so we have not really seen that underhand approach. It will drive competitive balance in some respects, so we will probably see that the rights go up. We have not really seen that competitive and closed bidding. It has not happened for us. We have a really good relationship with S4C. We did stuff around the World Cup last year with BBC Wales and ITV Wales, and we are very proud of what we have done. We have not really seen that so far. We are still working with broadcast partners that are very in line with our fit, our values, our morals and what we try to do for football.

Q338 **Mr Roberts:** Mr Walker, is that a picture you recognise—that it is more difficult for public sector broadcasters?

Nigel Walker: It has been getting more difficult; probably since the turn of the century, it has got more difficult, but the demise of public service broadcasting in the sports world has been much exaggerated. Certainly, when I was at the BBC, which was between 2001 and 2010, there was concern that digitalisation and the things you talked about could lead to this, but it has not.

It has become more difficult. It is not impossible. Public service broadcasters have decided to keep their powder dry more than they



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would have before. They have picked the rights that they want to bid for and have been very competitive in those markets. I see no reason why that should change.

Q339 Mr Roberts: In terms of the digitalisation that you mentioned, what kind of impact has there been on Welsh rugby in terms of the increase in audiences streaming things online rather than watching live? Has that been a major theme?

Nigel Walker: Viewing figures are now made up of those who watch on traditional television and those who stream online. The figures for those who stream online have grown, but, when it comes to the big events in particular—those must-see events such as the Wales football team playing in the World Cup, or the Wales senior men’s or women’s rugby teams playing in the Six Nations—the vast majority will still coalesce around a television set for those big moments. That may change in the future, and the way in which people consume media is changing rapidly, but not to the extent that many people predicted.

Ian Davis: I agree with Nigel. Linear TV will still be the go-to for live TV. We are seeing a shift in consumption patterns around sport, but linear TV is still very strong. Streaming has probably not taken off. The wraparound stuff that you get with streaming and digital is really important for us to build our brand and our narrative, but linear TV will still be where people go to watch live TV.

Q340 Chair: Just on that point about linear TV, if it is still the case, Mr Walker, that the linear channels are in a really strong position in terms of live sport, why have all the autumn internationals gone behind a paywall with Amazon Prime—even the Welsh language coverage?

Nigel Walker: That is the challenge. The threat is there, but it has not manifested itself in the way that many people predicted five and 10 years ago. To the point that Ian made, it is incumbent on organisations such as the Football Association of Wales and the Welsh Rugby Union to be cognisant that eyeballs on screen and on the product are still really important. Some governing bodies have gone completely the other way and are on pay TV pretty much exclusively. Football and rugby in Wales have not gone down that road.

When I talk to my fellow chief executives in the other Six Nations countries, we are very clear that we need to achieve that balance. That is the answer that I gave first time round. We have to continue to be cognisant of that fact, because you need to achieve the balance. You want as many pounds, shillings and pence as you can get in, but you have to make sure that you are taking the game to the widest possible audience, if the game is to continue not only to survive but to thrive going forward.

Q341 Ben Lake: Thank you, Mr Davis and Mr Walker, for joining us. You have both mentioned this morning the balance that your respective sporting bodies have to strike when it comes to negotiations on broadcast rights.



Mr Walker, you mentioned the balance that you are striking between ensuring eyeballs on the product, as it were, and securing a source of income to the sport. In very general terms, is it becoming more difficult to strike that balance? Are pressures mounting in such a way that there is perhaps a greater need to maximise the investment, which then inevitably makes it more difficult to ensure more eyeballs on the sport?

Nigel Walker: It may well become increasingly difficult. We rely on the free-to-air broadcasters continuing to be competitive. It does not necessarily mean outbidding their opponents, but being competitive. As long as they continue to be competitive, in my view, Welsh rugby will continue to look very closely at those bids, and it will not just be about the top level.

Just as we say that every person has their price, every organisation will have its price. For some national governing bodies, that price has been reached. It would be a significantly greater price than I have seen so far, for the reasons that I have stated. If you want to grow the game and you want a young girl or young boy to pick up a ball in Fishguard, in Bala or somewhere else, the way that most get engaged, first of all, is seeing the product on television. There are other ways, of course, but when you have those big must-see events, where 60% or 70% of the population of Wales is tuned in for an hour and a half or two hours, you have to continue to bring those events to those large audiences.

Q342 **Ben Lake:** That is very useful. Just to clarify, when you talk about a competitive bid, am I right to understand that what you are talking about is being able to maintain high levels of audience share when it comes to these fixtures? Is that what we are talking about?

Nigel Walker: Absolutely.

Ian Davis: It is an interesting one, and Nigel has summarised it quite well. Going forward, we need to make sure that we engage with a new audience. The gen Zs of the world are really important. That is why digital is key to what we do. What we are now looking for from broadcast partners is how they use innovation to try to engage with this audience more, because that is what we need to be able to do. Traditional linear is really key, but it is also about making sure that we embrace new technology. Everybody now has wi-fi and viewers can watch from anywhere. We need to look at broadcast partners that can evolve and innovate with us to make that experience better.

Q343 **Ben Lake:** That is interesting. As has been discussed in previous sessions of the Committee, the way in which people of different ages consume content and watch regular TV, including sporting events, is changing quite rapidly. Are you having discussions with the more traditional public service broadcasters about the wider package of services that they can offer? I have in mind things such as podcasts and radio shows discussing the games and what have you. Does that sort of content feature in your discussions?



Ian Davis: Yes, definitely. Nigel is probably the same. The relationship with our broadcasters is key in any deal that we have. We sell our rights on a platform-neutral basis, so they can put those rights anywhere they want. The wraparound bits, as we call them—the highlights, the best goals and the interviews—are key in what we are trying to do. When you look at broadcast deals, it is not just what is seen on TV, but what goes around it to help build that brand and get more people involved. Innovation is really key in how we interact with our audience.

Q344 **Ben Lake:** Mr Walker, this is a similar question. Coming back to future bids from public service broadcasters, would offers on alternative platforms such as YouTube, or content that might engage with younger generations in a particularly different way, be things that you are keen to see come forward as part of bids in the future?

Nigel Walker: Absolutely, I completely agree. It is dreadful that Ian and I are violently agreeing on everything here, but it is so important. It is not looking through my lens of a person who is very nearly 60, but through the lens of all age groups. The BBC, ITV and S4C are all thinking this way too. I have had some experiences over the last two years. As many of you will know, I was involved in the professionalisation of women's rugby in Wales. Our young female players have engaged with their audiences, for example on TikTok, in a way that I would never have thought of, which is really important.

Just as the FAW has done some fantastic work in that area in recent times, we are talking to ITV and the BBC about what the Rugby World Cup will look like—not just the matches, which are obviously very important, but the wraparound elements that Ian referred to. What can we do to continue to engage and bring value to our audiences—I am a broadcaster all of a sudden—and supporters?. What can we do to make sure there is a long tail to these big events?

Ian Davis: We have now developed our own streaming platform, which is called RedWall+, since we have recognised that there might be a gap in some of our deals and the way that we use broadcasters. We launched it only about a month ago, but we have put stuff on there that is more relevant to a different audience. You will probably find that rightsholders and governing bodies will become more like media agencies, as such. We are getting our own product ready and saying, "This is what can fit and this is why it is good".

Q345 **Kevin Brennan:** Morning, both. Nigel, what would it cost somebody if they wanted to watch all Welsh professional rugby, including at the regional level, on TV?

Nigel Walker: Every single game or just games involving Wales?

Kevin Brennan: Any Welsh regions and the internationals.

Nigel Walker: I am guessing, Kevin. I am sure you have the answer there. I know that for the autumn internationals, which are on Amazon, if



you did not have Amazon Prime or some other Amazon product it would cost about £70 to watch those matches, unless you went to your local club, where you would be able to see it free of charge. I am imagining that, for a season of URC rugby, it would be probably in the region of £100 or £110, but I am happy to be corrected if it is significantly more.

Q346 Kevin Brennan: It is free to air, but you still have to have a TV licence to watch the Six Nations. On top of that, you have Viaplay for regional stuff, then Amazon Prime. Do you have a relationship with BT Sport at all in Welsh rugby?

Nigel Walker: No.

Q347 Kevin Brennan: BT Sport would be about £30 a month, and that is if you are watching the English Premiership as well. My point is that watching rugby can be quite expensive these days. If you did all those, that would be £806 a year, or about £67 a month. I just wondered how much you bear that in mind when you are talking about the possibility of putting things behind a paywall.

Nigel Walker: I knew the Amazon numbers, because that is directly relevant, so it is something that we talk about. It is about the overall package. We do the selfish bit—what does Welsh rugby and the Welsh Rugby Union need—but then we also look at the supporter and follower of Welsh rugby. We go through those calculations and have those conversations, and that is where the tension comes in. We feel, at least, that we have come down on the right side of the line. It will be for supporters and followers of Welsh rugby to let us know if they think we have fallen on the wrong side of the line, if I can put it that way.

Q348 Kevin Brennan: Why are attendances at Welsh regional rugby so low compared with other countries in the URC, given the history and culture of rugby in our country?

Nigel Walker: As you all know, 20-odd years ago we went from a club-based system to a regional system. I am not saying that was the wrong thing to do, but, if people who were responsible at the time had their time again, they may have done it slightly differently. We certainly did not convert everybody who was watching club rugby into regional rugby, so we have been playing catch-up for well over two decades. In the relatively recent past, we have had the occasional glimpse of success at regional level, but our regions have not been as successful as, say, the Irish provinces. We have to get to a stage where we give our regions the opportunity to be successful and then work incredibly hard to build on that.

Q349 Kevin Brennan: The problem is that we are in a bit of a death spiral in that regard, where you are having to cut costs because of that lack of revenue base. Inevitably, Welsh regions will be less competitive and, therefore, end up near the bottom of the table every year in the URC and not get to the final of the Champions Cup or whatever. Ultimately, people will not come. We saw recently that, when the Scarlets got to a semi-



final, they nearly managed to fill Parc y Scarlets, but, even then, it was not at capacity.

Nigel Walker: It is tough, and it is going to be tougher in the short term, for the reasons that I mentioned earlier. Money is important. The amount of money that you have to spend on your squad is important, but that does not necessarily guarantee success either. Our regions have been well funded as far as squad sizes are concerned, certainly in the last two or three years, and that has not guaranteed success, which is why the union and the regions are going to work hand in glove to come up with a formula, if I can put it as crudely as that, that gives us a better chance of success.

I have been criticised for this reset, but, if we do not have it, we will be in the position that they have experienced in English rugby this season. It is as simple as that. We do not have a choice. The other option, of course, was to cut one of the regions. We had that debate, and the regions, as part of the PRB, decided that they wanted to stick with four. The Welsh Rugby Union was happy to stick with four. We are going to try to make that work.

Q350 **Kevin Brennan:** There are lots of questions that I could ask you. I am not going to hog the time, but I need to come to Ian. Unlike England, Wales does not get to negotiate its own rights in relation to qualifying matches. It is decided by UEFA rather than the FAW. How does that work and where are we at with all of that?

Ian Davis: Centralisation came into effect in 2016. The problem we had with broadcast revenues is that they would fluctuate with who we drew. If we drew Germany, we would get a huge amount of money. If we drew San Marino, the TV market is not strong enough. To help us with financial planning and forecasting, we all went together with the 55 federations, so that UEFA could sell our rights centrally.

It has worked really well. We have a really good relationship with them. UEFA, the FAW and the broadcasters know how important Welsh language is, so we are always pushing for that. Historically, we have always had Welsh language, and we are quite confident that, going forward, we will have the same. We always like to do it.

Q351 **Kevin Brennan:** I want to ask you about that. Does it matter that, if there is Welsh language coverage, it is free to air on S4C rather than on a red button somewhere on some streaming behind a paywall?

Ian Davis: For me, it does. If Nigel could speak openly, he would probably say the same—that it is important that we support our host broadcaster. S4C does some great coverage for us. It does a lot of stuff around our domestic league. It also does our under-21s. We have a very good partnership with S4C. For me, it is key that it is on our national broadcaster.

Q352 **Kevin Brennan:** So we can confidently expect that, after 2024, all Wales



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qualifying matches will be on S4C?

Ian Davis: I cannot confirm right now, but, yes, I should think that we are in a good position with the negotiations that are going on at the moment.

Q353 **Kevin Brennan:** You are content that UEFA will be happy with that as well?

Ian Davis: UEFA is hugely and fully supportive. It is a not-for-profit, as we are, and we want to get the best out there. We have a moral duty to represent the Welsh language in our game, so we are very confident.

Q354 **Kevin Brennan:** Are you 90% or 99% confident?

Ian Davis: Yes, confident.

Kevin Brennan: Is that 99.5%?

Ian Davis: On Nigel's point on attendances, it is really difficult, because there is so much choice out there. People want to stay at home and watch. There is a lot of competition out there. It is about the product, but we compete with so many things now as a governing body. There is so much out there that people can do, which makes it difficult for attendances.

Q355 **Virginia Crosbie:** I just wanted to continue that thread on the Welsh language. The Welsh Government have a goal of a million speakers by 2050. Mr Walker, in terms of Welsh language, what can you do through the contracts you have with broadcasters to provide Welsh language commentary? What can we do in terms of the regulatory environment?

Nigel Walker: I have been acting chief executive for four or five months. When the autumn international contract originally went to Amazon, I know that my predecessor, Steve Phillips, negotiated the carve-out for S4C. During the course of the contract, the commitment to the Welsh language remained, but Amazon put it on a red button and provided the service itself.

To Ian's point, our starting point would be a carve-out for S4C. It depends on the nature of the contract and what others around the table feel, because we negotiate en bloc, but our starting point will definitely be a carve-out for S4C. There will certainly be Welsh language provision.

Ian Davis: Making it an obligation to have a Welsh language option will reduce the competitive landscape for us. Ultimately, if we get less money, we can invest less money into programmes and facilities. We have a duty of care to make sure we get the most out of it, while also respecting the Welsh language. Making it an obligation would be dangerous and we would lose money on it.

Q356 **Ruth Jones:** Thank you, gentlemen, for coming this morning. We have talked a lot about the protection of broadcasting rights so far. I just want to be really clear that the Government are currently consulting on groups



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A and B in the listed events regime. Should public sector broadcasters have guaranteed digital rights to events such as the rugby and football World Cups in the future? Should it be nailed down very clearly like that?

Ian Davis: No, I do not think it should be. At the moment, like I said, we sell on a platform-neutral basis, so we rely on the rights they have in addition to just the linear rights to wrap around and build our brand and awareness. If we took that away from the package, we would lessen some of our negotiating power and see a reduction in the price. The way our current broadcasters use their digital rights is about that extra stuff: how we connect with gen Z, how we do shorter stuff that they can watch. It would not sit on a listed guarantee.

Q357 **Ruth Jones:** So you are happy with the way that things are going?

Ian Davis: Yes, and things will change. The listed events need to be modified completely, if I am honest. In terms of how we consume sport at the moment, I do not think it should focus on just one digital aspect. The way in which we consume sport now is probably not reflective of listed events anymore. For me, it would stay as it is.

Nigel Walker: I hate to disappoint, but I agree. I do not want to talk for the sake of talking but, for the reasons that Ian stated, it would be dangerous to bring in any change. It is working well at the moment. It is right that it is reviewed regularly, because of the changing landscape but, at the moment, it is about as good as it can be. If things changed radically, it would be reviewed.

Ruth Jones: If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Nigel Walker: In short, yes.

Q358 **Ruth Jones:** It would be remiss of me to let you go without talking about this. Broadcasting covers lots of aspects of football and rugby, but there has recently been a lot of broadcast airtime about issues off the pitch rather than on the pitch. While I do not want you to get into the details of accusations and the culture, things like players' contracts have featured as the story, rather than the sport. Going forward, how are you going to make sure that the sport is centre rather than secondary? Shall I start with Mr Walker?

Nigel Walker: I thought you might start with me. We have had a difficult time; there is no getting away from that. Some of it has been incredibly uncomfortable—probably the understatement of the year. We put forward some governance changes, which were accepted by our members at the end of March; 97.22% voted for them.

We are expecting to unveil—I am sure “unveil” is not the right word; “announce” is probably a better word—an independent chair within the next two or three weeks. That independent chair will sit on the panels to appoint a permanent CEO and the other independent non-executive directors. The board of the Welsh Rugby Union will then be much better



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able to meet the demands of a sporting governing body. That, in itself, will not right all the wrongs, but we will be in a much better position.

With regard to the specific accusations that were levelled at the WRU in the *BBC Wales Investigates* programme, an independent review is under way, as you know. That review is progressing well. Interviews are taking place and we rather hope that that report will be with us by the end of the summer. I have undertaken to implement all of the recommendations in full.

A number of the historical cases that were highlighted in the BBC Wales programme took place between 2017 and 2019. That is not to minimise it in any way, shape or form. It is merely to give me the opportunity to say that the Welsh Rugby Union has reviewed a number of policies and processes since that time and has made a number of changes with regard to ED&I across the whole organisation. Once we receive the report, we will know how big a gap we have. We are confident that we have closed the gap, but we are committed to making rugby in Wales a place that is welcoming for all.

Q359 Ruth Jones: That is helpful. You mentioned that the report is coming out at the end of the summer. As a parliamentarian, I know that seasons in Parliament can stretch for many months, so do you have a summer month in mind?

Nigel Walker: As you know, I am not in charge of that process. Dame Anne Rafferty is chairing that panel. We are led to believe that the end of the summer would mean towards the end of August, but I hope nobody is going to hold me to that, because I am not responsible for it. The sooner we get the report, the sooner we can begin to implement the recommendations, which is what everybody in Welsh rugby—certainly the executive board and the current board—is signed up to.

Q360 Ruth Jones: I share your eagerness for the report. Mr Davis, you are in a slightly different position, but I do not know if you have anything to add.

Ian Davis: We always try to put sport first. We are the third oldest federation in the world and, with that, modernisation takes a lot of time. Nigel talked about governance, which is key in what we do. Better governance every day is so important, and we are trying to do the best we can. The focus should always be on sport, and that is what we try to do.

Q361 Ben Lake: I am taking you back to another strand in the conversation and something you both touched on in your answers, which is about increasing and enhancing the number of eyeballs on the sport and ensuring that communities across Wales are participating. One of the things that you mentioned in an earlier answer, Mr Davis, was that you are developing the RedWall+ app. You said something quite interesting about becoming media agencies in your own right. Could you perhaps elaborate a little on that? What has been the impetus for that



development?

Ian Davis: The media landscape in Wales is quite tricky for us anyway. We do not really have a national paper. We probably do not get as much coverage as rugby does in our local papers and our media, so we wanted to take that on ourselves and build a platform where people can come on and engage. There are content and documentaries in there that are relevant to our audience. They might be aimed at a bit of a younger demographic, but that is the reason that we want to connect through there and build them through that customer journey. The impetus around it has been to connect with a different audience, and we can control our own destiny in some respects, so please make sure you download RedWall+.

Q362 **Ben Lake:** Am I also correct in thinking that the Cymru Football app is something that the FAW has supported as a way of making it a lot easier to keep track of grassroots and club-level football?

Ian Davis: Yes. We teamed up with a company called Analyticom, which does our results. All football results are on this one app, which is great. We get huge numbers going to that and we can monetise it. Again, it is about trying to give people what they want, not what we think they want.

Our digital journey is moving on. We are getting digital tickets. We are doing our own streaming platform now with RedWall+. The Cymru Football app is really important for us. It is part of us as we try to evolve and innovate in what we do to connect with a new audience, which is why it is really important that broadcasters buy into our culture and our vision.

Q363 **Ben Lake:** I appreciate that it is early days now for the various apps, but what are the initial findings?

Ian Davis: About 100,000 a week look at the Cymru Football app. The results are really good. We have started to sell ads off the back of it. We are at about 20,000 for RedWall+, because we have got all our members to join now. We are slowly growing that platform. It will not be Netflix tomorrow, but hopefully one day it will be the Netflix of football. Like Nigel said, content is king, and we talk about that a lot. It is about how we engage. What we are trying to get to is an organisation that is always on, so we are not just off when we do not have football. We always need something there. We have a duty to do that and to get more engagement and more people playing.

Q364 **Ben Lake:** Mr Walker, as somebody who has attended many a rugby game, both in the Principality Stadium and elsewhere, one thing that is always striking about international matches at the Principality is that it seems a lot of effort goes into the pre and post-match element and experience for the audiences that attend physically. Looking to the future, is this something that the WRU will look to replicate for those watching at home? How would you expand and build on the experience for them as well?



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Nigel Walker: You are absolutely right. A lot of effort goes into making it a spectacle and an event for those who attend. We know that we have some work to do with regard to the TV audience. We continue to work closely with broadcasters. When I was at the BBC and we looked at the figures on a Monday or Tuesday morning following an international, you would have the peak 10 or 15 minutes before the game, even though the programme might have been on for 45 minutes or an hour.

It is a much more difficult sell for the TV audience, but there are things that you can do. It is about how much money you put into making it an event for the audience at home as against those who are paying for their ticket and turning up at the Principality Stadium. Again, there is a tension and a balance. We have a way to go, which we recognise, but people can be reassured that we are talking about these things and how we can make improvements for all concerned.

Ben Lake: That is very good to hear.

Q365 **Mr Roberts:** Mr Walker, your career seems to have got progressively more difficult. You started off with inanimate hurdles to jump over and then, as a winger, the people coming to tackle you were at least in front of you and you could see them coming. Now you are getting hit from all angles about all kinds of different matters.

Earlier, you mentioned getting eyes on the prize and more bums on seats watching these things. Do you get involved in the rugby code, for example? There has been an awful lot of talk about changing how tackling works and those types of things, which might make it less of an exciting product to watch. Might that impact broadcasting figures?

Nigel Walker: We have a seat at the table when the laws of the game are being discussed. As you know, tackle height is key, as is the safety of the game. As you would expect me to say, the safety and welfare of players is at the heart of everything we do, but it is not that easy. When you make a law change, you have to be fairly confident that it is going to bring about the desired change and that it does not make the game less appealing or lead to unintended consequences somewhere else that are worse than the ones you are trying to fix.

You are absolutely right. The central tenet of your question is that we have a seat at the table and we talk about modifications of the law to make sure the game is as safe as it can be. I can say that the game is safer now than at any time in its history. We are just more aware of the things that could cause harm and, therefore, those are the things that we are trying to eradicate.

Q366 **Wayne David:** Nigel, in January 2022, a joint bid from BBC and ITV for the Six Nations was successful. Is that kind of co-operation generally something that you would welcome, and would you say it is objectively a good thing for the sport?



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Nigel Walker: In a word, yes. I can elaborate, if we are not short of time.

Wayne David: It is worth a few sentences, because it is an important point.

Nigel Walker: It is. When I was involved in broadcasting, those collaborations and partnerships were few and far between. There is now a recognition among public service broadcasters that they might need to unite in order to be competitive and to keep the value products free to air.

Q367 **Chair:** Thank you very much. We are drawing to a close now and we will move on to our second panel, but I would like to end with a question to Mr Walker about a particular bugbear of mine. It relates to how we look after our stars. We have spent a lot of time this morning talking about the role of broadcasting in supporting sport. Something that we all understand, and, Mr Walker, probably you understand better than anybody, is the role that sport plays in Welsh national life in helping to tell a particular story about Wales, who we are, our culture and our values.

One of the strengths that I always remind English friends and colleagues about is that, in Wales, a Welsh person is far more likely to come into day-to-day contact with some of the stars from their treasured national sports than, for example, here in England. Probably from your time, when you were running in tries for Cardiff and Wales, you would have been greeted in the streets by many a well-wisher.

Joe Hawkins is a tremendous young man who has come through the Welsh player pathway. He is a product of the Welsh rugby system. He is, effectively, banned from playing for Wales now, because he wants to go and, for the first time in his life, get a professional salary down the road at Exeter. That cannot be right, can it?

Nigel Walker: Again, there is a balance to be struck. The 60-cap rule, which is now the 25-cap rule, is there for good reason. When the regions select players to be part of their academy, they could be 13, 14 or 15, and they spend six, seven or eight years investing in a player. They want to see some return on that investment.

We know that we cannot compete financially with France, or with England in certain circumstances, so it is put in place to ensure that they get some return on their investment. At 60 caps, many people felt that the figure was too high. It is now 25 caps. You can get 25 caps in two and a half seasons. If you made the national team at 20 or 21, you could be free to go and earn as much money as you like outside of Wales at 23 or 24. We feel that system is fair.

The important thing is that people understand what the rules are and that they are administered fairly. I am not going to talk about Joe, because that would be inappropriate, but that is why the 60-cap rule was in place.



We have talked about Welsh regions perhaps not being as competitive as we would like, and there are things that we could do. If we allowed players to go through the system and to leave at 19 or 20 without any safeguards, the professional game in Wales would be devastated.

Chair: We really appreciate the time you have both taken and the frankness with which you have responded to our questions. I am sure we could carry on talking about these issues for a lot longer. It has been a fascinating discussion. You have both been really helpful in our inquiry, so thank you very much. We will now move seamlessly and quickly over to our second panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sioned Wiliam, Dyfrig Davies and Siân Price.

Q368 **Chair:** We welcome our second panel. We are joined by: Sioned Wiliam, who is director of Cwmni Da; Dyfrig Davies, who is the chair of TAC, which is the trade body for the Welsh independent broadcasting production sector; and Siân Price, who is creative director of Yeti Television.

I should explain, for people watching at home, that this panel is representing the broadcasting production sector in Wales. We have moved on from the discussion specifically about sport and broadcasting, but this panel will also help us in our inquiry into broadcasting in Wales.

Q369 **Ruth Jones:** Thank you to the three of you for coming in to see us today. It is really helpful to have you here in person. Coming from Newport West, which is my constituency, we know all about the changing landscape of broadcasting. We have Netflix coming in, and there is lots of very exciting stuff going on around Newport. How do you see the broadcast landscape changing in Wales over the next decade or so? A lot of changes have been made in the last 10 years, but where do you see it going in the future? How do you, as independents, respond to those challenges and changes?

Siân Price: I can speak only from the perspective of myself and Yeti. I will leave my colleagues to fill you in on the broader picture, but there is still no shortage of consumption of long-form factual content. Factual is what we make. The way it is consumed is starting to change and will continue changing. I still see a place for linear. Event television and that appointment to view will inevitably continue, and so it should, but, for other content, the way we watch it and the way we consume it will change.

My hope is that production companies in Wales will be able to take advantage of these opportunities and that more opportunities will be given for us to get bigger and better commissions, make inroads into the streamers and be on a level playing field with bigger companies.



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Sioned Wiliam: As Cwmni Da, we make content. We want that content to be viewed. As a company, we try to encourage the many young people who work for us to think about this changing landscape, to create new ideas, to create new models and to be excited about the opportunities that are presented.

There is no question that the landscape is changing. I am hoping that there will be co-operation between broadcasters and Government to ensure the content we make is prominent in this new digital online landscape. There is no shortage of creativity and enthusiasm, but we want our material to be out there.

I have had this conversation through my career, whether I have worked for the BBC or ITV. It is all about getting your content out in front of an audience. That is the key bridge to cross.

Dyfrig Davies: Bore da. Good morning. The industry is growing and it will continue to grow. Welsh companies—we represent over 30 of them—are now looking further afield than just Wales, which is good. Part of what TAC does is to try to promote that content to reach a further audience, be it through UK public service broadcasters or by working directly with the SVODs.

It is interesting to note that Cardiff is now the third-largest production centre in the UK. We very much hope that will continue. It is not just a picture of Cardiff. The great thing about the landscape at the moment for broadcasters is that there are companies based all over Wales. The digital revolution has meant that you can work from home, be it for editing purposes or even production.

Without a doubt, Covid posed a lot of pressures. We are over that now but, leading on to something else, it has meant that a lot of freelancers have left the industry. The problem facing us in the future is not the ability or the ambition; it is more to do with skills and the workforce.

Q370 **Ruth Jones:** You raise good points. BBC Cymru Wales told us very clearly that Wales is now the fastest-growing area in the UK for the commissioning of drama programmes. TAC has raised concerns about the brass-plating and the quotas of the industry. Would you like to share those concerns with us? We want Wales to be the best in the world, but what about the concerns and hurdles you might have?

Dyfrig Davies: It is a concern. Ofcom publishes a list of productions that have the nations and regions banner put on them. There are advantages for people to say that they are based in Wales. It is a worry. I am not sure whether Ofcom is looking closely enough at this. The three criteria are that they are substantively based in Wales, the 70% spend in Wales and the 50% on talent.

I am not sure that is being monitored closely enough. TAC members have always raised this issue. Brass-plating was a problem and is a problem,



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but we hope it will not remain a problem. We need more transparency and honesty about that.

Sioned Wiliam: Cwmni Da could not be further from that. It is a big employer in Caernarfon, with over 50 members of staff. It makes a massive contribution culturally, but it also helps prevent the brain drain because it encourages young people to make world-class television without having to leave Caernarfon.

They can leave and make great programmes all over the world, in New York, as with Chris, or Scandinavia, but the whole point is that their career progression can happen within the company. They can keep their families there; they can live the life they want, with the quality of life they want, without having to leave.

Without a company like Cwmni Da, they might have had to move to Cardiff or London to do the same jobs. They are able to do that because of the relationship between the company and the community. It employs people from across north Wales. It is a fantastic model, in fact, and we are very proud of it.

Ruth Jones: That is one aspect, I suppose. Siân Price, do you have anything to add?

Siân Price: Pop-ups are a particular bugbear of mine. It is really hard to get a commission, full stop. Whoever you are, you have to work really hard and you have to have brilliant ideas. There is definitely an issue, particularly with some broadcasters encouraging pop-ups. I understand that there needs to be a mixed economy to support both freelancers and properly indigenous Welsh companies.

Where there is perhaps an issue is where a multi-series order is given to a company on the condition it sets up in Wales. These are the commissions that companies already existing in Wales would kill for. They are our bread and butter. They are what keeps us going and what has sustained us through a feast and famine pattern of commissioning.

When you hear about companies that are given a big three series order on the condition they set up in Wales, that does not seem fair. The problem lies where the IP is not in Wales, where they are not executive-produced from Wales and where the money flow is not in Wales. That is where the problem is. Something needs to be done, perhaps through greater scrutiny of those commissions.

On the flipside of that, it feels like it disincentivises commissioners from engaging with Welsh companies because, once they have ticked that box, they can move on. I have been told in meetings with commissioners, "That is a brilliant idea. We love it. If only it came from a Northern Ireland company because we still have a box to tick there." That does not seem fair. Ideas are our currency. They absolutely have to commission



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the best ideas, but there seems to be a slightly uneven playing field in the pop-up or brass-plaquing side of things.

Ruth Jones: I am sure others will develop that conversation, but I will hand back to the Chair.

Q371 **Chair:** Siân Price, to clarify, when you talk about a “pop-up”, you are referring to companies that set up within Wales just to deliver a particular commissioning contract but do not have a real footprint or rootedness in Wales. Have I understood that correctly?

Siân Price: Yes, they will set up an office, although it is up for discussion how populated the office is. When I say “pop-up”, I mean it is set up specifically to deliver a project or a series, then will often close at the end of that. When they stay, grow and contribute to the local sector, that is the mixed economy and that is a good thing.

Q372 **Chair:** Do those pop-up company names appear in TAC’s list of Welsh production companies?

Dyfrig Davies: Many are not members, but they will be on the Ofcom register of productions in Wales. You will have a list there. The last one was produced in 2022. They are not very current, but you will have a list of the productions that were made in Wales.

Q373 **Chair:** It would not necessarily be evident what is from a “genuinely Welsh” production company and what is not.

Dyfrig Davies: No, you would have to do some digging or some googling to find out where their head office is and so forth.

Q374 **Mr Roberts:** Good morning, everybody. I met Siân at an event in Cardiff not too long ago, and we talked about this very thing. Alarming, it was not something I had heard about happening on this scale before. Siân, do you have a solid example of where you may have lost out on a commission to such a company? What actual impact do issues like this have on your business in terms of long-term viability and difficulty in maintaining staffing levels?

Siân Price: It is really difficult to quantify because, as I say, in theory everything is commissioned on the strength of your ideas. I feel like, in some departments within the BBC, as I said before, the commissioners are perhaps disincentivised from properly engaging with us and developing ideas with us because they feel they have ticked the Wales box. That is why I feel it would be great to get more engagement in the first place so we can compete for this business.

Returning series are the holy grail for all production companies because they enable you to invest in your staff, reinvest in the company and keep people on longer contracts. A one-series order and then a long wait before you know whether it is going to be recommissioned is really difficult for companies to ride out, if they do not have deeper pockets. The London or Manchester companies that set up in Wales, whichever



they are, perhaps have deeper pockets because of the infrastructure in their other offices.

Q375 **Mr Roberts:** Dyfrig, you mentioned skills and workforce issues. You used the term “brass-plating”. Just for the benefit of those who are not familiar with the term, that is broadly what we are talking about in terms of setting up an office and not really having an office.

Dyfrig Davies: Yes, exactly. It is usually a desk and a phone, and there might be one person. That is at the extreme. Of course, the point has been made: where does the IP lie at the end of the day? How much money comes back into the economy? How does that money then help the economy?

Q376 **Mr Roberts:** You said that should be more heavily scrutinised.

Dyfrig Davies: Yes.

Mr Roberts: In what way? What would you recommend they should do on a day-to-day basis to make it more heavily scrutinised?

Dyfrig Davies: It is a discussion we need to have with Ofcom. There is a register. The register looks back rather than forward. Maybe we should have a more current register. People should be aware.

There are basically three criteria, and you only have to answer two of them. They are that the production company must have a substantive business and production base in the UK outside the M25; at least 70% of the production budget, excluding some specific costs, must be spent in the UK outside the M25; and at least 50% of the production talent by cost must have their usual place of employment in the UK outside the M25.

It is the same for Wales, if you are answering those criteria. You have to answer two out of those three.

Q377 **Mr Roberts:** Are you saying that the criteria are not robust enough or there is not enough scrutiny of the criteria being properly fulfilled in the right way?

Dyfrig Davies: Agreeing with what Siân has said, it is possibly both. We should maybe look at the criteria again. They definitely should be scrutinised closely.

Q378 **Virginia Crosbie:** Dyfrig, you mentioned that freelancers are leaving the sector. My question relates to the pop-ups. Is their offering significantly different? What are they offering that you cannot fulfil locally?

Dyfrig Davies: If you are a freelancer in Wales, and just in Wales, you are usually dependent on several companies. It is that sort of feast and famine lifestyle. It is natural for them to look outside Wales. If they have been successful in working with a pop-up in Wales, they might be drawn to work further afield.



At TAC, we are not against that. It is difficult. The problem can perhaps be tackled from a different angle through apprenticeship systems. We know that S4C and Skillset are working closely to do this type of thing at the moment. TAC has been involved in discussions with CRIW and so forth about setting up apprenticeships where the apprentices are shared between companies. If you have a six-week production but you have to take on an apprentice for a year, it does not work. They need to be shared out.

Virginia Crosbie: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q379 **Wayne David:** I want to try to press you a little on some of the things you have already touched upon, in particular where the creative industry clusters are located within Wales. It seems to me that Cardiff is doing extremely well. There is a real creative cluster there. It is one of our most pre-eminent clusters in the UK.

You can also look at the specific developments in other parts of Wales, in the north-east and south-west. Generally speaking, there is uneven development, is there not? How do you address that? How do you make sure all parts of Wales benefit from what is taking place?

Dyfrig Davies: In terms of uneven development, if you look at the geography and the demographics of Wales, it is very difficult. In north-west Wales, the new Aria Film Studios development, with Rondo and so forth, is very important. That is a very important cluster, as Cwmni Da would know better than I.

We know there are other companies that work across other parts of Wales. You have Tinopolis in Llanelli and Telesgop in Swansea. We are distributed throughout the whole of Wales. Is it evenly distributed? When you consider the demographics and the geography of Wales, it is difficult.

Q380 **Wayne David:** How do you address it? How do you improve the situation?

Dyfrig Davies: In a way, it is through telling people that you can set up a television production company anywhere, really. If you are doing non-scripted or even scripted, your actual base can be anywhere these days. We cannot blame wi-fi in any area because most areas are well covered by now. We have not had any complaints about that. You are right; it is possible.

You tend to set up a company where you know there are freelancers and people similar to you who you can mix with. Ideas are quite often improved when you discuss them with other people.

Sioned Wiliam: Cwmni Da is an employee-owned business. Its conviction is to serve the local community, to stay rooted in that community and to tell the stories that reflect that community. There is an ambition there that could be copied by many other companies.



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You have to be brave; you have to be ambitious; you have to constantly be developing a range of ideas. You have to seek other markets, as Dyfrig says. Cwmni Da has worked in China and Korea. There needs to be a degree of ambition there.

One of the reasons I was really thrilled to become involved with the company was its ethos. It was connected to a community, but it also had these broad ambitions to make first-class television and to tell stories that are specific but universal in appeal. For me, that was a really exciting proposition.

When you go there, there is such excitement. All these young people are able to stay and work, and make ambitious, exciting and creative shows without having to leave Caernarfon, which is a wonderful thing. That shows it is possible.

Q381 **Wayne David:** Siân, you mentioned intellectual property earlier, but is there anything immediate that Government, at whatever level, could be doing to enhance the situation and ensure more equitable development?

Siân Price: I do not have much more to add than my colleagues have said, other than to say that Covid opened up a world of opportunity where you can be based anywhere. From my perspective as a programme maker, it is important that we are reflecting all of Wales on screen. That is just as important as maybe where production companies are based in Wales. It still feels like the areas where the production communities are centred tend to be the areas you see most frequently on telly.

Wayne David: In a sense, the status quo is being reinforced and reinforced.

Siân Price: Yes.

Q382 **Kevin Brennan:** Can I just drill down a little bit, Mr Davies, on what you were saying about brass-plating and pop-up companies? You said there is a need for transparency and honesty about it. Could you name some of the companies you are talking about?

Dyfrig Davies: It is not for me to name those companies.

Q383 **Kevin Brennan:** You said you need transparency and honesty; you have said this is a problem. How can we get our head around what the problem is if we do not know who you are talking about?

Dyfrig Davies: I refer you to the Ofcom list.

Q384 **Kevin Brennan:** If we took a list of your members and then compared it with the Ofcom list, all the companies that are not on your membership list are the ones you are talking about. Is that correct?



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Dyfrig Davies: Yes, or you could drill down a bit further and find out where their head offices are based, who has commissioned them and, as Siân has said, the number of commissions and so forth.

Q385 **Kevin Brennan:** There is not one example you could give us.

Dyfrig Davies: I would prefer not to do that.

Q386 **Kevin Brennan:** Why is that?

Dyfrig Davies: I represent all companies within TAC. It is not my role to do that.

Q387 **Kevin Brennan:** That is the problem, though.

Dyfrig Davies: It is. It is a problem.

Q388 **Kevin Brennan:** You are coming in front of a Select Committee and saying something is a really big problem, and then you are refusing to give an example of it.

Dyfrig Davies: I am quite happy to write to you at a later date, once we have done the work on it.

Q389 **Kevin Brennan:** Siân, I am not going to press you to do the same because I am sure you do not want, as an active company, to get into that. It is important that we know what is being talked about.

I want to ask about Channel 4, the Media Bill and what is going on there. What is TAC's reaction to the Government's proposals around Channel 4 and the Media Bill.

Dyfrig Davies: We are glad it is not being privatised. We want to look closely at this, and we have made suggestions regarding the quotas. We are worried that they might become production in-house. That would have a detrimental effect on a lot of Welsh companies that produce for it at the moment.

We are also worried. At the moment production in Wales is quite high. We would not want to see that drop.

Q390 **Kevin Brennan:** The Government's proposals are interesting. It is another one of these solutions in search of a problem, is it not? There is nobody who really wants this. Channel 4 does not want it; independent production companies do not want it. Yet it is in the draft Media Bill, in my opinion, because it was a chance for the Government to save face after its second botched attempt to privatise Channel 4 in five years. Is that a fair assessment of the position?

Dyfrig Davies: It would seem so, yes. The importance of Channel 4, which spent about £84 million in Wales over the last decade, is plain to see. The annual spend increased in 2021 and is forecast to grow to around £17 million in 2022. Anything that takes away from that is a worry.



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Of course, the Bill requires Channel 4 to commission a significant amount of programmes from independent producers. How do you quantify “significant”?

Q391 **Kevin Brennan:** If that were the case, if they did directly commission and make their own programming to a significant extent, would that cause significant damage to the independent production sector in Wales?

Dyfrig Davies: It would.

Q392 **Ben Lake:** Bore da. We have touched upon some of the streaming platforms, and we have had representatives from some of the companies before the Committee in previous sessions to explain some of their plans for productions in Wales. I am interested to understand, just to begin with, what your relationship might be. If you have had any dealings with some of these large multinational streaming companies in the past, how have they been?

Siân Price: Again, I can only speak from a factual and unscripted perspective. The SVODs and streamers are definitely in our sights as a company. At the moment, it does feel like the door is just ajar, and we really want to kick it down. The difficulty is in being taken seriously by the streamers. It feels like you need a big hit or a brand that your company makes. For that, we need investment in skills, commissions from the PSBs and all the rest of it, to grow and compete with those other companies.

One thing that could really help Welsh companies with the streamers is if there were some light quotas introduced there or if Welsh companies could pitch for opportunities with the streamers, in order to get a foot in the door and to show the world that there is amazing talent in Wales and that we should be up there on these platforms for the world to see our content.

Q393 **Ben Lake:** That is interesting. Is it the case at the moment, then, that some of the streamers often have their own ideas and production companies that they will bring with them to Wales to produce dramas or programmes? Is that what you are telling me?

Siân Price: No, that is not necessarily the case with the streamers. It is more that there is a smaller pool of production companies making content for the streamers. We are a small fish in a very big pond. It is about how we can be helped to get more visibility with the streamers.

We have no issue in getting meetings with them or pitching to them, but you get the impression that we are not really going to be taken properly seriously until we are a bigger-name company. We feel our ideas and our content can absolutely compete with those bigger companies. Is there a helping hand to have the opportunity to do so?

Q394 **Ben Lake:** Sioned, how does the experience of dealing with streamers differ from dealing with public service broadcasters?



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Sioned Wiliam: I cannot speak personally because, as a non-executive director, I am not actually pitching. I would say the ambition is there. I would echo everything Siân has said.

One thing I would say is that we have seen some recent developments, with *Dal Y Mellt* going to Netflix and the excitement within Netflix about programmes from all over the world. I am sure I am not alone in having spent an evening with a glass of wine and a Nordic drama. In fact, I became obsessed with a Finnish drama over the summer. I could highly recommend it. It is called *Deadwind*.

Again, you just do not think now. It is a window into somebody else's world. It is second nature to us all. It is great that Netflix has shown an interest in Welsh-language content. I saw them speak to this very Committee. There was a real excitement from them. It is putting their money where their mouth is, really. Maybe we need the equivalent of the quota quickies we had in the 1940s, not necessarily with an American in the lead role.

You are right, Siân. We need to be given some sort of level playing field to help us a bit to access those markets. The talent is there. *Dal Y Mellt* has proved that we can make extraordinary and internationally appealing drama. Again, it is always about access. It seems to come back to the same old, same old.

I would say that we need some sort of intervention, policy or quota. It has to be done with a light touch, but opening up that pathway would help companies. The ambition and the content are definitely there.

Dyfrig Davies: TAC has worked on this with the Department for Business and Trade quite recently. We held something in Cardiff, which brought in the BFI, S4C and the Department. We discussed how we promote our content—*Dal Y Mellt* has shown the way forward—to the streamers and so forth, and how we can have access.

It is important. It is that question of how we have access. That is what the companies would say. A part of what we need to do now is to work hard to bring them to meetings with producers in Wales. It is happening, but it needs to happen more.

Q395 **Chair:** Within your membership, are there companies in Wales with the scale to be able to get those very high-level meetings?

Dyfrig Davies: Yes. It is not always that. Some companies will work together. Even within the public service broadcasters, they will say, "You need to work with a larger company." That happens. There is collaboration.

Q396 **Chair:** Playing devil's advocate for one moment, is it a weakness of the sector that we have so many companies in Wales? Is it too fragmented a sector? Is there a need for consolidation, so we have a smaller number of bigger players that punch above their weight to a much greater extent?



Dyfrig Davies: The companies differ a great deal. You have companies maybe at the utility end that do the daily programmes and so forth. Then you have the very large drama or scripted companies. They differ, and I would not say it is because there are too many. Everybody has a role to play, but sometimes it would be good if we collaborated more.

That is something that companies are doing. For example, speaking with a Telesgop hat on, we work with Rondo quite a bit. I know there are other companies that do that. S4C is also promoting that.

Chair: Thank you. That is helpful.

Q397 **Virginia Crosbie:** Sioned, you mentioned a window on someone else's world. When the Welsh Affairs Committee went to America, everyone loved *Welcome to Wrexham*. That was great feedback. I have *Rownd a Rownd* and the production company Aria on Anglesey, in Menai Bridge. It is absolutely fantastic.

How does the production sector benefit from the Welsh language? How does the Welsh language benefit from the production sector?

Sioned Wiliam: It is a double-edged thing. First of all, we want to tell our own stories. Culture is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it. For us to be able to do it in our own language is vital and it is part of a civilised society. We do not have to argue the case for that.

In terms of the local economy, being able to make a range of first-class programming for S4C, a public service broadcaster, has meant that, for example, Cwmni Da can make great drama in co-production, by the way, with another company, as Dyfrig was saying. We make *Goglebocs Cymru* with Chwarel TV. We have a tradition of doing exactly what you have talked about.

It is also about having this broad range of programmes we can make. Chris Roberts—he is the perfect example of somebody who was found online, and he is now an international global phenomenon—speaks to the world through the medium of Welsh. The story begins within our own culture but spreads out into a more universally applied piece.

It is about authenticity and telling our own stories in our own way. People recognise authenticity; they respond to it. That is our USP. Being able to do that gives us a richness, and that is something we do not have to fight about anymore.

Siân Price: On the whole, Yeti focuses on English-language production. I would echo everything Sioned just said. We are all in Wales. It is very important that the Welsh language is reflected and served.

Funnily enough, over the summer we are making, for S4C, our first Welsh-language production. For us, it is a way to test a format that could then potentially have IP that we can exploit beyond Wales. S4C, in my limited experience, seems very willing to take risks on formats. It is very



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receptive to that, which benefits us as a non-Welsh-language Welsh company.

I would also say that the programme we are making for S4C is a children's series, which is being supported by the BFI's young audiences content fund, which the Government have closed, sadly. Without that funding, we would not be making this programme. We would not then have a format to take elsewhere. That is a matter of sadness for us, if slightly off-point.

Q398 Virginia Crosbie: You make a good point regarding funding. That was going to be my next question, regarding the number of young people coming through the sector. I know we are going to touch on apprenticeships as well. What is limiting the number of people coming through? Is it funding? Is it showcasing the talent we have? What support do we need?

Siân Price: There are a number of factors, really. For me, one of the biggest ones is class. There is a huge amount of very creative people in Wales, people with ideas, who just do not think telly is or could ever be for them because it is seen as posh or out of their reach.

There is a real job to be done at a very young, grassroots level. There are huge opportunities within the industry, especially if you include scripted and unscripted. Virtually every job going comes under the media banner. We need to engage people at a young age so they know this is a viable industry, whatever your skillset.

Again, it comes back to investment in people and tapping into the various funds that are available. As I said, we have tapped into the BFI fund. Creative Wales has supported us, along with Skillset, thinkBIGGER! and Channel 4. Channel 4 has been a huge support in terms of training and the trainees who have come through Yeti.

It is about investment in training and the visibility of the industry, so that it is open to everyone and can encourage people in. There are big class barriers at the moment that need to be overcome.

Q399 Mr Roberts: Siân, you said that Yeti is about to do its first Welsh-language commission. That is wonderful. Congratulations. Keep doing more of those. That is great.

The Welsh Government have this target to increase massively the number of Welsh speakers over a period of time. I will come specifically to Sioned and Dyfrig. Is the volume of programming in Welsh increasing significantly? Is it relatively flat? Is it in decline? Are we producing more Welsh-language content than we used to? Are we producing enough for the Welsh Government to hit that increased target of speakers?

Sioned Wiliam: I am terribly sorry, but I cannot really answer that very accurately. My impression is that there has never been a more wonderful time in terms of the range and ambition of programming.



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Take something like Hansh. My 20-year-old son will watch that. He curates his own television now, in a way we did not when we were younger. There is certainly more of a sense of, "How do we get 16-to-25s to come to television?" in a way I have perhaps not noticed before. Again, I am fairly new to this, having come back from radio to television in the last six months. I am still learning about some of these things.

Again, it comes down to ambition. I certainly see more ambition to tell our stories. I am repeating myself now, but, just in terms of the broad range, our company makes *Gogglebocs*, but it also makes *Stad*, which is a fantastic drama set on a council estate in Caernarfon. It also makes children's programming, such as *Deian a Loli*; it makes factual entertainment; it makes *FFIT Cymru*; it makes gardening programmes.

You can see that there is a hell of a broad range of programmes there. I see that echoed across the industry, but that is my limited experience.

Dyfrig Davies: There is less money. S4C had a flat settlement. To be fair, the cost of living crisis, as well as everything else, has spiralled. Having said that, there is a wide range of programming.

Are there more? Should there be more? Yes, and I would say that. It is interesting, for example, that engagement with Welsh programming is on the increase on all platforms. S4C has been concentrating on the 16-to-25s. That has been very successful.

At the Urdd National Eisteddfod held last week, more hours than ever before were streamed live. The overnight figures were the highest they have ever had. There is a huge increase for Urdd, which is very good to hear. That was in the news this morning or yesterday. There is a lot happening.

Do we need more? Yes. That is the right answer. If we are to hit that target, television is important. The content is important, if it has life beyond a linear platform. It is important to tell our story, to engage people with the language and to make it something outside education, so yes.

Q400 **Kevin Brennan:** I just want to go back to what Siân was saying about social class in all of this. I am extremely keen to try to get some progress on this and make it clear how many careers there are available in film, TV and the creative industries, not just in front of the camera but behind the camera, in catering or in set building. An incredible range of jobs are available.

Is one of the problems or barriers not only that people are unaware of that but also that the freelance nature of the industry can be off-putting for people from socioeconomic backgrounds that do not traditionally engage in freelance work?

Siân Price: Yes, absolutely. It is a huge barrier. If you did not have the bank of mum and dad, 10 or 15 years ago, you did not have a hope. It



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has changed for the better, but that change needs to go further, through apprenticeships and training.

Above all, for us as a company, the only way we can bring people in, train them and develop them is if we get commissions that are longer running. It is very difficult to take trainees on for a single project. If you have a series, you can create those roles.

We recently worked with Red Bull on this as part of a single project. I was talking about this issue of class and opening up opportunities. They created a runner position on the project specifically for someone from a disadvantaged background. We thought, "We could create this for all of our productions." I know it is something Netflix and a lot of the streamers are doing.

That is how we need to tackle it. The companies need the business in order to have the projects to train people on. More investment in skills, training and apprenticeships would be a massive help as well.

Q401 **Chair:** Thank you very much. We are just reaching the end of our time together. If you have any specific thoughts or recommendations on how the system of apprenticeships, either on the Welsh side or here in England, needs to be changed to reflect better some of the concerns you are raising, I would be really grateful. If you would not mind sending us some further thoughts and information in writing, that would be very helpful.

I will finish with one very quick question, if I may. You are all creative types. Do you agree with Michael Sheen that Welsh roles should only be played by Welsh actors?

Siân Price: God, that is such a difficult question.

Chair: Is that a pass?

Siân Price: To me, acting is acting.

Sioned Wiliam: They have to do it well, though. There was a film called *Pride* that nearly drove me round the bend. It is such a great film. Everybody but the Welsh were allowed to tell their story in that film. They had fantastic actors like Bill Nighy and Imelda Staunton, but there was a line in it where they said, "We have come all the way from Powys," where there were no coal mines in the 1980s, as far I can remember. There was a real sense that everybody but the Welsh were allowed to tell their story in that film.

Michael Sheen did not say what the clickbait suggests he said. It was a much more nuanced conversation about authenticity. He said that some actors make an effort. Welsh accents are notoriously difficult to do. He was saying that, from his point of view, sometimes perhaps people think they can do it but they have not really made enough of an effort because it is quite hard.



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Chair: We do not want to go down the road of saying, "If you are a Welsh actor or actress, your career is playing Welsh roles."

Sioned Wiliam: Yes, exactly. I remember Steffan Rhodri saying something similar. He wanted to be able to play other roles. I would just ask for people to make an effort, really, and use voice coaches. It is hard. There have been an awful lot of films in the last year from Wales with actors and actresses in the leads who, I felt, have not been authentically real. That is about making the effort.

Chair: Thank you. That is a great answer. Thank you very much for your time and expertise. It has been a really interesting session. Thank you to my colleagues and particularly to Kevin Brennan, who has been guesting from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Thank you.