

Rhodri Talfan Davies
Director
BBC Cymru Wales

10 April 2019

Dear Rhodri,

BBC Annual Plan 2019-20

Within the National Assembly for Wales, the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee is responsible for oversight of the BBC's delivery of its remit in Wales.

In the BBC's Annual Plan 2019-20, which was published recently, I noted the proposal to submit a request to Ofcom to amend the Operating Licence for radio stations in the Nations and Regions. The proposal to vary the quota for speech content in the chapter on 'Potential changes to the BBC's public services' says:

'we will be asking Ofcom to amend the Operating Licence to remove the 100% speech quota at breakfast time, whilst retaining the overall 60% quota for speech content between 06:00–19:00 on weekdays.'

The Committee is very concerned about the impact of this proposal on radio services for the people of Wales. The move away from 100% speech content at breakfast time would mean there is less focus on current affairs. The morning slot is an important means of informing people of news which affects them. Without this Wales-specific focus, people in Wales will be less well-informed about the democratic decisions which affect them.

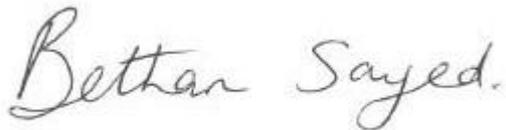
We are very well served with 'magazine style' breakfast shows which have a mixture of news, sport, music and interviews from BBC radio and commercial stations. The requirement to follow a talk-only format for stations which cover the regions and nations brings a pluralism to the choice of radio stations on offer. It is for this reason that we object to the proposal to ask Ofcom to amend the Operating Licence.

We cannot risk losing the scrutiny and attention to Welsh issues that currently exists in this time slot. I urge you to withdraw Radio Wales and Radio Cymru from the request to Ofcom to amend the Operating Licence.

In the meantime, I would be grateful if you could write to me setting out the reasons why Radio Wales and Radio Cymru feel this request to Ofcom is justified and how you will ensure the focus on Welsh current affairs will be maintained if the requirement for 100% speech content is dropped.

In order to inform the Committee at the earliest opportunity, I would be grateful if you could reply by 26 April 2019.

Yours sincerely,



Bethan Sayed
Chair of the Committee

Director Wales
Cyfarwyddwr Cymru

16 April 2019

Bethan Sayed, AM
Chair Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear Bethan,

Thank you for your letter dated 10 April 2019 about the BBC's Annual Plan.

As you know, the BBC set out in the Plan some of the areas in which it is considering seeking regulatory changes.

With regard to radio, the BBC's Nations and Regions division oversees all local and nations radio stations in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Currently, all these radio stations have significant quotas for speech content (60% of content between 06:00 and 19:00 and 100% between 07:00 and 08:30 on weekdays). These quotas are regulated by Ofcom.

The purpose behind the BBC's proposed request to remove the 100% speech requirement in the morning (and, instead adopt a consistent 60% requirement across the day) is to give individual radio stations right across the UK the flexibility at breakfast to respond to changing patterns of listening.

In short, it is about devolving these decisions to editorial leaders who are best placed to judge what is most appropriate in their own parts of the UK – rather than being bound by a 'one size fits all' approach.

However, as we have already stated, we have no plans for BBC Radio Wales or BBC Radio Cymru to change their current news focus in peak.

In fact, last month we announced a new-look line-up for BBC Radio Wales' news programmes. The biggest change is a new-look breakfast news show which will be presented by Claire Summers, bringing listeners the latest news and sport from the earlier time of 06:00 until 08:30.

Oliver Hides will take the reins on Friday and Saturday mornings (with an extended breakfast news programme on Saturday). And Gareth Lewis will present a new-look weekday drivetime news programme between 17:00 and 18:30.

First and foremost, these changes will ensure that news remains the cornerstone of our national radio service. All these programmes will be all-speech, and, yes, they'll continue to hold decision-makers to account. Contrary to some public comments, these are not 'magazine' shows. They will address the biggest stories of the day and offer an in-depth look at the issues and debates that are shaping modern Wales and the wider world.

But they'll also respond to growing audience demand for news coverage that directly addresses their passions and concerns. So expect a focus on people and communities every bit as much as our institutions. And they won't be afraid to look at the lighter side of Welsh news and events because radio news programmes have the space to do both and we know listeners want us to strike an effective balance.

Given the interest in this matter, we have also today published a blog setting out the context for the changes which I have attached for your interest.

Finally, I would like to stress that any proposed regulatory change at a pan-UK level would be in line with the BBC's obligations, as set out in the Charter and Agreement and any material change would be subject to a Public Interest Test and approval from Ofcom. There is also a commitment to engage with stakeholders both from industry and audiences to ensure the BBC takes their views into account in developing and assessing proposals.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rhodri', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Rhodri Talfan Davies

News programming on BBC Radio Wales

I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on our plans for BBC Radio Wales as there's been quite a bit of comment on the changes we're planning – not all of it accurate.

Last month, as you may be aware, we announced a new-look line-up for BBC Radio Wales' news programmes. The biggest change is a new-look breakfast news show which will be presented by Claire Summers, bringing listeners the latest news and sport from the earlier time of 6am until 8.30am.

Oliver Hides will take the reins on Fridays and Saturdays mornings (with an extended breakfast news programme on Saturday). And Gareth Lewis will present a new-look weekday drivetime news programme between 5pm and 6.30pm.

A commitment to journalism

First and foremost, these changes will ensure that news remains the cornerstone of our national radio service. All these programmes will be all-speech, and, yes, they'll continue to hold decision-makers to account. Contrary to some public comments, these are not 'magazine' shows. They will address the biggest stories of the day and offer an in-depth look at the issues and debates that are shaping modern Wales and the wider world.

But they'll also respond to growing audience demand for news coverage that directly addresses their passions and concerns. So expect a focus on people and communities every bit as much as our institutions. And they won't be afraid to look at the lighter side of Welsh news and events because radio news programmes have the space to do both and we know listeners want us to strike an effective balance.

Of course, programmes are about much more than any one individual presenter and the BBC Wales newsroom will continue to play a central role in planning and reporting the stories that are broadcast on both programmes. So whilst the presenting line-up is changing, I want to be clear that we are not reducing our investment in journalism on BBC Radio Wales and both programmes will continue to draw extensively on the editorial expertise of our news department.

There has also been some press comment about the impact of these changes on female presenters. Contrary to the impression given by these reports, the reality is that these changes will deliver one of the most balanced presenter line-ups on any radio station anywhere in the UK. In fact, of the six main weekday programmes between 6am and 10pm, three will be presented by women, and three by men.

In addition, it's worth noting that Claire will be the only female journalist anywhere in the UK to take on the role of solo presenter for a national breakfast news programme. We're delighted Claire is joining the team but she is only the latest in a long line of new female voices to have signed-up with Radio Wales over recent months. Other new presenters include Carol Vorderman, Behnaz Akhgar, Angela Jay and Eve Myles.

Finally, there has also been some comment that we're cutting news on Radio Wales. The only reduction is in the afternoon – where the weekday programme length is reducing from 2.5 hours to 1.5 hours.

Why? Because we believe the current programme duration is too long and we're confident we can deliver more impact by focusing our editorial resources at this time of day. But we

also need to keep this reduction in perspective: the new programme will still be half an hour longer than Radio 4's PM programme. A shorter programme certainly does not mean less impact.

The wider context

I know that the BBC's intention to seek a change to the Ofcom quota for all-speech content on radio has also led to some concern about Radio Wales' plans. The purpose behind the BBC's proposed request is to give individual radio stations right across the UK the flexibility to respond to changing patterns of listening at breakfast time.

In short, it is about devolving these decisions to editorial leaders who are best placed to judge what will work in their own parts of the UK - rather than being bound by a 'one size fits all' approach.

However, as we have already stated, we have no plans for Radio Wales or Radio Cymru to change their current news focus in peak.

Whilst all radio stations refresh their programming from time to time, these particular changes come at a time when the radio landscape here in Wales has shifted dramatically, with two of the Wales' leading commercial radio stations recently ending their Welsh breakfast shows.

This means that many people who want Welsh radio in the mornings will be looking for somewhere else to turn. Many, we know, will be looking for output that's smart, engaging and relevant – and we believe that's exactly what we can offer.

There's a wider journalistic challenge too, of course. In a news agenda dominated by what's happening in Westminster, Europe and elsewhere, there are many distinctive Welsh stories to be told. As a result, it's never been more important for us reach out to the biggest possible audience with news and debate that informs our national conversation.

Of course, programmes must change and evolve in response to changing times and audience feedback but I want to assure you that our commitment to quality news and journalism for Wales remains unchanged.

Colin Paterson
Editor, Radio Wales