



School of Journalism,  
Media and Culture  
Ysgol Newyddiaduraeth,  
y Cyfryngau a Diwylliant

**Cardiff University**  
School of Journalism, Media and  
Culture  
Two Central Square  
Cardiff  
CF11 1FS  
Email lewisj2@cardiff.ac.uk

**Prifysgol Caerdydd**  
Ysgol Newyddiaduraeth, y  
Cyfryngau a Diwylliant  
Dau Sgwâr Canolog  
Sqwâr Canolog  
Caerdydd  
CF11 1FS  
Email lewisj2@cardiff.ac.uk

2 December 2019

## **RE: Evidence about whether broadcasting should be devolved to Wales**

Dear Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee,

This is a response to your invitation for evidence about whether broadcasting should be devolved to Wales. In summary, the points below suggest that:

- Current arrangements have led to outcomes that are negative for Wales and decrease Welsh representation in key areas of decision-making
- Devolution of broadcasting – if pursued effectively – provides a number of opportunities with the potential to benefit both the people of Wales and the thriving Welsh media sector.

My work cuts across this question in two ways.

**First**, my colleague Professor Stephen Cushion and I have conducted the largest body of research in the UK about the way network broadcasters report issues (like health or education) where UK powers are devolved. Much of this research was conducted for the BBC Trust, and I presented some of our findings at the Gwlad conference (powerpoint attached - see also a journal article on the main findings). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1464884917746560>

In short, our research suggests that BBC network news coverage of devolved issues improved following our first review in 2007 (which informed the King Report). However, our subsequent studies suggest *a number of problems remain* – in particular:

-  Across all UK network news broadcasters, coverage of devolved issues – like health or education – remain overwhelmingly focused on England.



- This means that UK viewers and listeners in Wales, Scotland and N. Ireland *cannot rely on network news* for coverage of major areas like Schools and the NHS.
- This problem is compounded by *weak signposting*. The many stories that only apply to England are sometimes signposted with one or two references to location (this is more likely to happen on BBC network news than elsewhere), but these references tend to be both brief and vague. They are also contradicted by phraseology suggesting the story has a more general application – for example, reports referring to ‘*the Health Minister*’ rather than ‘the Minister responsible for NHS England’. Our audience testing suggests this weak signposting *simply does not work*. Even in a controlled viewing environment, viewers in Wales are likely to assume that these stories *apply to the whole of the UK*. This means that viewers – especially viewers outside England - are routinely misinformed.
- Broadcasters have largely failed to take the opportunities that devolution has provided to compare and contrast policies and approaches across the UK’s four nations. This means that policy/approaches are often discussed in a vacuum, with people unaware of how other parts of the UK are moving in different directions.

**Second**, as Director of Clwstwr - which funds, supports and promotes innovation in the Welsh screen and news industries – the devolution of broadcasting raises a number of possibilities to promote a more progressive broadcasting policy and benefit the Welsh media sector (an increasingly significant part of the Welsh economy). In particular:

1. *Tensions arise for a Welsh broadcasting sector with a strong stake in broadcasting policy when most key decision makers are located in England*. Despite the distinctive value importance of broadcasting in Wales, current arrangements mean that decisions taken by DCMS or by politicians in Westminster often do not take these into account (especially when the Westminster and Welsh governments are not politically aligned). This goes well beyond S4C. So, for example, over the last decade, the Westminster government has taken decisions about the BBC licence fee settlement which the Welsh Government is likely to have opposed. Any existing consultation of devolved Governments in this process is therefore weak and ineffective.

Current arrangements for broadcasting thereby exclude Wales from decisions that affect it. Devolving powers over broadcasting provide an opportunity to give the Welsh Government a seat at the table in areas like BBC licence fee renewal, or funding for S4C. Indeed, including all four UK nations in decisions of this kind is likely to make these processes more consensual and stable.

Our discussions with the EU in Brussels suggest that, post-Brexit, there will be opportunities for the Welsh Government to strike agreements (outside the EU) that might provide greater access to participation in funding schemes that would benefit the media sectors in Wales. In this climate, devolving broadcasting may provide real opportunities for competitive advantage.



Overall, current arrangements which centralise power in England have a number of disadvantages for Wales. Devolving broadcasting to Wales provides a number of opportunities to have greater control over and promote an increasingly important sector in the Welsh economy. It also has the potential to strengthen the Welsh voice in securing strong media services by and for the people of Wales.

The key question, for me, is what is devolved and how? Changes that simply passes responsibility for S4C to Welsh Government will *not* allow us to address many of the issues outlined above. Any plans for devolution need to give Wales a real voice in decisions at the UK level about British broadcasting. This certainly includes the BBC, but could extend to all broadcasters with a UK-wide remit.

Your sincerely,



Professor Justin Lewis



THE QUEEN'S  
ANNIVERSARY PRIZES  
FOR HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION  
2015



Registered Charity No. 1136855  
Elusen Gofrestredig Rhif. 1136855