

9 June 2004

Professor Patrick Barwise
c/o Karina Grazin
BBC Digital Services Review
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Dear Professor Barwise

Review of BBC's Digital Television Services

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the above review.

The Arts Council of Wales has a statutory duty to develop and improve understanding and participation in the arts and to promote the accessibility of the arts to the people of Wales. We are an Assembly Sponsored Public Body and are one of the two Welsh distributors for National Lottery funding from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport based in London.

We wish to make three brief points about BBC4, the service intended to "create a forum for debate" and aimed at "anyone interested in culture, arts and ideas".

Greater arts content

- We have been slightly disappointed with the amount of arts coverage on the new service and would wish to see more arts content on BBC4 in future. We trust this would not detract, however, from any arts coverage on BBC 1 and BBC 2.

The arts beyond London

- We note that in the schedule of the new digital services, the intention is for BBC4 to "have a high level of new content and....represent the nations and regions". While we welcome this expression of intent, past evidence is that policy commitments in organisations of the size and character of the BBC are not always carried through over time. While we recognise the inevitable dominance of a cultural centre of the size of London,

commissioners and producers must guard against an overwhelming concentration on the central metropolitan scene. Currently, we feel that the new service is still far from representing fully the cultural landscape of the UK and would wish, in particular, to see more programmes that reflect the reservoir of talent and the increasing range of events of an international standard that exist in Wales.

- For instance, in its approach to opera on television we believe the BBC needs to pay far more attention to the work of opera companies outside London. In particular, over the last decade we do not believe that opera on television has reflected the scale and quality of Welsh National Opera's achievements. The opening next November of the Wales Millennium Centre – a brand new home and auditorium for WNO – will only serve to underline this point. The point can also be extended to the work of Music Theatre Wales.
- Given that the take-up of digital services in Wales is higher (at around 55%) than many other parts of the UK, there is clearly a potential audience for this type of programming.

Partnership working

- Given Wales's recent international successes with projects such as Artes Mundi and Venice Biennale, and with the opening of the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff this autumn, there are likely to be many more opportunities for showcasing Welsh art and artists for the enjoyment of a wider audience. We would be very happy to work in partnership with the BBC, BBC4 and arts and music producers in BBC Wales in order to ensure that a UK network such as BBC 4 reflect the talents that Wales has to offer and their relevance and appeal to wider audience.

We hope these comments will be incorporated in your independent report to the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely

Peter Tyndall
Chief Executive