



Written evidence in response to DCMS Select Committee inquiry into Minority Languages

About TAC

1. TAC (Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru) represents the independent television production sector in Wales. Our sector is a substantial component of the creative industries in Wales and in the UK overall, with Cardiff alone having the third largest film and TV cluster in the UK¹. This provides economic, social and cultural benefits through supplying creative content. There are around 50 companies in the sector, ranging from sole traders to some of the leading players in the UK production industry. They produce content for the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky as well as other commercial broadcasters and platforms.
2. Our member companies also produce almost all the original television and online media content for Welsh-language broadcaster S4C, plus a variety of radio productions for the BBC. In its role as a trade association, TAC liaises with Welsh and UK Governments, including on matters around creative industry policy and its ability to promote the Welsh language.

About this response

3. Our knowledge and expertise of minority language issues is based on our members' position as television content makers often communicating through the medium of Welsh. We have therefore restricted our response to two of the Committee's four questions.

What are the key factors determining whether an indigenous minority language thrives?

4. A language needs to be relevant and feel like part of a national identity. It also needs to be recognised that each language has a different and unique form of expression of thought and opinion. Its link to the heritage and culture of a nation needs to be reflected and its relevance to modern life, as well as a connection with the past, is very important.
5. In 2017 the Welsh Government, realising that strengthening the Welsh language needed a coherent central approach, introduced its Cymraeg 2050 strategy, which has at its centre a target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. This strategy was able to build on previous positive developments, including its having official status, as the Welsh Government explains in its Cymraeg 2050 work programme:

"We are fortunate not to be starting from scratch. Government support for the language has never been stronger. The Welsh language has official status; legislation is in place providing Welsh speakers with the right, through the Welsh Language Standards, to Welsh language services, and a Welsh Language Commissioner to oversee the implementation of those rights. There also exists a statutory basis for which the provision of Welsh-medium

education is planned for, and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 included the Welsh language within one of its seven well-being goals.”¹

6. This demonstrates the many building bricks that are needed to ensure a minority language remains strong and is supported at the right levels by government. In the case of Welsh, its presence has been made stronger by positive legislation, including the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This declares that the Welsh language has official status in Wales and it created the Welsh Language Standards and the Welsh Language Commissioner post. The Welsh Language Commissioner can require public organisations to use the Welsh Language Standards, which promote and facilitate the Welsh language, and ensure that the Welsh language and the English language are treated equally in Wales.
7. But it should also be emphasised that the broadcasting and TV production industry also plays a crucial role. The creation and continued support for the Welsh language media provider S4C in 1982 was a highly significant step, as it created an independent production sector made up of Welsh speakers, which has become a major force in the use of the language through providing compelling original content.
8. In January this year S4C, which celebrated its 40th anniversary last November, announced that its share of viewing among younger audiences (16-44) is the highest since 2008. It also had a 35 per cent increase in its prime time viewing figures on live viewing and catch-up for the 16-44 age group for 2022/23 compared to 2021-22, plus a 20% year on year increase in the number of viewers watching on catch-up platforms such as S4C Clic and iPlayer.
9. S4C’s delivery commitments for the Cymraeg 2050 strategy are spelt out in a Memorandum of Understanding with the Welsh Government². These commitments include collaborating with partners such as the National Centre for Learning Welsh; providing archive material to assist with the development of Welsh language speech recognition and automatic translation facilities; making its content easy to access for education purposes, collect relevant statistics and data and; through S4C’s skills and diversity and inclusion strategies, ensuring opportunities for people from all walks of life to work in Welsh. S4C has recruited a Cymraeg Strategy Leader to further its work to meet the Cymraeg 2050 target.
10. TAC partners with S4C to deliver a training programme, and since 2019 TAC has delivered 89 courses, for which there were 1,328 registrations. This training programme was set up in recognition of the need to ensure companies can meet their responsibilities as businesses as well as seeking to grow them, plus ensuring their workforces have the appropriate skills. TAC does not currently charge freelancers to attend this training. TAC offers a fully bilingual service with training sessions held in both Welsh and English to ensure that the training programme is inclusive to both Welsh speakers and non Welsh speakers. Some TAC training sessions have also been held bilingually, and others with simultaneous translation for non Welsh speakers to participate. TAC has also encourages training providers to provide materials and resources in both Welsh and English to ensure that training content is accessible to all TAC members in their preferred language.
11. Elsewhere, the BBC’s Charter and Agreement contains measures to bolster Welsh language content, including providing Welsh language radio service Radio Cymru and ten hours per week of Welsh language programming to S4C, including soap opera *Pobol y Cwm*. BBC Cymru Wales

¹ [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers - Work programme 2017–21. Welsh government, 2017, p2](#)

² [Memorandum of Understanding between Cymraeg 2050 and S4C. Welsh Government, February 2023, p9](#)

provides news stories and other online content in Welsh. It has also undertaken initiatives such as 2014's 'Big Welsh Challenge'³ to encourage the take up Welsh, providing a range of online resources to support those seeking to learn the language. The presence of S4C on the BBC's popular iPlayer platform has meant easier access and discoverability of Welsh language content for audiences across the UK.

12. The BBC now has a Memorandum of Understanding with Creative Wales which commits it to working towards ensuring the screen sector: *"delivers content which tells the stories, reflects the lives and landscape of the nation, as well as the languages and cultures, in a way that is compelling for audiences globally and generates pride locally"*.

What should be the role of the UK Government in supporting and developing indigenous minority languages?

13. Over and above its legislative requirements, including relevant departments having Welsh Language Schemes, the UK Government also has an important role to play in the broadcasting space. This is important to ensuring the major players in PSB system and beyond are where possible helping to promote the UK nations' culture and identity, including minority languages.
14. The UK Government, following the independent review of S4C, has stabilised its funding to some degree (see paragraph 18 below). But it still needs to implement very important legislation to protect the prominence of all the UK's PSBs, including S4C, on digital platforms. This legislation was due to be in the Media Bill, but this legislation has been much delayed, partly due to the deliberations on the future of Channel 4. We now need to see this Bill introduced as a matter of urgency to ensure our PSBs, including those broadcasting in Welsh and other minority languages, can be easily discoverable on streaming platforms.
15. S4C has taken advantage of the growing UK audience for foreign language drama by investing, often in collaboration with English language broadcasters, in relatively high-end drama. Programmes such as *Craith/Hidden*, *Y Gwyll/Hinterland*, and *Y Golau/The Light in the Hall*, using techniques of back-to-back filming in Welsh and English, have grown UK audiences' familiarity with Wales and the Welsh language, with the English language versions normally including some subtitled Welsh.
16. Thanks to such collaborations, we are now in the situation where the international platforms are starting to take notice of Welsh language productions with Netflix having decided to show its first ever Welsh language drama, *Dal Y Mellt*, made by TAC member company Vox Pictures. When informing the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee session of this development in January, a Netflix spokesperson said *"just one example of an instance where we identify a piece of content that is very culturally specific but we believe will be incredibly successful with our members"*⁴.
17. Netflix has also released two films with Welsh language subtitles⁵. These developments would not have arisen without the investment in S4C and other PSB support for Welsh language content.

³ See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/learnwelsh/bigwelshchallenge/>. Accessed 3 March 2022

⁴ Oral evidence: Broadcasting in Wales. Welsh Affairs Committee. HOC 620, 18 Jan 2023, Q94

⁵ See <https://nation.cymru/culture/second-ryan-reynolds-film-to-be-released-on-netflix-with-welsh-language-subtitles/> accessed 7 Mar 2023

18. However S4C's funding remains a challenge. In 2010 it saw its government grant of £100m plus annually, linked to inflation, replaced with £74m from the TV Licence Fee plus a much smaller public grant of £7m which then underwent further cuts. The funding of S4C has now transferred to the TV Licence Fee, with S4C carrying out its own negotiation with the Government for the amount of TVLF money it receives. Following the independent review of S4C in 2018, which recommended wider online activity for S4C to take it beyond being a linear channel and become a public service media provider, in 2022's TV Licence Fee settlement the Government agreed to a £7.5m per annum increase in S4C's share of TVLF funding. However this funding was specifically designated to allow S4C to develop its presence on digital platforms and did not contribute further to its overall programme budget. This leaves S4C in a situation where it is still running over 50% repeats on its linear channel and whose overall budget is much lower than it was in 2010. And with discussions ongoing about the future of the TVLF, it is important to remember that funding the BBC beyond 2027 using an alternative mechanism will also directly affect S4C.
19. As well as needing long-term stability in terms of its funding, S4C and Welsh language TV production could benefit from an improvement in the UK creative industry tax relief regime. Figures from the BFI show clearly the enormous economic benefits brought by the existing audio-visual tax reliefs, which include the High End TV Tax Relief (HETR). HM Treasury has recently consulted on merging this relief with the Film Tax Relief, Animation Tax Relief and Children's TV Tax Relief.
20. TAC's response⁶ to the HMT consultation has highlighted a number of important areas for consideration, one of which is HMT's proposal to raise the current HETR threshold of £1m per hour. TAC, along with much of the rest of the industry, has voiced concerns that this could be counterproductive. While some high-end TV budgets have risen in recent years due to increasing content spend by the VOD platforms, this same spend has more recently seen a contraction in production spend as the general economic climate, plus the economics of the TV business, have caused those platforms to reduce their outgoings. Raising this threshold could cause international TV platforms to move production spend outside of the UK. This would adversely affect our domestic broadcasters, who increasingly rely on international co-productions to fund high-end TV. This in turn could have a knock on effect to the TV production industry, including in Wales. It is this industry that S4C relies upon for its programmes as it is a publisher-broadcaster.
21. Further to this, S4C is not itself in a position to take advantage of the HETR at its current threshold, as £1m-per-hour is well beyond what it can spend on a Welsh-language drama. TAC therefore is making the case to HM Treasury that there should be a lower threshold for minority language high-end TV production of perhaps £200k-per-hour.
22. Elsewhere the UK Government supported further minority language production in its contestable fund pilot schemes. In TV, the Young Audiences Content Fund allocated 10% of production awards and 7% of development awards supporting new content in indigenous languages (Scottish Gaelic, Irish Gaelic and Welsh)⁷. TAC companies Cwmni Da, Telesgop, Boom Cymru and others used the fund to make Welsh language content. The funding allowed for additional Welsh language content which would not otherwise have been made.
23. Cwmni Da gained funding for two shows in 2021, one of which was *Hei Hanes!*, a drama series on Welsh history. They have stated to us that: "*Without the contribution of the YAC Fund this*

⁶ [Response to HMT consultation on Audio-visual tax reliefs. TAC, February 2023](#)

⁷ [Young Audiences Content Fund Pilot: End of Term Evaluation. Bigger Picture Research, December 2022, p3](#)

would not have reached the screen, there is no doubt. The tax relief on children’s programmes on its own does not enable broadcasters and producers to create material that is daring enough to compete with that on Netflix and its like - those programmes that are on a plate for most children. The challenge is greater to attract these young viewers to continue to watch programmes in their mother tongue after nursery stage”.

24. And in radio the Audio Content Fund had programmes in various minority languages, broadcast on commercial or community radio stations. A total of 7% of the fund’s grant budget has been spent on content in non-English UK Indigenous languages⁸.
25. Regrettably neither of these schemes have been continued at UK level, with the UK Government not having allocated further funding following the three-year pilot phase (April 2019-March 2022). Given the positive official evaluations⁹ for both schemes, we hope that the UK Government might consider further funding for them. As well as providing new content for audiences, these schemes also created jobs and new partnerships for production companies all around the UK.
26. In the meantime Creative Wales has set up the Young Content Fund¹⁰, which provides development funding for children’s TV projects across all genres. Proposals are only considered if they are from production companies whose head offices are based in Wales. All projects must be bilingual in English and Welsh. The first eight projects were recently announced and will receive a combined £352,545 of funding¹¹.
27. The UK Government therefore needs to be joined up in terms of understanding the role PSB’s and S4C in particular play in supporting and maintaining the Welsh language and introduce a range of measures to support Welsh language TV production:
 - Introduce the Media Bill as soon as possible to guarantee prominence for UK PSBs on digital platforms.
 - Ensure S4C’s public funding is maintained and increased post-2027 when the current BBC Charter ends
 - Introduce a lower threshold to allow minority language productions to access the HETR and gain further investment
 - Allocate further funding to the Young Audiences Content Fund and Audio Content Fund

⁸ Evaluation of the Audio Content Fund. Wavehill for UK DCMS, October 2022, p29

⁹ YACF Evaluation: <file:///C:/Users/Tim%20PC/Downloads/bfi-young-audiences-content-fund-end-of-term-evaluation-2022-12-5.pdf>

ACF Evaluation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-audio-content-fund>

¹⁰ <https://www.creative.wales/young-content-fund>. Accessed 6 Mar 2023

¹¹ <https://businessnewswales.com/new-funding-for-wales-based-companies-to-develop-bilingual-content-for-young-audiences>. Accessed 6 Mar 2023

www.tac.cymru