

Sub Committees on The Smoke-free Premises etc. (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2012

Response from Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru (TAC) (Welsh Independent Producers)

TAC

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Smoking exemption for Film & TV.

TAC is mindful that this is a very emotive and complex subject, and do not seek to overturn the Smoking Ban in Wales. We do however seek for a change in the law, a change that would allow an exemption for TV and Film Productions, in certain circumstances.

The law as it stands does not allow for an exemption, as it does in England. TAC feels that this has a serious economic impact on the creative Industries within Wales. These are Industries that the Welsh Government is actively supporting in various ways, and I would entreat you to continue in your invaluable support by supporting this exemption.

There are examples where revenue has been lost to Wales because of this ban on smoking. “Upstairs, Downstairs” will suffice as a clear example of this issue. The BBC, with much fanfare, has moved Productions from London to Cardiff, and has brought much needed income into the Capital. It seems at odds then, that this Production has to “up sticks”, and move to Bristol to film scenes that involve smoking. Period drama will inevitably require such scenes. Should we sit back and let all TV and Film be made in England? This is not in line with Welsh Government’s undoubted support for the Creative Industries.

In the case of “Ryan a Ronnie”, a TV drama largely based in the ‘smoky’ atmosphere of a Welsh workingman’s club in the 1970’s (The Double Diamond, Caerffili), the Producers tried various means to adhere to the law on the prohibition of smoking on premises. They tried electronic cigarettes, which looked unrealistic, and even tasked the design team with creating fake cigarettes with cigarette paper and cotton wool, which was quickly ruled out for obvious health and safety reasons. There is no doubt that the Producers had, while attempting to authentically portray the atmosphere of the period, great difficulties dealing with the challenging task of compromising editorially in the face of being unable to film interior scenes involving smoking. The inability to set the scene as realistically as desired contributed in part to a decision to locate certain scenes outside Wales (Liverpool) resulting in additional production costs.

It was often mentioned in the Press that the Dragon Studios in Pencoed were going to be the Welsh equivalent of Hollywood, with some getting so excited they called it “Valleywood”. To date this hasn’t really happened, why? Do Production Companies from England and beyond really want to come to Wales to film a period Drama, only to have to relocate the whole Production, if there is a scene that involves smoking? I think not.

TAC is committed to seeing the Creative Industries in Wales grow and prosper, not an easy task in these days of dwindling budgets. This task is being hampered by a law that is inflexible. This discussion will not come up in legislation for many years, if this exemption does not get the support from AM’s, there can surely be only one outcome. The TV & Film Industry within Wales will be at a disadvantage economically and creatively by being out of step with England, which I’m sure you’ll agree is something all AM’s should be concerned about.

Iestyn Garlick (Chair TAC)