

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
Radio yng Nghymru / Radio in Wales
CWLC(5) RADIO10
Ymateb gan Radio Cardiff / Evidence from Radio Cardiff

Background

VCS Cymru is a social action charity based in Cardiff. We operate the broadcast licence for Radio Cardiff, the community radio station. We offer an alternative to mainstream BBC and commercial radio stations with our distinctive blend of music and speech programming.

Aside from being the only community radio station in the City, we are actually the only terrestrial station of any kind that broadcasts exclusively to Cardiff and its richly multi-cultural population. We are proud to give a voice to the diverse communities living in what is both one of the oldest established multicultural areas in the UK, and the youngest capital city in Europe. Radio Cardiff has over 100 volunteers from across the communities that make the city their home.

But there is more to Radio Cardiff than just broadcasting. The station has become very much part of the community. We first went on air in October

2007, and we are an established part of the City's life and each week we connect our audience to a huge spectrum of events, opportunities and recreational activities in the Welsh Capital as well as offering training to 'up skill' local people to become broadcasters and produce radio that is more representative of lesser heard communities.

(1) The extent to which BBC Cymru Wales radio services, commercial radio services and community radio services meet the needs of audiences in Wales.

As Wales, unlike England, does not have a network of BBC local radio stations, BBC Cymru Wales has the difficult task of trying to serve the entire country with its considerable demographic and cultural differences.

In Cardiff, and indeed increasingly across all the urban areas of Wales, there is a multi-cultural dimension which is not well served by the national stations.

In the current climate a more formal relationship between the BBC and community radio may be able to partially alleviate this issue. I should point out that BBC Radio Wales – Colin Patterson and his team – have been responsive and supportive of us

at Radio Cardiff, but it would be a great step forward to have mentoring and training development protocols in place where volunteer broadcasters could benefit from BBC expertise in a structured way.

(2) The possible impact of the deregulation of commercial radio on audiences in Wales, ownership structures of commercial radio and their impact on local content.

We have already seen a high level of dilution of local content in the commercial radio sector, with established radio 'brands' losing their local identity to become part of quasi-UK national channels with the majority of programming originating from London or Birmingham.

This has a more significant impact on how local areas are represented in Wales than in England due to the absence of BBC local radio, and increasingly it is the case that the only source of radio content tailored to specific areas is provided by community radio.

(3) The impact of new technology on local content

Clearly the advent of internet-based radio listening with the fast increase in smart speakers, phone apps and bluetooth technology is increasing choice and is liable to have an affect on both reach and advertising revenue. The future of DAB in this climate is hard to quantify, but the introduction of the new small-scale DAB licences is something Radio Cardiff welcomes. With our required low-wattage transmitter there are several areas of Cardiff that cannot pick up a good signal on FM and this has become a greater concern for us as the demographic of the capital evolves.

When we started broadcasting 11 years ago the inner-urban areas of Butetown, Grangetown & Riverside were home to the biggest number of people from BAME communities – our core audience. Since then there has been a shift, and now the most diverse areas of the city are to the north of the city in Cathays, Adamsdown & Roath where the signal is significantly weaker.

Radio Cardiff is the only terrestrial station than broadcasts exclusively to the City. The is unusual in the context of cities in the UK given its size, and is in marked contrast to other urban areas in Wales (Swansea, for instance has 3 commercial stations – Swansea Sound, The Wave and Swansea Bay Radio – and a community station in Radio Tircoed). We estimate our weekly reach at around 26,000 listeners

but growing it is very limited by FM coverage restrictions. Being part of the small-scale DAB multiplex would be one way to address the problem, but its a costly enterprise for a not-for-profit station which does not receive financial support from the Welsh Government or the local authority.

(4) The financial sustainability of community radio services in Wales; and the suitability of Wales's radio broadcasting infrastructure.

Radio Cardiff has a business operating model which takes 50% of its revenue from grants which support people into training & volunteering with the radio, and 50% from sales & advertising (for which element we have recently set up a Community Interest Company). The advertising market is tough, and we are constantly looking at ways of adapting our approach, for instance we are currently in talks with our two neighbouring community radio stations (Bro Radio in the Vale of Glamorgan and GTFM in Rhondda Cynon Taf) to form a consortium to attract sub-regional advertising revenue.

The Welsh Government has previously committed to allocating a proportion of its own radio advertising spend to community radio, but this initiative has not yet come to fruition. Some form of financial support from the Welsh Government could make it possible for us to expand our community journalism, better represent our communities and increase the stations reach, so acting on this commitment would have a significant impact.

We believe community radio is an invaluable provision to the communities we serve, and that its importance will only grow as deregulation impacts on sub regional commercial radio.