

A short report into community radio in Wales

November 2019

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should fund a community radio body for Wales. The body would offer practical support to stations, perform a representative role and co-ordinate cross station co-operation and knowledge sharing. Practical support might include performing common tasks for stations like HR, marketing or grant writing. The body should also help forge links between community stations and other interested bodies like commercial and BBC radio.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should place more government advertising, particularly public information campaigns, with Community Radio stations and provide guidance to other public sector bodies in Wales to draw their attention to the possibilities of using the sector more.

Recommendation 3. The BBC should actively engage with community radio to give access to the output and promote the use of their Local Democracy Reporting Service.

Recommendation 4. The BBC and commercial radio should work with community radio to develop a pathway for community radio volunteers to gain experience at their radio stations as a means of developing talent across Wales.



Recommendation 5. The BBC should offer community radio stations preferential rates and first refusal when selling off radio equipment they no longer use.

Recommendation 6. Radio Joint Audience Research (RAJAR) should develop a less complex and cheaper audience survey that community radio could use. Stations that chose to use this new service should then be able to access the advertisers that place adverts using RAJAR ratings.

Recommendation 7. Ofcom should simplify the grant process for community radio stations.

Recommendation 8. Ofcom should work with community radio to develop access for community stations to affordable Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB).

1. Introduction

1. Community radio was introduced following legislation, in order to introduce a new tier of radio broadcasting in the UK, focused specifically on community engagement. Stations are not for profit and focused on delivering social gain, working to build connections within the community and involve the community in running the service.

2. There are currently eleven community radio stations in Wales. Ten stations, Calon FM, Tudno FM, BRfm, Radio Tircoed, Radio Glan Clwyd, Môn FM, Radio Cardiff, Radio Tircoed, Bro Radio and GTFM are already on air with Radio Aber aiming to start broadcasting soon.

3. As part of its report: “Tuning in: Inquiry into Radio in Wales”, published in December 2018, the Committee stated it would “organise a symposium for Community Radio stations in Wales to provide an opportunity for them to get together and consider a range of common issues”. This symposium was held on Thursday 20 June 2019 at The Atrium, Cardiff.

4. People from all 10 community stations, academia, commercial radio, the BBC and members of the Committee attended the symposium, a list of attendees is attached as an annexe. Attendees discussed a range of issues including where stations could collaborate (both within the community radio sector and with commercial radio/the BBC), issues faced by community radio stations and solutions to common problems. This report outlines the Committee’s findings and recommendations from this event.

5. The symposium started with informative presentations by Colin Paterson from the BBC, Hywel Williams from Advisors in Media (AIM) and Martin Mumford from Nation Radio. The Committee would like to thank them for their contribution to the day and would also like to thank Steve Johnson from the University of South Wales for his help in preparing for and facilitating the event.

2. Feedback from the symposium

2.1. The value of community radio

6. A community radio station provides a wide range of benefits to the community it serves. It helps to connect a community. It is a valuable platform on which to promote local events, companies and charities. It offers hyperlocal news which is becoming more important as local papers close. It also creates a route for people to gain valuable training and experience in all aspects of running a radio station: whether they are interested in a career or just want to learn new skills and meet new people.

2.2. Common problems experienced by community radio stations

7. Participants really valued being given a space to network and problem shoot issues in a way that had not happened in the Welsh community radio sector before. Early in the session representatives from one station managed to help another station out with advice on how to solve a long term technical issue; this quickly highlighted the value of networking for the sector.

8. A large issue faced by community radio was ensuring all back room functions were filled. There was a lot of interest in on-air roles but non-studio based roles were hard to fill. These include both news gathering, which is very important to ensure the station adds value to the community, and HR, finance and other associated positions. These roles are as vital to keep stations on air as those in the studio.

9. There are three main routes for financing community radio: adverts, grants and donations. Larger charities will have full time staff who have professional training and experience in applying for grants and or seeking donations. Similarly advertising sales is a highly competitive market.

10. This is not necessarily the case for community radio stations. Whilst some stations are fortunate and have volunteers with these skills to a professional level

most do not, and those volunteers who do have the skills have limited time to spend bringing in revenue to the stations. This means most stations are not able to maximise their revenue and as a consequence stations are often in a very precarious financial position.

11. There is also no central body which represents community radio in dealings with government, the regulator or other interested parties. As with the other issues raised above, these are specific skills and some people volunteering for some stations may have them but on the whole there is a lack of personnel hours and skills to fully pursue these aims across the industry.

12. It was felt that a body could be formed that would fulfil all of these roles. It could create a platform for co-operation and organisation between community stations, between stations and other interested parties and pick up a lot of the back room roles and repetitive tasks which stations are struggling to undertake.

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should fund a community radio body for Wales. The body would offer practical support to stations, perform a representative role and co-ordinate cross station co-operation and knowledge sharing. Practical support might include performing common tasks for stations like HR, marketing or grant writing. The body should also help forge links between community stations and other interested bodies like commercial and BBC radio.

13. The Committee would like to reiterate its recommendation from the ‘Tuning In’ report about public sector support for the community radio sector. During the inquiry into radio in Wales the Committee concluded ‘The Welsh Government should aim to place more government advertising, particularly public information campaigns, with Community Radio stations and provide guidance to other public sector bodies in Wales to draw their attention to the possibilities of using the sector to a greater extent.’

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should place more government advertising, particularly public information campaigns, with Community Radio stations and provide guidance to other public sector bodies in Wales to draw their attention to the possibilities of using the sector more

2. 3. Co-operation with the wider radio industry and media

14. Community radio plays an important role in reporting local issues which is becoming more and more important as local newspapers decline. As part of its Charter commitment the BBC, working with partners in other media

organisations, established The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS), a public service news agency which covers all top tier local authorities and some other public bodies across the UK.

15. The LDRS creates output covering each of the 22 Welsh Local Authorities, however the community radio stations present were not aware of how to access its output. The output created by LDRS would enable community radio to cover their local authority proceedings effectively and keep their communities informed.

Recommendation 3. The BBC should actively engage with community radio to give access to the output and promote the use of their Local Democracy Reporting Service.

16. Community radio offers a great gateway for people to gain valuable experience in the radio industry. Stations train on air, technical and off air staff and give them real experience at a broadcast station. However there was a certain amount of concern from attendees that the methods community radio stations use may be non-industry standard as a lot of their procedures had been created by volunteers and passed on through internal station training.

17. It was felt that the sector would greatly benefit from some co-operation on training with the larger radio providers. Some stations had received assistance from the BBC with training in the past which was very welcome. However the group felt a pathway for station volunteers to gain experience with the BBC and/or commercial radio was lacking. This would also help stations recruit volunteers as there would be a clear training pathway with attractive work experience opportunities.

Recommendation 4. The BBC and commercial radio should work with community radio to develop a pathway for community radio volunteers to gain experience at their radio station as a means of developing new talent across Wales.

18. As the BBC is a world class broadcaster it regularly updates its equipment. This state of the art equipment is purchased with public money. If the BBC gave community stations preferential status when selling off the equipment they are replacing this would allow the BBC to pass this public investment on to the community. It would also help support the development of radio talent by allowing volunteers to become familiar with newer equipment.

Recommendation 5. The BBC should offer community radio stations preferential rates and first refusal when selling off radio equipment they no longer use.

2. 4. Listening figures

19. There was a wide discussion regarding ratings with varying views in the room. Stations agreed that, although the aim is to reach their whole community, you could not judge the value of a station on ratings alone.

20. Community radio's main objective is to connect their listeners to the wider community. As such a small number of well-connected and informed listeners, especially if they are isolated, vulnerable or have few other links to society, would be as much, if not more, of a success as large listener figures. That said, lots of stations felt it would be useful to know their audience figures.

21. Radio Joint Audience Research (RAJAR) is the official body in charge of measuring radio audiences in the UK. They work with mainstream stations to collate listener numbers via comprehensive public polling.

22. That level of polling is resource intensive so has high costs associated with it. It is also more detailed than most community stations would require. It was felt that a less complex survey, which was cheaper to access, targeted at community stations would be very welcome.

23. The benefits of this survey would be two-fold. It would help stations understand their listeners and as such hone their output but also help to bring in advertising revenue as lots of advertisers place adverts based on RAJAR figures.

Recommendation 6. Radio Joint Audience Research (RAJAR) should develop a less complex and cheaper audience survey that community radio could use. Stations that chose to use this new service should then be able to access the advertisers that place adverts using RAJAR ratings.

2. 5. Relationship with the regulator

24. It was felt there was a lot of scope for Ofcom to strengthen its work with the community radio sector. At the moment community stations felt Ofcom's guidance was focused at the commercial sector and it may not fully understand the community sector and the challenges they face.

25. One issue raised was that the process for applying to Ofcom for grants was complicated. Most community stations do not have volunteers with the

experience of applying for grants so they feel a complex grant process is an unfair barrier to accessing much needed funds.

Recommendation 7. Ofcom should simplify the grant application process for community radio stations.

26. It was felt that Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) presents an exciting opportunity for community stations. As technology advances it is making the option to broadcast on DAB cheaper and more accessible. This creates a brilliant opportunity for Ofcom and the community sector to collaborate, get ahead of the curve and develop a strategy which will allow community DAB stations to flourish.

Recommendation 8. Ofcom should work with community radio to develop access for community stations to affordable Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB).

Annexe

The symposium was held at The Atrium on 20 June 2019 and the following people attended:

Name	Radio Station
Nathan Spackman	Bro Radio
Gareth Knight/Ryan Sutton	Bro Radio
Martin Mumford	Nation Radio
Euros Lewis	Radio Beca
Lee Davies	3G's Development Trust
Marc Webber	University of Northampton/BBC
Lee Cole	Rhondda Radio
David Arthur	Rhondda Radio
Stephen Bower	BGFM
Daniel James	BGFM
Tony Wyn Jones	Mon FM
Gwyn Owen	Mon Fm
Paul Atkins	University College Birmingham
Colin Paterson	BBC Radio Wales
Harold Martin	Clwyd Community Broadcasting LTD
Clint Evans	Dapper FM
David Chamberlain	Dapper FM
Amir Maleki	Radio Cardiff
Sam Thomas	Radio Aber
Terry Mann	GTFM
Gavin Powell	GTFM

Colin Dixon	GTFM
Michael Lewis	Radio Tircoed
Paul Gemine	Radio Tircoed
Ian Lamsdale	Newport City Radio
Philip Davies	Newport City Radio
Chris Jones	Vitalize Radio
Dan Williams	Vitalize Radio
Chris Morgan	Vitalize Radio
Janet Morgan	Vitalize Radio
Christina Papagiannouli	USW
Helen Davies	USW
Rhys Evans	BBC Cymru Wales
Hywel William	Director of AIM Group (UK)