

What is your position or specialism on this topic?

How do you think we could improve the way we receive news about politics?

The way we receive news about Wales and our politics has a direct link to how people feel about politics in this country, and goes some way to explaining why people are less engaged in Welsh elections.

One of the best examples of this is the data showing people in Wales have not traditionally been aware of devolution and the way decisions are made about our critical public services. A survey by the BBC/ICM in 2014 found only 48% people could correctly identify that health was a devolved matter, and 42% of people wrongly believed the then National Assembly had control over policing.

The media absolutely has a part to play in this. We know that there is a paucity of Welsh specific media, and that a lot of people in Wales get their news from UK sources. What happens when these UK sources don't properly reflect Wales? Well, people don't get the right information about what's going on in their country, how decisions are made and who makes them. Before the last election a Senedd committee concluded that the "supply of media content in Wales is inadequate" and particularly highlighted news provision as an area of concern.

The pandemic changed things in some ways, as the ability for Wales to make different decisions to the UK government was put in focus. More people can now identify Mark Drakeford- YouGov have a 'fametracker', which monitor's people's awareness of political figures and Mark has gone from 23% in the third quarter of 2020 to 47% now- but the increased reporting on Wales hasn't come without its pitfalls. A Senedd briefing on the impact of COVID 19 on journalism and local media found that:

"The differences in lockdown measures across the UK have contributed to an increase in awareness of devolution but UK news providers have frequently published information that inaccurately reports issues that are devolved to Wales. Misinformation is damaging to democracy in Wales at the best of times, but during the current crisis it undermines efforts to tackle the disease in Wales."

A number of committee reports and academics have mentioned devolving or transferring some powers over broadcasting would improve media provision in Wales. Indeed it's now of the view of the Welsh Government that broadcasting should be devolved following the Cooperation Agreement between Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru.

The former Senedd Committee on Culture, Welsh Language and Communications made a number of recommendations about Welsh Government stepping in and funding news provision in Wales. It is true that we almost have to overcompensate because there's poor provision in Wales and funding better provision could play a part in this.

There is also a role for better political education and election engagement to try and increase people's awareness of devolution and increase voter turnout. This can be in schools, but also in additional communications around election time (e.g. a letter telling you where you can vote, find out info about candidates and why the elections matter).

What would your critics say about your position?

Recent policy from the UK Government has been the opposite of devolving broadcasting, with plans to privatise channel 4 and scrap the licence fee.

That is a clear opposition to the current arguments of devolving broadcasting to Wales so Welsh Government can have more oversight and do things differently.

A good example of these different opinions is the row over the licence fee plans, where the Welsh Conservatives have criticised the Welsh Government for even speaking about the issue as it falls outside of devolved areas.

But the reality is that the media doesn't exist in a vacuum. The fact that UK media is often accused of not reflecting Wales properly has a direct link to how people in Wales understand decisions that are made here about health, education and the economy- and has a direct link to how many people engage at the ballot box. Unless we can start thinking about how we can ensure Wales is properly represented and reflected in our news provision these problems will persist. One way of doing that is to move powers to Wales and allocate more central Welsh funding to ensure this is corrected.

Thinking about your critics and/or alternative positions to yours, how would you respond?

Critics:

- We should have less regulation of our media and it should be privatised
- Let free markets decide what is shown
- Broadcasting isn't devolved to Wales- why are Welsh government getting involved?

Response:

- Free markets and privatisation could risk Wales getting left out, no news on Wales being reported and no due care to the Welsh language
- The media affects how people in Wales see and understand issues here. Our NHS is run by Welsh Government who are making decisions about it in Cardiff Bay. People should know what those decisions are and who is making and at the moment a lot of people don't because the UK media doesn't show that.
- That has a direct link to how people understand decisions made in Wales and whether they're likely to have their say in future elections

Audiences for news are consistently falling, and young people in particular (the voters of the future) largely aren't engaging with those traditional news outlets.

It's not clear to me that the information we get from anonymous sources is true or valuable. Perhaps anonymous sources go to the journalists they think are the most pliant and uncritical – rather than the cultivation of anonymous sources being a great journalistic skill.

Arguably, the BBC's business model should help it provide more useful and trustworthy information – but it sees itself as in competition with traditional newspapers, so ends up somewhat dancing to their tune and mirroring their editorial agendas.