

Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales

Q1. Should Swansea Bay Radio Ltd be permitted to make its proposed changes to the Format of Nation 80s, with particular regard to the statutory criteria set out in Section 2 of this consultation document? (Section 106 (1A) of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, as amended, relating to Format changes).

The Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales does NOT agree with proposed changes to the Character of Service of Swansea Bay Radio, and therefore the Committee does not believe the proposed changes should be permitted.

In making these observations, the Committee notes the comments of Ofcom's Radio Licensing Committee when Swansea Bay Radio was awarded the licence in 2005:-

*In relation to sections 105 (b) and (c), RLC members felt that Swansea Bay Radio would broaden choice compared to the existing commercial services through its specific Format commitments, and would provide a service for which there was strong evidence of demand. **In this respect, the committee noted in particular the promise to provide 24-hour local news throughout the week, the emphasis on the provision of 'gold' and 'easy listening' genres, the pledge that at least 50% of daytime tracks must be 25 years or older, and the commitment that no more than 20% of Swansea Bay Radio's entire music output would be drawn from the last five years. The proposed mix of music and specific speech commitments proved popular in the group's research, especially among the core target of 45 to 64 year olds. The committee also noted that the weekly 'nostalgia' show included in the Format had received a positive response among the potential audience.***

*The RLC considered that, in relation to Section 314 of the Communications Act 2003, Swansea Bay Radio's programming proposals contained a suitable proportion of local material and locally-made programmes. The station will be locally-produced and presented 24 hours a day, with the exception of up to four hours a week of networked or syndicated programming. **Its Format includes commitments to deliver a wide range of local material including Welsh language items and extensive provision of live local news***

The Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales does not believe that in the intervening years the nature of the radio stations serving Swansea has changed significantly enough to justify Swansea Bay Radio's case that its proposed format change will not have an adverse effect of the overall provision of significant news and other speech content for radio listeners in Swansea. Wales already faces challenges in the provision of news and speech about the country and its regions and major cities, particularly given the lack of traditional print media. The BBC does produce significant speech radio, including news, which can be heard in Swansea, but it is important that citizens and consumers are informed by a range of operators providing such a service.

Moreover, whilst Swansea Bay Radio argues that there are other local services providing news and other speech in the Swansea area, it is clear from the Characters of Service quoted by them in their application that only one, Real Radio, has a commitment to news written into it:-

1) The Wave

A MUSIC AND INFORMATION STATION -- MAINLY CHART AND CONTEMPORARY BUT MAY INCLUDE OLDER TRACKS -- FOR UNDER 40s IN THE SWANSEA AREA, WITH WELSH ARTISTS FEATURED AT LEAST WEEKLY

2) Real Radio

A FULL SERVICE ADULT CONTEMPORARY MUSIC STATION FOR SOUTH WALES, TARGETING PRIMARILY 25-54 YEAR-OLDS, TREATING SPEECH, INFORMATION ABOUT WALES AND LISTENER INTERACTIVITY AS IMPORTANT INGREDIENTS, AND RUNNING 24-HOUR NEWS.

3) Swansea Sound

A CLASSIC POP HITS AND INFORMATION STATION FOR OVER 30s IN THE SWANSEA AREA, HIGHLY FOCUSED ON LOCAL ISSUES, WITH AT LEAST 12 HOURS A WEEK (NOT OVERNIGHT) OF WELSH LANGUAGE PROGRAMMES AND REGULAR WEEKDAY EARLY EVENING WELSH LANGUAGE BULLETINS (HEADS IN ENGLISH)

4) Nation Radio

A PREDOMINANTLY MODERN ROCK STATION FOR 15-34 YEAR-OLDS. OTHER COMPATIBLE GENRES WILL COMPLEMENT THE OUTPUT, WHICH WILL ALSO INCLUDE COVERAGE OF LOCAL ARTISTS

Conclusion & Recommendation

The Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales also notes that this request for a change in the Character of Service is retrospective, and that it was a complaint from a listener which alerted Ofcom to the change.

Therefore, it is the strong contention of the Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales that allowing this now will narrow the range of locally available programming in the Swansea area, and therefore should not be permitted.