

Rondo Media's response to the Ofcom Renewal of the Channel 4 licence consultation

Q2: Do you consider it would be appropriate to increase the out of England quota on the Channel 4 service? If so, please set out the reasons for setting a particular level for the quota and for the rate of increase to this level?

We welcome the suggestion that Channel 4 has increased (and is proposing to further increase) its commitment to supporting and commissioning independent creative production across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Obviously such a clearly stated commitment by a major, multi-genre UK broadcaster and commissioner will be a strong boost in significantly developing the Nations' production base. Channel 4's commitment to and investment in the independent production community has been key to several UK creative industry businesses in terms of both their growth and future strategies.

Here in Wales, Channel 4 has historically commissioned relatively little, so it was extremely encouraging to hear at a recent industry event hosted by the broadcaster in Cardiff (24th September 2013) that there were several recent and current examples of commissioned work from Welsh production companies. It was also stated that Channel 4 was keen to further expand this commitment. This said, clearly the current 3% committed quota by Channel 4 for output out of England (ie UK Nations) is not enough and nowhere near representative of the 17% of UK population living in those nations. The fact that in 2012, even without committing to extending this quota, Channel 4 commissioned 5.4% by spend and 7% by volume is proof that this quota was significantly too low to start with. The suggestion by Channel 4 that they increase this quota is therefore a crucial and timely one. Indeed, if they are serious about reflecting the whole of the UK this would seem an appropriate step to take.

Channel 4's commitment to the Nations has already brought direct benefits to Rondo as a company. As recipients of investment from the broadcaster's Alpha Fund (as well as the crucial support and enthusiasm of key Channel 4 individuals like Ian Mackenzie), we have been able to significantly increase our presence with Channel 4 commissioners and to produce a range of higher quality tasters.

The Alpha Fund scheme, supported by co-investment from the Welsh Government, has further increased these opportunities. With the right support and future investment, we believe that further commercially-driven opportunities will benefit from the long term growth in Wales-based production companies. However, we do feel that, relative to Scotland, Welsh producers suffer from having a less "hands on" relationship with Channel 4's Nations and Regions department. There are various initiatives - such as a permanent office and regular producers' meetings – that Scottish producers are able to benefit from that would also be of direct benefit to producers in Wales.

We feel strongly that there is a wealth of talent (as well as capacity) in Wales that is currently underestimated by Channel 4's quota. With many years of production for S4C, BBC Wales and other broadcasters, Welsh producers have proved they have the capacity and the talent base to deliver high volume, returnable series. There is no reason why they can't do this for Channel 4.

In the case of our own current BBC 1 drama series *The Indian Doctor* – all of the writers are Welsh, the director is Welsh, the producer is Welsh, as well as most of the cast and virtually the entire crew. Our recent successful factual series for Channel 4, *My Tattoo Addiction*, was filmed and edited by a largely Welsh production team working out of our Cardiff offices. The SWOT analysis of the Welsh Creative Production Sector also mentions the limited availability of exec level production talent. Both *The Indian Doctor* and *My Tattoo Addiction* were exec'ed by Rondo's Tom Ware, who is a permanent member of the company and who has a long track record in producing BBC network series. We have also been able to capitalize on the commercial appeal of the Channel 4 tattoo series – both the original single documentary and the recent series are distributed for us internationally by BBC Worldwide.

Crucially, though there are many points in the SWOT analysis on which we would agree, overall it seems to have a somewhat outdated perception of the creative sector in Wales, specifically with regards to Wales' most significant current TV production strength: drama. Surely Wales' great and growing renown as a core provider of quality drama should be seen as the major strength of the current scene. Alongside BBC in-house productions like *Doctor Who*, independent producers have been a vital part of that story: the multi award winning series *Sherlock* produced by Hartswood; the series *Stella* produced by Tidy Productions for Sky and distributed by BBC Worldwide; the recent *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* detective series from Fiction Factory for S4C, which has already been bought by BBC 4, BBC Wales and DR Denmark and is distributed by All3Media and, of course, our own RTS and Broadcast award-winning BBC 1 series *The Indian Doctor* distributed by Content Media. Alongside the development of the BBC's Roath Lock drama studios, there has never been a stronger momentum for drama production in Wales. The Channel 4 rationale that 'there is less experience in producing programmes in genres that are typically higher spend and returning series, such as Drama' seems therefore to be irrelevant in relation to the current situation in Wales.

Meanwhile Welsh factual producers have responded to Channel 4's call to broaden the broadcaster's supplier base. And as a result there is certainly an emerging production talent which has the momentum and confidence to deliver high quality returnable volume for Channel 4. Appealing recent documentaries like *Posh Pawn*, *My Tattoo Addiction* and quality factual output from Telesgop like *Edward's Murderous Mistress* and *Wallis Simpson: The Secret Letters* have proved that Welsh companies like Boom Pictures, Rondo and Telesgop are able to deliver popular, critical and rating hits. All of these Welsh indies have initially built their businesses on the work won from S4C, which remains a crucial enabler to the industry here in Wales. We feel that there could be future opportunities to be considered for Channel 4 and S4C to co-commission some

factual content to take advantage of the documentary and factual programme specialism here in Wales.

Therefore and in conclusion we'd argue that it would indeed be appropriate to increase Channel 4's quota and that the skills base/output of production companies in the Nations would be more than able to cope with such an increase. An increase in the out of England quota to a minimum level of 9% is welcomed, but should in our view be presented earlier (say by 2018) with a view to raising that quota to a level nearer 12% by 2020. To leave the existing quota unchanged at the level of 3% would be extremely foolish and detrimental to commercial opportunities, growth and future investments in the Welsh creative industry sector.

Gareth Williams, Chief Executive Rondo Media, October 10th 2013

ABOUT RONDO MEDIA

Rondo Media is a major independent production company based in Wales with offices in Cardiff, Caernarfon and Menai Bridge. The company produces sport, drama, music, events, factual and entertainment content. Recent productions include BBC 1 drama *The Indian Doctor*, popular S4C youth drama series *Rownd a Rownd*, the football series *Sgorio*, coverage of the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod for S4C and the BBC and the award-winning comedy drama series *Gwlad yr Astra Gwyn*. Now in its fifth year, the company has an annual turnover exceeding £14m.

Rondo has produced three series of the BBC 1 network drama *The Indian Doctor*, distributed internationally by Content Media. Rondo also produced the film version of Michael Sheen's Port Talbot Passion production, *The Gospel of Us*. The company is currently producing a documentary series on tattoos for Channel 4, *My Tattoo Addiction* which is distributed internationally by BBC Worldwide.

Rondo's first major commission was to provide coverage of Wales's International and Premier League football matches on S4C. We have since also covered FA Cup and FA trophy matches as well as Swansea City's recent European qualifier matches.

Classical music and events are prominent areas, such as coverage of the *Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod* and the bi-annual *Côr Cymru* competition. Next year sees the launch of a brand new competition for brass and music bands. During the autumn of 2013 the company is producing coverage of the world music festival, Womex.

The award-winning youth drama series *Rownd a Rownd* has brought significant employment opportunities to Wales as well as nurturing new acting, writing and technical talent within the industry in North Wales. Since 2012, two episodes of this

series have been broadcast every week on S4C – effectively doubling its volume to 104 episodes per series.

The company has permanent offices based in Cardiff, Caernarfon and Menai Bridge and currently employs over 60 full time staff members and up to 120 part-time and freelance employees. Rondo recently invested £700,000 in a new post-production facility in Caernarfon and also now has a post-production base in Cardiff.

Rondo's productions have won several international awards, including Broadcast and RTS awards for *The Indian Doctor* and several Bafta and Celtic Media Awards. At the 2013 Bafta Cymru Awards the company won 5 awards: for Best Actor (Michael Sheen); Best Music and Entertainment Programme (*Côr Cymru*); Breakthrough Award (Gwion Lewis for presenting the *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* documentary on S4C); Best Sound Team (*The Gospel of Us*) and Lee Haven Jones as Best Director (*The Indian Doctor*).