

Ken MacQuarrie

Director of BBC Nations and Regions

cc. Rhodri Talfan Davies

Director of BBC Cymru Wales

31 March 2020

Dear Ken,

BBC Breakfast and news bulletins from Wales

Within the National Assembly for Wales, the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee is responsible for oversight of the BBC's delivery of its remit in Wales.

It has come to the Committee's attention that from Monday 30 March there will be no news bulletins from Wales during the Breakfast show on BBC One.

I am concerned about the impact of this decision on the people of Wales. The regional news bulletins during the Breakfast show are currently an important means of informing people about issues which affect them. The demographic that watch Breakfast may not necessarily be the same demographic that watch evening news programmes. Therefore, without a news bulletin from Wales during Breakfast, there is a risk that people will not receive sufficient information about Coronavirus in Wales.

I appreciate that the BBC is under significant pressure at the moment. However, it is vitally important during these unprecedented times that people in Wales continue to receive Wales specific news and information. I therefore ask you to reconsider the BBC's decision not to show bulletins from Wales at Breakfast.

If people from Wales are to receive their news from a UK network bulletin instead, it is crucial that these bulletins reflect the devolved nature of many of the government responses to the pandemic. For example, as health is devolved, the widely reported call for NHS volunteers to apply through the GoodSAM app is only relevant to England. Similarly, business rates relief schemes, which are crucial to the survival of many small business, are devolved to Wales. Never has it been more important for

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu

National Assembly for Wales
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

people in Wales to receive clear and accurate information about the reality of devolved governance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Mary Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helen Mary Jones AM

Chair of the Committee



Email to: Helen Mary Jones AM, National Assembly for Wales,
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
SeneddCWLC@assembly.wales

Cc: Rhodri Talfan Davies; Non Tudur Williams
Rhodri.Davies@bbc.co.uk
NonTudur.Williams@bbc.co.uk

16 April 2020

Dear Helen

Thank you for your correspondence from the 31 March 2020 regarding the local BBC Breakfast bulletins during the current pandemic.

May I reassure you that decisions like this – while only a temporary measure - aren't taken lightly, but the current situation means we have to adapt and respond like never before. And while it's a privilege to play our part in responding to this national and global emergency, the operational challenges we currently face are immense and we have to focus resources carefully and where they will have maximum impact.

For that reason, it may be useful if I explain the background to this decision and why it was taken.

As you rightly acknowledge these are unprecedented times and as a result, audiences are tuning into our news, radio and online services in their numbers for the most up to date information. In fact, around 750,000 viewers are tuning into *BBC Wales Today* every day across the three main bulletins – lunchtime, early and late evening. But at this difficult time BBC Wales – along with the rest of the BBC - is balancing two priorities, that of a duty of care towards staff and delivering its responsibilities as the national broadcaster.

It's worth noting that, despite the current lockdown and higher levels of staff absence due to self-isolation and illness, BBC Wales's teams continue to deliver over 14 hours of weekday news for *BBC Wales Today*, *Newyddion* for S4C, BBC Wales News Online, BBC Cymru Fyw, BBC Radio Wales and BBC Radio Cymru. That level of programming is testament to the commitment shown, not just by the editorial staff but those working in production, technology and operations who continue to work from our broadcast bases, while the majority of colleagues are now working from home.



Therefore, the decision to pause our local service to television audiences at breakfast in the nations and regions of the UK was taken in order to safeguard staffing for our peak-time TV services, that attract much bigger audiences and to reduce the unprecedented strain on our teams and facilities.

I would also add that, overall, BBC Wales has extended its news coverage during this period - not reduced it. For example, both *Post Cyntaf* on Radio Cymru and Gareth Lewis in Drivetime on Radio Wales have been extended by half an hour and an hour respectively each day. BBC One Wales is also broadcasting the Welsh Government's daily press conference at 12.30pm every day.

I hope this goes some way to address the points and concerns you raise.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ken MacQuarrie'.

Ken MacQuarrie

Director, BBC Nations & Regions