**Sara**

Hello, good morning, bore da and croeso mawr. And a very good morning to everyone watching online, we're really pleased to welcome you to the second ‘In conversation with…’ event hosted by the Creative Economy team at Cardiff University and Creative Cardiff. I'm Sara Pepper director of Creative Economy and I'll be your host for this event.

So, like many we are moving to online events. We had a few technical glitches with the first one that we ran last Friday. So, we're using the Zoom platform this morning and we hope that it provides a stable platform on which to watch and listen. Apologies, though, this means that we can't use the automatic translation software as Zoom doesn't have that function. But we will be providing a transcript of the discussion in the next day or two for anybody for whom that would be useful. So please do email us if we can help you with that. And we're also keen to let you know that we're recording this event and discussion, and we'll upload it to the Creative Cardiff website in the next 24 hours. So for whatever reason, you can't join us for the whole of the conversation please feel free to re-watch at a more convenient time.

So onto today's event…

I feel like I need to start by saying something that we are all saying out loud on a daily basis, but it's still absolutely true. So much has changed over the past four to five weeks and all of this has had such a profound effect on so many of the ways that we live in work.

Through our work at the Creative Economy team at the University, in having conversations and doing research with individuals and organisations we've seen and heard a great deal about the direct impact this is having across the cultural and creative industries.

And to that end, we've also been very aware of the range of organisations who are working with the sector at speed to develop, and deliver, information and support and funding to help the sector as we move through the coming days, weeks and months.

For that reason, we've developed these online Q&A events. They feature the leaders of a variety of creative sector organisations and creative sector support organisations in Wales, so that you can find out more about the current activity that they're undertaking, and the support and development opportunities that they're offering in response to business that they're doing as usual, but also during this very unusual period of COVID-19.

We hope that we can spotlight and share opportunities that we can also give a voice to the sector, to those who are supporting and working with the sector and to those who are working in it. If you have questions, please send them and we will do our very best to answer them. If you haven't sent a question, there's still time to do so. Please email those to us at creativecardiff@cardiff.ac.uk and we'll do our best to put those questions to Rhodri this morning or to answer them after the event itself.

So, as I just said, this morning, we're very pleased to be joined by Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director of BBC Wales. Hello Rhodri, how are you doing?

**Rhodri**

Good, thank you, very grateful that you're here to chat this morning.

**Sara**

Rhodri you know, it feels difficult to say but it's so true - so much has changed in the past five weeks. What does that look like for BBC Wales? And what have you had to do to change the way that you're working to adapt to what's happening?

**Rhodri**

Well, it's been profound. I think that the first, certainly three weeks, we were consumed by the issue of two things really - one is maintaining the new services and the second was obviously looking after the welfare of staff. And that meant some really radical changes because everything that we knew really about television or radio production was up-ended. Such as the size of cubicles, the size of studios, the shape of a newsroom, everything had to be literally thrown out - well, not literally but metaphorically thrown out of the window because of social distancing rules, and also the need to get as many people out of the office as possible.

So just to give you a feel for that we're about 1100 staff. Within three days, we had 85% of staff working from home, the entire online operation was home-based. In terms of the newsroom, we typically had 180 people in the newsroom. We now have about 25 to 30 people in the newsroom at any one time. It was just an extraordinary shift.

Today as I speak the entire Radio Wales schedule is presented from home on technology that, honestly, a month ago I'd have said we wouldn't have taken the risk on. So, our view on risk in terms of technology has had to change because if you want to maintain the output, you have to get people out of your studios and out of your galleries. So, it's been profound.

I think, as time has passed, you then begin to focus on the other issues. So how do you give people more content to enjoy? How do you give them more educational content? You know, we've made announcements yesterday about our partnership with Machynlleth Comedy Festival. We're now issuing daily lessons on BBC Bitesize. So, there's a whole range of things that a public broadcaster can do. But if I look back those first three weeks were, you know, they were minute by minute, how do you keep the services on air and convince your staff that you're really prioritising their welfare?

**Sara**

That's so much to do, and at such speed, I mean, that's the other thing that's been a necessity. So clearly, just a gargantuan amount of creative thinking and innovation as well as like you say, thinking about your approach to risk.

**Rhodri**

But the interesting thing was that, in a moment of crisis, the only upside of a crisis - this is a hideous crisis - but the only upside is you get a real singularity of focus.

What I certainly didn't see in the people in BBC Wales was lots of people looking upstairs immediately for direction. What you what you get is everybody taking responsibility.

So you're right, there was a lot of innovation, particularly in rethinking our whole production and broadcast processes. But it was happening at every single level of the organisation. A real moment of pride because what you see is specialism and expertise in every part of the organisation, focusing on a single underlying challenge.

And that's really, really energising. You know, it's tough and it's horrible. It's all those things. It's also incredibly energising. Because as you know, organisations like the BBC can be quite divisional. For the last four weeks, I have never seen a place that has felt more connected and unified in terms of what we're about. You know, I don't compare public service broadcasting to, you know, the NHS or frontline workers. But there is no doubt at the moment that good public information and news can help save lives. And that's a very, very singular, energising and motivating thought.

**Sara**

Yes, and a phenomenal response from the whole of your team at BBC Wales. And actually, you've just hit on something that I'd like to ask a bit more about, if I may Rhodri, which is about the BBC’s role as a public service broadcaster during this time. Can you tell us a bit more about your thoughts about how you've seen the public perception of this change or alter during COVID-19?

**Rhodri**

Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? Three months ago, I probably thought I'd never see a story as big as Brexit for perhaps a decade. And then in the matter of weeks you're into something that is more profound – it’s life and death.

And I think it's a reminder that a strong public service broadcasting sector and one that is rooted right across the UK can do a job that no other major organisation can do. You know, Netflix and Amazon aren't going to do that. They're not going to do the job of educating our children. They're not going to do the job of ensuring that people are connected to what is happening on their doorstep every day, in a story that matters profoundly to everybody.

So, I think there has been a clarity and a greater sense of clarity, I think about what public broadcasting is really about. I mean, does it change everything? I don't know. I mean, I talked about this last week, you know, there's always a level of cynicism about public broadcasting. And I still can't decide whether it was pre-social media or social media created it. There will always be those questions. But I do think probably now more than ever, certainly as long as I've been in broadcasting, there is an understanding that public service broadcasting isn't just important – it is quite central to our understanding of the UK and Wales.

**Sara**

Well, I think it will certainly be a discussion that will continue not just during this period, but thereafter. It's certainly been interesting to see some of those shifts. And so I'd like to focus the conversation a bit more on to the creative sector in cultural industries in Wales. And I know from conversations that you and I have had over a number of years now the importance that BBC Wales puts on working with and developing the creative and cultural industries across the nation, across Wales, and obviously across the UK, but from BBC Wales’ perspective. And so we're going to talk about four or five different commissioning and development opportunities in just a second that BBC Wales that are involved in. But before that, before we get into the detail of those, can you just talk a bit about why you're so committed to this work?

**Rhodri**

Well, I think it's really in many ways, it's really straightforward. It's not the BBC historically, if you go back 15, well, even 10 years, the BBC success was largely driven through its in-house teams, and it was a Citadel, and it largely commissioned itself to make its own shows. That has been utterly transformed in the last five to 10 years. And so much, or almost all of, our television success beyond news and sport is driven by the quality of our relationships with the independent sector so if you watch in the last couple of days - Rhod Gilbert's remarkable program about the about care workers or you look at *Critical* the series on intensive care units at the Royal Gwent, there's a BBC Wales commission. But those are extraordinary programs being made by partners in the independent sector.

So, our success is umbilically-led and has been for years. And our success in these periods of crisis depends on the independent sector. But also our success beyond this crisis will depend on our ability and the ability of other broadcasters to help support the sector through what is an unprecedented crisis.

You know, if you're managing your cash flow day to day, if you're reliant on a stream of commissioning, the disruption this causes is both in terms of maybe a commissioning hiatus, but also the ability to actually make programmes. And that's the underlying problem, it's virtually impossible to make stuff and that is a crisis that no company could have been adequately prepared for.

And I'm not saying that any public broadcaster can come to the rescue as some sort of shining knight, but what we can do is keep that commissioning engine running, so that there is work to bid for. But equally, we really dial up our focus on what we're going to be commissioning as soon as we come out of lockdown. And that's about development. That's about making sure that when we come out of lockdown, we're ready with, you know, the big ambitious projects that we want to get behind. That's why both in the commissioning during the COVID crisis and beyond, we want to make sure that we're working with the best players in the sector, to make sure that slate of projects is as good as it possibly can be.

**Sara**

Absolutely, that makes a lot of sense. And thanks for explaining that sort of bigger picture vision because I think it's really important to understand that. Perhaps now we could dive into the four or five different strands of commissioning and development activity that I've read about. And you could tell us a bit more about them. And perhaps if I take them one by one, and then you can just talk us through what they are. Obviously, I'm aware that information about this will be available on your website or via colleagues in your team. But you could give us a bit of feel of them, and how people might get involved, if they are currently open, I know some have closed. But even for the ones that are closed, it's really useful to know what is in development and what is happening so people can feel like they're current and up to date with what's happening.

And so if we take the first one - I understand there's a new commissioning round launched for TV and radio content, as well as short form content for younger audiences, now I'm well aware of BBC Bitesize. It's very popular with my eight-year-old daughter, is this an extension of that or is it something slightly different?

**Rhodri**

So with Bitesize, we made a decision about three weeks ago. From last Monday, we would launch daily lessons for all age groups right across the four nations. And that's something that's largely been driven by the Bitesize teams within the BBC, both in Salford and across the different nations. And that's launched and up and running.

The commissioning round BBC launched was twofold. One was about commissioning immediately in terms of the immediate crisis. And we've begun that already. *Wales in lockdown* is a four-part series, it's already airing. There's a series called *The Great Indoors* which we've already commissioned, which will be a partnership between a number of indies that we hope to kick off in the first week of May. So there's a whole slate of series that we're immediately commissioning to capture this particular period.

And then there's a separate piece which is really about development efforts beyond this period. I'm putting in place a development fund particularly for scripted and comedy and drama. So that as soon as production can begin, that we've got a slate of comedy and drama ready to go. I think there are lots of questions about how we get comedy and drama scripted particularly back on its feet because, clearly it's almost impossible with the current restrictions in place. What I don't want to see - and I know any commissioner doesn't want to see - is a hiatus between the lockdown ending and being able to get back into production. Now, some of that will be around quite technical work around insurance. Because I think for a lot of big productions, insurance questions are going to be a real issue if there's fear of a second lockdown. But the more immediate question is, do we have the ideas fully developed, ready to go as soon as the restrictions lifted? That’s what this development funding is focused on. So, we're looking particularly at scripts, both in comedy and drama, that we can develop at pace, ready to go, once lockdown is over.

**Sara**

And that makes a lot of sense in terms of developing a pipeline and having, like you say, content ready to go. And now the next fund that I'd like to ask about focuses on smaller independent companies across the UK in terms, who I know are a vital part of the ecosystem and particularly the creative ecosystem here in Wales. And so I understand that this is part of an enhanced BBC Small Indie Fund. And can you can you tell us about that, who it is for and how are you working with the indies in Wales?

**Rhodr**i

So last year, the BBC announced it was creating what it called the Small Indie Fund. At the time, it was a million-pound fund managed by the BBC, which was really about trying to build sustainability outside of London and the South East. So it was specifically designed for small independent companies where the BBC could see real potential to grow scale. And clearly, it is those companies that potentially face the biggest challenges right now in terms of cash flow, in terms of the whole lockdown situation.

So the immediate decision taken a couple of weeks ago was to double that fund to two million pounds. There have been a whole range of applications that happened back end of last year, early this year that are already in progress. What it means is we'll be able to help more companies and potentially we'll be able to help companies to add it to a bigger, larger extent. So, it's recognising those companies, smaller companies who are most vulnerable and trying to put funding support in place to ensure that they can come out of this situation ready to go. And the way that it works is that both BBC Wales’ Nick Andrews, the lead Commissioner in Wales, and his BBC network commissioning colleagues work together to identify those companies in Wales that we think are probably best suited to that funding. And that work and that discussion within the BBC is ongoing at the moment.

**Sara**

Okay, and I understand I understand there's a new special one-off BBC fund to turbocharge development projects, such as drama or comedy. I mean, you know, two things here, well, maybe not so much comedy but drama, certainly difficult to produce in lockdown. So this is long-lead I'm guessing with an eye on the future schedules beyond sort of 2020?

**Rhodri**

Drama and comedy are probably going to be the most difficult to get back up and running. Once lockdown finishes because of the sheer technical weight that's required on those types of scripted projects, and as I say, what I don't want is a situation where we come out of lockdown, and then we still have an extensive period of development before we can get into production.

Because as things stand, we know that the public broadcasters and I'm sure Netflix and Amazon, too, are going to hit a period probably in the summer/early autumn when the drama pipeline starts to dry out. We're going to see it on the soaps in the next few weeks. And then in terms of the bigger impact six or eight-part series, they're going to start to dry up, so we have a couple of dramas, you know, *Keeping Faith* was part way through production. We have a new production, *The Pact* that was about to go into shooting, those projects are going to be delayed. What we don't want to do is see further delay beyond those projects because our development pipeline isn't the best placed. So that's why we're pushing money in that direction to make sure that slate is as strong as it can be. It's true in factual and other areas but I think in truth, those will be easier areas to get back up and running quickly once we're out of lockdown.

**Sara**

And, and I'd like to talk a bit about the focus and then on the work that you've been doing around commissioning for radio. I mean, radio, seemingly has had, people broadcasting daily from their living rooms? It has become such a staple, and even more so in people's homes and guiding us in this field, which is very agile and responsive, it seems in terms of a format. Perhaps when you're talking about drama or comedy production for TV, maybe it's not so. I know that that radio commissioning call has closed, but I’d love to hear some of the sort of innovations and potential commissioning opportunities that we might hear soon over the airwaves.

**Rhodri**

Yeah, I mean, it goes to your point around innovation, I think probably in audio more than video. Lockdown creates just a different creative space, but it's one that you can still capture and still play with if you like. And in the pitches that I've seen there’s real scope for radio drama, in a way that's just impossible in television.

And I think also a thoughtfulness about the fact that we are entering a different period of lockdown. I just know from conversation and from media coverage, this question of how we return to normal, whether there's a second lockdown with people starting to think beyond the sort of six to 10 week or 12 week timeframe, we're starting to see this as a sort of an indepth, rolling hiatus, and how that impacts on society that's coming through in the ideas. And the other aspect (not be too downbeat about things) is looking at the economic impact of this. So at the moment, my view of the news is that in the first three or four weeks, the focus is the life and death issue around numbers and deaths and death rates and all the awfulness that entails. I think we're going to move now to a place where we're, in a sense, bizarrely, maybe grotesquely balancing those issues with what is the long-term impact of an economic downturn? What misery does that create and how would you compare that with continued restrictions on people's movement, and those two things are going to be a negotiation that society makes or trades off. There are costs human costs of prolonging economic inactivity for too long. So those are the types of territories we're starting to see in some of the radio ideas. There's comedy there too, but I can't tell you what it is.

**Sara**

But important to be able to provide an outlet, a focus, a commentary on all of the things that you talked about.

**Rhodri**

Radio can be much more authored. It can be much more a personal one-to-one medium. And also, I think, because our live programs pick up most of the responsibility in terms of the direct news. There's much more space for reflection, personal reflection, viewpoint debate. And boy, you know, there's plenty, plenty to debate. So yeah we immediately released money into that area of commissioning because these are often the radio production companies, often they're literally one or two people. And again, making sure the machinery of commissioning keeps moving is really important. You know, it's not about grants or handouts, it's about making sure that the rhythm of commissioning continues across Radio Wales, Radio Cymru, and across BBC sounds.

**Sara**

I suppose it's keeping business as usual going in an unusual environment. You know, it's doing what you always do, but responding to these circumstances none of us ever seen or imagined before.

**Rhodri**

Yeah, and at the end of the day, we're commissioning, you know, 40 million pounds of content each year. It's important, you know, the most important thing you can do in terms of your partnerships, is make sure those wheels keep turning. And, you know, there's no doubt for a couple of weeks we were head down in maintaining live news.

But as those things have stabilised to some extent, it's been possible to lift our heads and say, okay, so what about the sector? It's not just about commissioning, and it's also about partnership. So, you know, what we've announced recently in terms of being able to help support National Theatre Wales, Theatre Gen, Sherman theatre with the Network project.

Now, we're not doing very much in that. In that project, we're providing some funding. We're also providing an important broadcast stage. This has been led by the theatres, but it is again, something where the BBC can lean in and support. In terms of those sorts of partners like Machynlleth Comedy Festival, which we'll be doing on the radio through Radio Wales. Again, finding a partner that has a product or content that we think is valuable for the audience. They can't deliver an event, a live event, but we can serve that on the radio. We're having similar conversations around the edge of the National Eisteddfod. If you can't do those on the Maes in the field, then can you do them on the radio and what innovation can bring to those types of events? So there's the cash, transactional commissioning part of our response and there's also how can we work with key national partners to provide something different, but something that could still be rich and valuable on it?

**Sara**

Yes, I agree. Partnership work absolutely critical in terms of thinking creatively, innovatively through the coming weeks and months, and it's certainly going to be months, isn't it?

I'd like to dig into this Network project a bit that you mentioned, and this initiative that you mentioned. And so as I understand it, as you described it, it's about creating and developing opportunities for making and experiencing theatre or live experiences in lockdown. Not an easy task. It’s a very different environment. And the live event world are going to be really hard hit, not just during lockdown, but in in that kind of immediate aftermath. How do we go into theatres, into cinemas and, you know, engage in social distancing in the way that we should be and safely? Lots of discussion in the sector at the moment about ways to innovate and think around this, and, and perhaps engaging audiences in completely different ways than we've ever done before. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Rhodri**

I think the first thing to say is, you know, this is a partnership. It was driven very much by the theatres and the new Artistic Director of National Theatre Wales, Lorne Campbell, was I think instrumental in shaping the Network project. It happened to coincide with a BBC initiative called Culture in Quarantine. We were looking for examples in Wales that could play into a pan-UK project called Culture in Quarantine. So it was, if you like, a meeting of minds.

And what we were able to do was to bring BBC Arts on board to provide some seed corn funding to the project and also provide a broadcast platform. But essentially, this is the theatres commissioning a series of short pieces for performance under lockdown conditions. So I think they're about five minutes long and they’re original newly-written pieces being performed remotely. And we will carry them on BBC Wales’ platform, but I know BBC can often have a reputation as ‘Bigfooting’ a partnership. So I want to be really clear this has been driven by the theatres and shaped by them. We're just happy to be involved and happy to provide the support that we can through the broadcast services that we offer.

I know they've done an initial round of applications. But I think there will be a rolling approach. So, I think they're still looking for scripts and ideas that could be part of that project.

**Sara**

Okay, thanks. Well, we'll certainly make sure that we put links up to all of these schemes after the call on the Creative Cardiff website and signpost anybody who would like to hear more about them or see if there are ways to get involved with them as they develop going forwards. Now, one thing I'd like to ask you about Rhodri before we start moving towards the end of our conversation, and it's certainly been a subject of much discussion among the creative and cultural sector.

It's around freelancers - at the moment, many of them fall between a variety of gaps in most development, funding and support schemes. I just wondered if you had any particular thoughts on that? Are the BBC doing anything to address that, particularly themselves? I mean, clearly, freelancers are absolutely vital to delivering all creative and cultural content. So a really important part of our ecosystem. But they have been particularly hit hard in this process of work changing, going away completely, and all the changes that we're trying to respond to.

**Rhodri**

Yeah, I mean, I think that, you know, the first thing to do is recognise this is disproportionately difficult for the freelance community across the sort of creative, artistic sector.

I think that the approach that the BBC has taken is to reflect the fact that there are different statuses if you like a freelancer or a PAYE freelancer and then there are self-employed freelancers who are paid gross, without deductions for tax.

Then the approach we've taken with PAYE freelancers, who are actively engaged by the BBC before the 28th of February, is that we are accessing the Government's Coronavirus job retention scheme and making up the difference to ensure that they are paid either 100% of their pay, or £3000 a month, up to a maximum of three months. So whichever was the lesser of 100% of their pay or £3000 a month, and that's been in place from 1st of March this year.

Obviously, it's different with self-employed freelancers, who are paid gross. And the UK Chancellor's announced an income support scheme for the self-employed, which again, is a cash grant worth up to 80%, I believe, of average monthly trading profit over the last three years. So that's the scheme that's in place for the BBC.

What I have heard is some questions about the approach that BBC Studios has taken. So BBC studios is the commercial subsidiary of the BBC, involved in television production. One of the things BBC studios is reviewing anybody who left BBC studios in March because there was quite a bit of incoming in terms of the approach. So they are reviewing again, anyone who left BBC studios in March to see again, whether they are eligible for support. But that is is obviously a conversation between the individuals and the studios directly. I think that they're aiming to complete that review as fast as possible.

**Sara**

Thanks Rhodri. Clearly, there's still lots we need to collectively work through on this in terms of the creative and cultural industries coming through this and out the other side, particularly in Wales, you know, where we saw a period of growth and real strength developing in the creative and cultural sector, we need to think about ways that we can collectively work together to support all parts of that ecosystem.

At Creative Cardiff we recently did a piece of research to go out to the community to hear about the gaps, not just for freelancers, but generally with the self-employed and funding offer that was made. So that's published on our website, if anybody wants to take a look at that, and we certainly share that with colleagues in local national and UK wide government, if it would be of use to their decision making in the future.

We’re nearly at the end of our questions here, but I just like to turn it over to you really, I guess, just to ask finally, if there's thoughts you'd like to share with the creative community at this particular time?

**Rhodri**

Well, I think only to underline what I said earlier, there is a umbilical link between BBC Wales’ success and the success and strength of the wider sector, culturally, creatively artistically. And what's really, really important is that we do everything we possibly can to support the sector at a time of unprecedented challenge.

We won't be in the best of health because it's been a difficult moment, but we accept that with a plan and the energy to get back on our feet as quickly as possible. And I’ve never wanted BBC Wales to be a sort of fortress or a Citadel that sort of stands alone from the sector. We need to be porous. We need to be open. We need to demonstrate that we're an effective and reliable partner. And, you know, we've announced what we've announced, but if there are colleagues and partners in the sector, who think we could go further - please, let's have that dialogue. Please don't you know, sit there thinking, well, that's all the BBC is going to do. This is a live conversation. I'm in conversations every day, with colleagues in the sector. It doesn't matter, because it's a good thing to do. It matters because our success ultimately hinges on the success of the sector. And so I would invite anybody who wants to have that conversation just to contact me directly.

**Sara**

Thank you, Rhodri. So a clear call there to colleagues across the creative and cultural sector in Wales. That the BBC is really open to a conversation, I think, in the way it always has been. But it feels you know, in in an even greater and more pronounced way right now and that is so very welcome to hear Rhodri and thank you very much. We really appreciate what an unprecedented time this is for everybody, but particularly for you and all the BBC Wales team. And I know from conversations I've had with yourself and various colleagues, just how hard everybody's working to deliver coverage of what's happening and news programs that keep us entertained, educational resources for our children and learning. And now this conversation we're having about creative ways of supporting, engaging the sector that we all are part of. And you know, that we have so much hope as we move through and out of this the other side in whatever way that manifests. So I guess, you know, huge, huge thank you to you and, and to your team. We really do appreciate everything that you're doing.

**Rhodri**

Thank you very much. That's very kind.

**Sara**

And so I'd like to thank Rhodri for his time. We really appreciate that and thank you to all of you who have watched live today. We hope you found this useful in some way. And if you have any comments or feedback or ways that we can change what we're doing or amend, please do email the Creative Cardiff inbox or tweet us your recommendations or suggestions.

Our next live Q&A event will be with Phil George and Nick Capaldi of Arts Council Wales a week today. So, Wednesday the 29 April at 10am. Again, viewing via the Creative Cardiff website. And then following that the next day on Thursday 30 April with Pauline Burt, Chief Executive of Ffilm Cymru Wales. Both those organizations will be talking about the variety of similar commissioning development and support initiatives that their organizations have been very working very hard together to deliver at speed.

You can find full lists of COVID-19 resources, funds and opportunities plus ways that ‘creativity continues’ on the Creative Cardiff website homepage.

So finally my thanks again to Rhodri and also to the Creative Cardiff team who put this together and we look forward to speaking to you again in the not too distant future. Keep in touch with us and take care. Hwyl fawr. Goodbye.