

SCOTLAND, PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING AND THE BROADCASTING LANDSCAPE



VLV co-hosted a free event on public service broadcasting in Scotland with RSA Scotland, CCPR and SMCA at Glasgow University on Wednesday 13 January 2016. There was a good turnout of about a 100 people, which included some VLV members whom it was great to see - on rather a cold, rainy day in Glasgow!

The afternoon comprised two panels of speakers representing academia, industry and VLV, as well as keynote speeches from Bill Matthews, BBC Trustee for Scotland and Ken MacQuarrie, Director of BBC Scotland.

There are a number of issues which PSB faces following devolution - representation of all the nations of the UK in network schedules, investment in the local economies of the nations, and output which informs audiences about issues and events in their own nation. These are particularly pressing for the BBC while it renegotiates its charter for the coming ten years – one which will have to reflect the seismic changes which have occurred in the identity of the UK's nations.

A key issue was whether Scottish audiences suffer from a deficit of content which is relevant to their lives and receive adequate coverage of political events within Scotland. When asked whether this was the case, the panel of speakers replied that it was not a significant problem in their opinion and no-one in the audience spoke up to disagree - but it remains a key policy issue for Scottish broadcasting and one of which the BBC is keenly aware.

Chairman of VLV, Colin Browne, was on the first panel of the day, alongside Professor Philip Schlesinger of the CCPR and Ofcom, Dr Lynn Whitaker, Dr Marina Dekavalla of the SMCA and David Hutchison of Glasgow Caledonian

University. Colin highlighted that broadcasting for Scotland sits within the wider public service broadcasting ecology of the UK, which is generally under threat with the raid on the BBC licence fee and Channel 4 privatisation on the horizon. He stressed that ideally there needs to be a charter which sets out the BBC's responsibility more clearly and reinforces the independence of the corporation and a strong Channel 4 alongside the BBC. Lynn Whitaker, VLV Trustee, raised the contentious issue of 'lift and shift' whereby English independent production companies have opened offices in Scotland to produce programmes such as *Question Time* for the BBC, thereby fulfilling production quotas for the nations; but some say they do not increase investment in the wider local economy.

In the second panel of the event we were provided some perspectives from the industry with

Bobby Hain, Director of Channels STV Glasgow/Edinburgh, Richard Wilson of BBC Sport, Jo MacDonald of the MG Alba Board, Marcus Herbert, Head of Online, BBC Scotland and David Strachan who represents PACT in Scotland and is director of independent production company Tern TV. They all stressed the importance of having locally produced content for Scottish audiences and for more content to be commissioned from Scottish production companies.

The event ended with presentations by Bill Matthews, BBC Trustee for Scotland and Ken MacQuarrie, Director, BBC Scotland. Bill stressed that licence fee payers must be the focal point of the charter debate and that they want the BBC to do more, not less. He questioned how devolution will be codified in the new charter and suggested that any new structure for the BBC needs to allow populations in the nations to feed into the process of decision making within the BBC. He also acknowledged that news for Scotland needs to be more responsive to devolution and that BBC Scotland needs to work harder to engage younger audiences. Ken MacQuarrie added that BBC Scotland's proposals included one licence for all BBC services in Scotland which would make it easier to plan the £108 million budget in a more holistic fashion and help the BBC respond better to audience needs in Scotland.

All in all it was a very stimulating event and a great way for VLV to start 2016 – addressing one of the key issues which the BBC Charter Review will be considering. Thanks to all the organisations which partnered to make this important event possible.