

*"Working for quality
and diversity in
British broadcasting"*



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Response by Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) to the Scottish Broadcasting Commission Consultation on the Future of Broadcasting in Scotland

1) Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) represents the citizen and consumer interest in broadcasting and works for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. The organisation is concerned with the regulation, issues, funding, structures and institutions which underpin the British broadcasting system, and supports the principles of public service broadcasting. One of its main aims is to raise awareness of the crucial role that broadcasting plays in our democracy and in our national and community life and culture. VLV in Scotland has maintained over a number of years a vibrant level of activity encompassing annual conferences in association with, variously, The Electoral Commission, The Radio Academy, The Royal Society of Arts, The Saltire Society and Napier, Edinburgh, Stirling and Glasgow Caledonian Universities involving speakers from across the range of civic society and the broadcasting and media industries. In addition, VLV was called upon by the Scottish Parliament in 2004/5 to give both oral and written evidence in relation to the state of broadcasting in Scotland. As in the rest of the UK, VLV members are drawn from all walks of life and our answers can be taken as reflective of wider audience opinion which we believe to be especially important in relation to some of the questions raised below. We therefore welcome this opportunity to contribute to the Scottish Broadcasting Commission's examination of broadcasting's role in promoting Scotland's cultural life among its different regions and groups, and through communicating between Scotland and the wider world.

We turn first to the question of what is the appropriate volume and nature of programmes and services to be provided by the Scottish broadcasters for audiences in Scotland?

2) It is commonly acknowledged that too few TV and radio programmes originate in Scotland and which deal with promoting cultural life among the regions and groups of the nation and in presenting a modern national image to broader UK and international audiences. In 2006, the overall spend by the networks in Scotland was just 3%.

3) Commentators and academics have argued that this lack of investment in Scottish productions causes a degree of cultural imbalance. If its films, TV and radio and newspapers are mainly owned outside Scotland, this impacts on the quantity, quality and range of programming offered to viewers and listeners.

4) The recent commitment by the BBC Executive and the BBC Trust to lift investment in production to a 'floor of 9% of UK network spend' and thus reflect more closely the licence fee income provided from Scottish viewers should move some way towards establishing an appropriate volume of programming originating in Scotland.

5) However, we do not know over what timescale nor – just as importantly, what kinds of genres this will be achieved and we believe that the Commission should build upon its work in the economic interim report to find ways of developing criteria which address the issue of badging in relation to cultural representation.

6) So the number of Scottish programmes needs to increase. The nature of this programming will be mixed to reflect the diversity of Scottish audiences and their different tastes and to cater to UK audiences and international broadcasting sales. Such programming should serve the interests and reflect the circumstances and aspirations, of Scotland's communities and the multicultural and multiracial nature of Scottish society. At the same time programmes need to be outward looking to attract UK and international audiences, a vital pre-requisite in any attempt to put broadcasting and the digital revolution at the vanguard of the 'Celtic Economy'.

7) What is important is that creativity in representation allows and enables the traditional strengths of 'Scotland the Brand' to be reinvigorated and renewed for new generations and audiences. Too often it is assumed that those living and being educated in Scotland have knowledge of the past cultural achievements of their nation. Just as, for example, the works of Shakespeare and Austen are remade and (re) interpreted for the present thus making their relevance clear and apposite and also generating tourism and sales abroad, so too the works and lives of Burns, Scott, Stevenson etc require attention as do those of less well known writers such as Hogg and those writing in Gaelic etc.

Does Scotland have a requirement for public service broadcasting which is different in scale and scope from other parts of the UK?

8) Public service broadcasters are national institutions and have a proud and rich tradition of providing programme for all audiences and this has continued in to the digital era. The provision of public service TV and radio channels offered by the BBC has expanded in recent years. In his latest report, the BBC's National Trustee for Scotland, Jeremy Peat, commends the original and innovative output of the BBC in portraying Scottish life and culture across all media.

9) However, public service broadcasters remain under intense financial pressures in an increasingly commercialised and globalised broadcasting market. BBC Scotland and the three Scottish ITV franchises have all faced financial challenges in recent years. Plenty of evidence now exists that certain audiences are turning away from TV and public service broadcasting in the face of digital competition coming from video game entertainment and the internet, especially social network sites. Public service broadcasting therefore requires support across the UK to continue its traditional remit but also to help re-engage lost audiences and win new ones.

10) The decline in the Scottish share of network television production in the past five years and the perceived wisdom in some circles that this has led to creative talent leaving Scotland means that additional public service broadcasting support is required at the current time. Some of this support relates to scale and to the expansion for example of production facilities to stimulate domestic output.

11) The investment in the production facilities at Pacific Quay, both at the BBC and the Scottish Media Group, needs to be accompanied by commissions and income generation to enable the full investments to bear fruit.

12) In other words, and following the work of Richard Florida, a creative economy and a creative class of entrepreneurs needs to be attracted by a mix of business and cultural opportunities in the central belt of Scotland such that a virtuous circle of investment breeds further success. In this sense, BBC Scotland are right to point to the multiplier effect on income and reputation enjoyed by BBC Wales as a result of the production of the Dr Who franchise being located and made there. Scotland needs the same success.

13) Other developments, such as the new joint agreement to start the dedicated Gaelic digital channel, expand the remit of public service broadcasting in Scotland, and introduce exciting new possibilities in the provision of cultural programming. While we welcome broadcasters' aspirations

to increase production spending in Scotland, VLV recognises the financial pressures faced by key public service broadcasters and supports attempts to raise further funds for Scottish productions (see below).

What kinds of programmes would Scottish viewers wish to be produced for their information or entertainment and are there important gaps in the current offerings?

14) VLV can identify a number of areas where viewers and listeners would welcome an improvement in programme provision. We would identify news and current affairs as one area where new programme formats – especially those that seek to inform greater audience participation - need developing, especially in the commercial sector. Home-grown Scottish drama is another area which has suffered in recent years and the lamentable and damaging decline in UK production of children’s programming has been widely noted. BBC Scotland has enjoyed great success in producing network programming for CBBC and CBeebies, notably with *Balamory* but also *Me Too!* and *Nina and the Neurons* and these achievements need nurturing and developing. Better cooperation should also be sought with other cultural institutions and festivals in Scotland such as the Edinburgh and Orkney Festivals.

Are changes required to the structure and funding of the ITV licensees in Scotland?

15) We would argue that historically ITV played a central role in promoting nations and regional public service broadcasting in the UK. The past 16 years have seen major changes in the way ITV operates. The development of ITV PLC, the ongoing rationalisation of facilities, which has seen many regional production centres closed, and the decline in the provision of regional news and non-news programmes audiences requires regulators and legislators to support ITV’s historical mission and serve national and regional groups and identities. In relation to the provision of local news services, for example, OFCOM has acknowledged that in order to safeguard the long-term future of news in the nations and regions, some new kind of public funding intervention may be required. We would argue that changes are required to the structure and funding of ITV licensees where they reinstate and promote closer connections between broadcasters and the regional audiences they serve.

16) Therefore we would support the reconfiguration of the Scottish licence areas so that a one Scotland licence comes into being, subject to the proviso that there are adequate and enforceable (and enforced if needed) terms of reference which ensure that the diversity of Scotland is reflected and communicated in media content and production.

17) In respect of funding, however, we are opposed to any scheme or proposal which involves top slicing of the BBC licence fee.

Is there a requirement or appetite for a new digital channel devoted to Scottish content?

18) We would need to see more detailed plans of any proposed digital channel before expressing a firm view on this. Certainly there is a requirement and appetite for more Scottish-made content, but much of this could be supplied by current producers, led by the BBC, and broadcast on the main terrestrial channels.

Is there an argument for a national Television Production Fund for Scotland (perhaps along the lines of the Canadian model) to part-fund high-quality cultural content which might not otherwise be produced?

19) YES. As noted above, terrestrial broadcasters have made noises about increasing the share of UK network spend in Scotland (up to 9%). We would argue that there might be a need for some new agency to raise additional sums to part finance high quality cultural content in Scotland and

also to monitor and promote Scottish made programming on radio, TV and in cinemas. One finance mechanism for this might be through direct payments from the Scottish Government.

20) The Canadian Television Production Fund model might provide a template for any new agency, although we would argue that the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) might demonstrate a better example in terms of scale and scope of activities relating to cultural production and where direct state intervention has greatly increased the number of productions in both English and French-speaking parts of Canada. The NFB was founded by Deanston-born John Grierson and enjoyed one of its greatest successes when Stirling-born Norman McLaren won an Oscar in 1953 for Best Documentary (Neighbours).

21) Another agency's work you might consider is the Singapore Media Development Authority (MDA) which has played an instrumental part in boosting the fortunes of Singapore's media industries. The MDA has a dual role: first, to promote the growth of the media industry; second, to manage content to protect core values and safeguard citizen and consumer interests.

22) We would argue that any such fund or agency should have a broader digital scope encompassing other media if it is to offer the best chance of providing a positive image of Scottish culture to international audiences and to boost revenue generation. Any organization would, we hope, need a strategy for future research, such as data on the degree of cultural diversity in programming and how viewers and listeners perceive the portrayal of cultural, ethnic and religious groups. Such data would also introduce robust methodology as to what exactly constitutes a Scottish production.

What will be the wider benefits for the English-speaking services in Scotland from the new Gaelic digital channel?

23) We very much welcome the decision to proceed with the new Gaelic digital channel and believe that the new service will promote greater awareness and understanding of Gaelic issues to English-speaking communities in Scotland. The stimulus given to cultural and educational programming will, we believe, help raise the game across the rest of the country and improve English-speaking cultural services.

24) The new channel has the capacity to help English speaking services to provide content which supports and demonstrates cultural and linguistic diversity and thus enable the BBC to more fully meet its public purposes. Moreover, there are clear opportunities for content thus made to be successful in other countries where there is less antipathy to watching programming with subtitles and thus we see future cultural and commercial success from this venture.

If more distinctive and high-quality Scottish content is to be produced, will we have the necessary distribution networks to ensure universal availability? For example, will there be high-capacity broadband connections in rural as well as urban areas?

25) VLV members support all delivery platforms but we take the view that platform neutrality should be accompanied by attention to the need to sustain and protect the DTT platform such that it remains viable. We welcome the news that the Freesat proposition is to be implemented shortly as it will bring access to services which cannot be accommodated on the limited bandwidth of Freeview, and it will bring them within the reach of many who currently reside outside the current range of Freeview. We also take the view that high-capacity broadband will be essential in urban and rural areas to prevent new forms of a digital divide emerging.

End.