

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Minority languages, HC 178

Tuesday 5 March 2024

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Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Dr Rupa Huq; Simon Jupp; John Nicolson; Alex Sobel; Jane Stevenson.

Questions 1-81

Witnesses

I: John Morrison, Chair, MG Alba, Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director of Nations, BBC, and Rhodri Williams, Chair, S4C.

II: Laura Giles, Managing Director, Screen Cornwall, Billy Kay, writer and broadcaster, Helen Mark, broadcaster, BBC Northern Ireland, and Caoimhe Ní Chathail, broadcaster, BBC Gaeilge.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: John Morrison, Rhodri Talfan Davies and Rhodri Williams.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Today we are beginning our inquiry into minority languages in the UK. Before we start, do any Members have any interests to declare? No. In which case our first panel today is with the broadcasting organisations. We are joined by John Morrison, chair of MG Alba; Rhodri Talfan Davies, director of nations at the BBC; and Rhodri Williams, chair of S4C. You are all very welcome; thank you very much for joining us today.

At this point I wanted to acknowledge that Rhodri Williams will be stepping down as the chair of S4C shortly. I know it has been a difficult time for the organisation, Rhodri, and I do not want to focus too much on that today. Before we start talking about minority languages it would be helpful for the Committee if you could set out the next steps that S4C are taking to address workplace culture, and how that will be taken forward upon your departure.

Rhodri Williams: Yes. Thank you for inviting us all here and for undertaking this important inquiry. As far as we are concerned it certainly has been an unprecedentedly difficult year—probably the most difficult year in the whole existence of the service. Following the commissioning of the independent report by the board, the board then took what was decisive action to terminate the employment of the chief executive, which led to much comment in the media and beyond.

I am glad to say that I think we have now moved beyond that, but there are other things that, in the board's view, would need addressing in order to restore confidence in the institution. We need to restore the confidence of our staff, who of course were the cause of the complaints made by the trade union Bectu in the first place. We need to restore the confidence of our suppliers—most of whom we pay for their content—and the confidence of our partners such as the BBC, who provide content to us as well as allowing us access to the iPlayer platform, which is very important.

We also need to restore confidence more broadly with our stakeholders and with elected representatives, both here at Westminster and in Cardiff Bay. That is something I am confident that we can do. We have sent a copy of a 15-point action plan to officials, which we have developed with the help of our staff, with input from Bectu and in collaboration with officials at DCMS. That action plan deals with leadership, culture, the policies that we currently have in place and governance.

Hopefully, over the coming months my successor—first the interim chair who will take over on 1 April and whose appointment I am expecting to be announced by DCMS very shortly—along with the board will implement that plan and get us back into a far better position. What helps us there is the dedication and hard work of our staff and supply partners, who have made sure that during the eight or nine months of turbulence that occurred last year and early this year, as far as the service was concerned,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the ball was not dropped on any occasion and the service continued to function efficiently and was well supported. Also, I think there is a will there beyond S4C itself for that to happen and for us to move on and carry on providing what we—and lots of other people who are interested in the preservation of the language and to secure its future—would describe as getting back to the main task at hand rather than dealing with the difficulties that beset us last year.

Q2 Chair: Thank you, Rhodri. I will start the questions with you as you have the floor at the moment. Do you think minority language broadcasting is part of a broader strategy to support the growth of minority languages?

Rhodri Williams: Absolutely. I think it is a very important part of that strategy. I am old enough to have been around matters dealing with the Welsh language, its use and its status and the provision of support for it since the early '70s. In my view the establishment of S4C in 1982 was the key moment up until that point in the whole development of the language. It sent a very clear signal to Welsh speakers themselves that there was support there from the UK Government for the language. It created an opportunity for people to see the language being used in a dynamic and modern way. It also created economic opportunities for people to work in what was a highly attractive sector, but to do that in Welsh and in various parts of Wales. They did not have to do it in Cardiff. They could do it in north Wales or west Wales, and that was a hugely significant development as far as the language is concerned.

There had been provision before that by what was then HTV, one of the ITV companies, and the BBC. But then, although at the time it broadcast for only four to five hours a day, we got a comprehensive service offering a wide range of content across many genres, bringing things like entertainment and drama to the screen in a way that had never been done before. That was a huge moment for the language. Since that point we have seen other significant developments in other areas of language policy to do with the status of the language. Educational opportunities are now provided for people to study through the medium of Welsh. But that all came about, I think, as a result of the establishment of S4C, which also made a huge difference to attitudes towards the language.

Up until 1982 the Welsh language was the subject of controversy and disagreement in Wales. That came to an end with S4C. I do not think it was necessarily a deliberate part of the planning for it, but it led to a far more convivial atmosphere where the support for Welsh from people who do not speak the language has grown exponentially since 1982. That was an important development.

Q3 Chair: John, can I turn to you? How do you think broadcasting links to education and learning a language, from children to adults, and to assisting the intergenerational transfer of language? What is the view of Alba?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

John Morrison: It is absolutely key. I would echo much of what Rhodri said. The same applies to Gaelic, although I have to say Wales and Welsh has probably set the gold standard in the UK for minority languages.

For the development of a language facing a crisis, there are two pillars: education and broadcasting, and both work well together. In Scotland in the 1980s we got Gaelic schools after hundreds of years of Gaelic being effectively legislated against. So you had the start of Gaelic schools. There are now 5,000 children who go through Gaelic schools, being taught through the medium of Gaelic. Alongside that has grown what MG Alba and BBC Alba do. The BBC used to do children's programmes; they are now shown on BBC. We do programming for pre-school, for school and for older pupils. That gives the language.

When you are developing a minority language, you need three things. You need visibility, which a channel gives it. You need usage, which a channel gives it, as well—it encourages usage in the community. You also reach out to learners. We are delighted that our LearnGaelic now reaches 500,000 users, when we have about 70,000 speakers. So, that could be massive. That is something that we want to spend more money on, because that could be transformational for the language.

We have got jobs created in television, with jobs created alongside in teaching as well. Then you take the fun side, which is something like Celtic Connections in Glasgow, which is a fantastic music festival every January. It brightens the gloom of the winter for many people, including thousands of people who come to Glasgow. Without the Celtic, you would not have the Celtic Connections. A lot of the young people who are performing in the fantastic new bands that have come through are the product of Gaelic-medium education, and often get their first showing on BBC Alba, because we are the platform.

Q4 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Rhodri Talfan Davies, did you have anything to add on that question?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: I echo a lot of what John and Rhodri said. The role of broadcasting in providing, first, a space for a community to speak in its own language, particularly when some of those linguistic heartlands are starting to be diluted by the prevalence of English, is critical. It gives a confidence and status that is incredibly important.

The other thing I would add to what has been said is that these are not just services about the preservation, safeguarding or promotion of language. They are also hugely valued in their own right, for the companionship and enjoyment they give speakers across the UK. If you take a service like Radio Cymru in Welsh, it is being consumed for about 1 million hours a week. That is huge; it is the most popular language among fluent Welsh speakers, and plays a huge role in linguistic national life.

Of course, there is a public policy dimension to this, in terms of safeguarding and promoting linguistic fluency and confidence, but there is

also the principle of inclusion, which is giving people of different languages a space in which they can share stories in their own medium.

Q5 Alex Sobel: John, in your evidence you said: "Gaelic public service media (PSM)—primarily BBC Alba—finds itself at a crisis point." Why did you say that?

John Morrison: For several reasons, which I will distil down to two. We were set up the UK Government, who set up a Gaelic fund in the '90s, which was worth about £9.5 million. Nowadays, that would be worth £25 million. Unfortunately, the funding from MG Alba, the successor of that organisation, has been frozen for 10 years.

I will explain the complexities of the funding. Rhodri will know the pain that the BBC went through when the licence fee was frozen for two years. We are paid for by Scottish Ministers through Ofcom, and that money has been frozen for 10 years. That means that in two years' time it will be worth exactly 50% of the launch budget we had. Really, it is unsustainable.

The other side of it is that the UK Government's various Acts have given us what we have now, which is a very complex infrastructure. We have been legislated for by the UK Parliament at Westminster, which looks after media law; we are regulated by Ofcom, which is another UK institution, to which Scottish Ministers do not need to answer; we are paid for by Scottish Ministers, through Ofcom—they give us the cash; and then we have a very valuable partnership with the BBC.

I have to pay credit to the BBC at this point because last year, we had the 100th anniversary of broadcasting in Gaelic. It started off with a religious sermon from Aberdeen over 100 years ago and now we have BBC Alba, so there has been huge progress. We have been hand in hand with the BBC, and independent companies such as STV and Grampian have also played their role. But right now, having gone quite a long way in terms of establishing BBC Alba, we are effectively being starved of cash. If this were a private company, you'd be saying, "You're heading towards insolvency," and somebody would be closing it down, and we are not helped by the complexity of the structure.

Out of the whole process, we need two things. We need a simplification of the process. We are like the orphan child of British broadcasting. We fall between all these stools, and we look up and say, "We need more money and more power." We need somebody we can turn to and say, "Look, we can't continue like this." We also need a funding mechanism that gives us assurance that we do have a future.

Q6 Alex Sobel: On that latter point, the UK Government have said that they will look at funding of minority language broadcasting when they consider the next BBC charter and through their review of BBC funding. Is that sufficient?

John Morrison: No. First of all, it is four years away, and in four years' time we will be below 50%, so the trajectory is going down. Also, the BBC

charter will look at many things, and I suspect that Gaelic will be a tiny part of that. We are looking to this Committee, this Parliament, this Government, to help us out.

The other thing with MG Alba is that, despite the very fruitful partnership we have with the BBC, we don't fall within the terms of the BBC charter. The Bill at the moment says that Ofcom decides what is sufficient. The BBC gives £10 million in people's programmes and access to the iPlayer, and the Scottish Government gives us £13 million, which has stayed at £13 million for 10 years. If Ofcom were to decide one day, "There is not sufficient broadcasting," to whom would it go to say, "You are responsible for doing this"? Who would pay for that, and who would be responsible for making those people actually pay for it?

We are caught in this dilemma where nobody seems to have ultimate power, and as a result, we have nobody we can turn to. Despite that, we have had a huge cultural impact. MG Alba has created 320 jobs since we started, and we are bringing in viewers. We peaked at 720,000 viewers. The average high point was about half a million for a language of 70,000 speakers. We are now down to 300,000 because of linear TV dropping off, and we have been given no cash to help in the transition to digital. We are really struggling; I don't think "crisis" is too strong a word. We need those two things to put things right.

Q7 Alex Sobel: What does the state funding model look like for you, and what difference would it make to broadcasting?

John Morrison: I like that figure of £25 million. The £9.5 million was like a bolt from the blue and was a huge impetus for the language, television, jobs and creation. This has had cross-party support. The Labour-Lib Dem coalition passed the Gaelic Language Act early in the 2000s. The SNP has always been extremely supportive and is bringing forward the Scottish Languages Bill at the moment. Sustainability for us, if you took that £9.5 million and projected it forwards, would be £25 million.

We also asked EY—Ernst and Young was their old title—to have a look at our finances just to see what we are doing. It looked at our governance and whether there are things we could do better, and it thinks we are doing an incredible job at stretching the money as far as we do. It also said that if we took that £13 million and applied inflation to it over the decade, we would be at around £25 million. That would be £25 million for MG Alba, and then the BBC contribution. The BBC has done a lot for us, Rhodri, and we love you dearly, but we look at the figures and we would like more, obviously.

Q8 Alex Sobel: Rhodri, we have heard John's side of the story. From your perspective, how is the BBC working with John's organisation to support its funding long term?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: In my experience, the partnership works brilliantly. I think that there is a shared ambition and a set of shared values that drive the commissioning and programming decisions. We are collectively thinking hard about this transition to digital. In the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

conversations that we are having with MG Alba, we are thinking about how we can give the language greater prominence and salience on our digital platforms. We are thinking about how higher-impact content can play a bigger part in the channel, because some of the successes that S4C has enjoyed over the past five or 10 years have resonated, not just within the Welsh-language community but internationally. I know that MG Alba and my colleagues at BBC Scotland have that same ambition. Therefore I think that the partnership is good.

On what John says, in terms of money, I think that that is a shared challenge across the broadcasting ecology. There is no doubt that the financial constraints facing public-service broadcasting are acute. You will have had my own boss, Tim Davie, here, telling you about the challenges on the licence fee. So yes, we all share an ambition, ideally to do more and to do it better and to drive digital migration, but there is realpolitik here in terms of the available resource, and that pressure is becoming more acute for everybody.

Q9 Alex Sobel: Do you agree with John's analysis, in terms of his funding issues? Does the BBC share that view?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: I don't think I'm going to wade into a conversation about Scottish Government support—

Alex Sobel: Can I tempt you?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: The BBC clearly has supported Gaelic for many decades through Radio nan Gàidheal. We were delighted, in 2008 I believe, to join forces with MG Alba to create the new broadcast channel. But, a bit like how S4C's own funding is determined by the UK Government, I think that those are matters for MG Alba and S4C respectively, not for the BBC.

Chair: Nice try, Alex.

Q10 John Nicolson: Thank you, gentlemen, for joining us. Ciamar a tha thu fhèin? I think that it would be good for us to just go back to basics here, because, looking around the Committee, I think I am the only person who comes from a Gaelic-speaking family—and a Scots-speaking family, and a Norn-speaking family on the Nicolson side from Orkney—and yet here I am, speaking only basic English.

I would like to pick up on something that you said, John. You said that Gaelic was legislated against. I think that it would be very useful if you let us know what happened to Gaelic, because people didn't decide, spontaneously one day, to stop speaking it, did they? Once upon a time, you would have had 1 million or more people speaking Gaelic, all across central and northern Scotland, and the south-west in Ayrshire. It was a language that was on equal par with Scots, was it not? Its decline, a bit like the glens where it prospered, wasn't natural; there was deforestation of a people, of a land, and also of the beautiful places that they lived in.

John Morrison: There was indeed, and you just have to travel through Scotland, all the way from Dumfries and Galloway, through the Highlands



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and across to Aberdeenshire, to see Gaelic in the place names. You will see it in the names of the mountains, the rivers, the lochs and the people. But I will go back, probably to Culloden and the Jacobite rising. There is a lot of mythology around that. It wasn't a Scotland-versus-England battle; there were Gaelic speakers on both sides of that battle. However, despite that, the repercussions against Gaelic speakers in the Gaelic-speaking clans were brutal. The kilt was banned; the bagpipe was banned; and Gaelic speaking was pushed down, sort of under the radar, as well.

So, that was post Culloden. Then, you move into 100 years of clearances, where tens of thousands of people were forcibly removed from the Highlands and Islands. Probably 100% of them would have been Gaelic speakers, and they were scattered all over the world. Some pockets, like Nova Scotia, have retained the language, which is quite amazing. We had a critical change in 1872, because you had the Education Act in Scotland that made the education of children between five and 13 compulsory. There was no place for Gaelic within that Education Act. Basically, Gaelic was pushed out of the classroom, pushed out of the people's lives. If you spool forward to my parents' generation, which you mentioned previously, they were actually punished—they were belted if they spoke Gaelic in the classroom. When I went to school, I did not speak any English. From day one the Gaelic-speaking teacher said to me, "From today, John, you will be speaking English." And I remember thinking, "This is going to be a challenge." So my first sentence—I will not even repeat it—was a wee bit tricky.

Now, thankfully, things have changed. The 1980s saw the opening of the first Gaelic schools and 1990 saw £9.5 million given to Gaelic broadcasting. So you have had Conservatives backing it, the Labour-Lib Dem coalition backing it and the SNP backing it. There are now dozens of schools across the country. There are 5,000 young people going through. Does this hold them back? No, it does not, because you have Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu in Glasgow, which is annually among the top-performing state schools in Scotland.

- Q11 **John Nicolson:** We will be visiting. We are also visiting the island of Harris, which is where my father's family come from. We will be seeing language alive there, which is very important. We have heard from Rhodri Williams about the effect that S4C had. I think he would say it saved the language. Our predecessor Committee recommended in its report that Gaelic broadcasting was given parity with Welsh in terms of percentage funding. Our recommendation was not picked up, sadly. If we were not to give you an advantage but just to give you parity with Welsh, what effect would that have?

John Morrison: I think that what we are looking for for Gaelic is parity of esteem. When we do look south, we look very enviously because of the budgets for S4C. Is it £90 million plus £25 million? The most important thing is that there is a structure by which the Welsh broadcasters know how much money they will get. We do not have that. So what we are looking for is parity of esteem in broadcasting. I hate to pull out figures. We are not looking for the same budgets, in case there are people terrified



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that we will be looking, like Rhodri Talfan-Davies beside me, for tens of millions. I think that if we got £25 million plus a funding mechanism that secured that going forward, and if we got something in the Bill that said there is a Gaelic service going forward that protects the right of this language to exist and to broadcast and tell our stories to the world—

- Q12 **John Nicolson:** You have made that point loudly and clearly. It is important as well that you explained to the Committee that Gaelic was deliberately attacked over generations. My grandmother, who did not speak a word of English when she went to school, was beaten in the playground by Gaelic-speaking teachers for speaking Gaelic. The self-loathing was extraordinary. I know the Welsh had an equivalent with the Welsh not. John, thank you for the moment.

Rhodri Talfan Davies, we are going to talk about Scots at the next session. Everybody knows what Gaelic is. Some people struggle a wee bit with Scots. You hear ill-informed comments saying that it is slang or a dialect of English, and of course that is illiterate nonsense. But Gaelic has an advantage in a way because it is so different. It has respect because it is used to broadcast news and current affairs. Why don't you broadcast news and current affairs in Scots?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: It perhaps goes back to the question of why wouldn't the provision be the same in all minority languages? If you look at the span of the last 100 years of broadcasting, the development of language broadcasting in different parts of the UK has evolved in different times. I suspect that in the run-up to charter and beyond, broadcasting in minority languages will continue to evolve and flex. If there were a clear audience demand, and that was deemed to be a good thing to do, that is something—

- Q13 **John Nicolson:** Have you asked them?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: The truth is—you have touched on it—that the position of Scots in Scotland is very different to the position of Gaelic, partly, I suspect, because it is regarded as a sister language to English in terms of its derivation, and partly because there are many variants of Scots—

- Q14 **John Nicolson:** There are many variants of Gaelic. There are dialects of Gaelic all around the country. Ten times more people speak Scots than speak Gaelic and you provide for Gaelic; we provide for Gaelic, collectively—not enough, but we do.

The thing about Scots is that it has either been relegated or promoted, depending on your point of your view, to just the cultural sphere. You've got plays in Scots. You've got music in Scots. But one of the things that Scots does not have is that kind of acknowledgment of it as an authority language.

You don't have a news presenter reading the news in Scots. You don't have reporters reporting from Parliament in Scots. It is all about music and culture, which is great, but there is something about having a language that is used to report Government business that gives it a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

certain status, and you don't have that.

Rhodri Talfan Davies: No, we don't have that. The approach BBC Scotland has taken in this space is that the use of Scots is, in a sense, integrated across our mainstream services. When we created the BBC Scotland channel, for example, the expectation would be that we would reflect Scots language within that output. If you look at the slate of drama that BBC Scotland has developed over the last five or six years, and in comedy too, you will have seen the characterisation and the language come through those programmes, whether that is "Two Doors Down" or "Guilt" or "River City".

We have not taken the Welsh and Gaelic model of creating standalone services. That is not from a point of principle or policy—

- Q15 **John Nicolson:** I don't think for a moment it is—I just don't think you have thought about. You are absolutely right. It is used in drama—I said that. It is used in music. We know that. I am putting to you, and I notice that you are not saying I am wrong—that you haven't used it in other spheres, which would give it a certain status. I am suggesting to you and putting it to you that you should ask the people if they want that.

More than 1 million people at the last census said they spoke Scots. I can't imagine any other country where you would have that number of people who are given no provision of any kind in their native language in news and current affairs. It would be unthinkable. I think that is something you should think about.

Rhodri Talfan Davies: As I say, I think our linguistic policy across all the minority languages will evolve. If we see clear evidence of audience demand for that space, that is something I know that colleagues at BBC Scotland will look at.

- Q16 **John Nicolson:** Rhodri Williams, just before I hand back to the Chair, am I right that when Gwynfor Evans challenged the Government over a broken promise, that was a landmark that perhaps saved the language?

Rhodri Williams: Yes, I think the establishment of S4C in 1982 was a historic moment for the language. There have been equally significant developments since then, particularly in relation to Welsh Government support for the language, the status of the language and the development of Welsh medium education. Most children who learn Welsh in schools in Wales come from families where neither parent can speak Welsh.

- Q17 **John Nicolson:** It has skipped a generation.

Rhodri Williams: Yes. Well—

John Nicolson: I used to do a youth programme where I was very struck by the fact that the Welsh-speaking kids were often so articulate and so confident. What they told me at the time was that they could talk to their grandparents in Welsh, but their parents didn't speak it. That is a very unusual thing, internationally. Maybe Catalonia had that a bit. That skip of a generation is remarkable.

Rhodri Williams: There certainly has been a lot of that, but even now, you have lots of people in Welsh medium education who have no linguistic background at all.

Increasingly, hopefully, along with BBC Radio Cymru, we have helped play a part. You can watch Welsh language television, listen to Welsh language radio and hear a diversity of voices that you would not have heard back in 1982. The establishment of the service, and the credibility that that gave the legitimisation of the language, was even bigger in its impact in those days than perhaps today, in that there were only four channels.

John Nicolson: Status—it gave it status. Thank you all. I am going to hand back to the Chair now.

Q18 **Chair:** Thank you, John. Can I just go back to something you said, John? You talked about the importance of being able to segue into a digital provision, because of the drop off in linear TV audiences. In 2022, S4C received an extra £7.5 million, Rhodri, to support your digital development. Can you quickly talk us through why that was important, and what you used it for?

Rhodri Williams: Developing content that is distributed on a wide variety of digital platforms is a significant step ahead from traditional linear broadcasting. With the benefit of hindsight, S4C were probably behind the curve, and did not follow the lead that was taken by the BBC when John Birt took the BBC into the digital world. The importance of that extra £7.5 million was to allow us to develop that distribution strategy in a way that did not take from money that was spent on content itself.

My view is that we would have had to have done it anyway but, of course, had we done it without the £7.5 million, there would be £7.5 million-worth less content to be distributed on YouTube or Facebook. Most of the listening is still to live television, but there is growth in listening to our own media player, Clic, and perhaps more significantly, to Welsh S4C content on the BBC's iPlayer, where the impact of the technology is so great, in the same way as our content distributed on YouTube, and reaches audiences that our linear broadcasts would not reach.

That has been a key part of the development. When we think of the importance of attracting viewers of a younger age group, you only need to look at some of the Ofcom statistics. Young people do not watch linear television at all, almost. There is an exception around some live events but, generally speaking, for people up to the age of about 24, their use of linear television has disappeared.

Being able to facilitate that development into digital distribution, and taking some original content and some repurposed content, and distributing it on the platforms that are best suited to the target audiences, was a very important step as far as we were concerned. We were very grateful to the Government for allowing us to be able to do that.

Q19 **Chair:** John, you also mentioned that you would like to see a commitment to Gaelic services in the Media Bill as it progresses. Is there



HOUSE OF COMMONS

anything else that you would like to see in the Media Bill that is not already there?

John Morrison: Yes. Can I touch on digital?

Chair: Of course you can.

John Morrison: Because that is critical for the future. Gaelic is like every other language. BBC Alba is losing around 15% of viewers on linear TV—the box in the corner—every year. A lot of them are moving to digital, but we are losing people. When I said that S4C and Welsh set the gold standard, can I upgrade that to platinum standard, because of that £7.5 million? We did not get any money; we got zero.

We looked across to Ireland and worked with TG4 over there. They have had €20 million since 2021 for the digital transition. We have had nothing. If we take one aspect of that: we were able to do three hours of drama last year. We did three hours of a new drama called “An Clò Mòr”. If you put that into box set consumption, that is one evening’s viewing for one family; the other 364 nights, they have to go elsewhere because we do not have the money to do drama. We are now doing a new drama this year, which is a co-production across other countries. We are putting in £1 million. We are getting £3 million in, but that is still only 4x50 minutes. That is probably a Friday night and a Saturday night for families across the UK, and then they go elsewhere. We are at high risk. This digital transition is hugely important.

To answer your direct question, we need two things to be in the Media Bill: recognition and security. When the last Bill, the Communications Act 2003, went through, BBC Alba did not exist. MG Alba, as it exists today, did not exist. We need protection and we need to say that there will be a service for Gaelic speakers, for people who want to learn the language, and for the people who consume the music and drama programmes that we would love to make. All these programmes, through subtitles, are accessible and increasingly watched by people across the UK. We need that, but equally important, we need a funding mechanism that unravels this kind of slightly crazy situation wherein you legislate, Ofcom regulates, the BBC partners us, the Scottish Government pays for us, and we do not know who to ask when we are looking for more money and for more programmes.

Q20 **Chair:** Do either of the either of the Rhodris have anything they would like added to the Media Bill?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: The provisions around prominence are incredibly important for all of us. In an increasingly globalised space, the ability of UK stories in any language to be front and centre within that media experience is incredibly important. The provisions support that. As John says, that recognition of the need for an ongoing, enduring Gaelic language service feels entirely appropriate.

Rhodri Williams: I would endorse that completely.

Chair: We like it when everybody’s in agreement with each other—well, to



a certain extent.

- Q21 Simon Jupp:** How important is it to Rhodri Williams—just to be clear which Rhodri I am talking to—and John Morrison that Welsh and Gaelic have a particular status or a level of recognition from the UK Government or devolved Governments?

Rhodri Williams: It is essential. Without going into the background of how we got to where we were, the UK creative industries are a huge success story. That is a challenge to anyone who is adjacent, even if you are even further away than we are, to maintain your cultural activity in the shadow of the huge success of the UK's cultural industries.

We have had success with co-productions with the BBC. For example, "Keeping Faith" was on the BBC network and was an original S4C drama. We have since partnered with Channel 4. We have sold drama series to Netflix. We have not yet achieved the same success as some Irish language content creators—a film in the Irish language won an Oscar recently—but that is important in legitimising the use of the language and in making it look and sound attractive to people.

It is important to give people the confidence to think, "There is a future in this. There is value in sending my children to a Welsh-medium school, in encouraging them to use the language at home and in using it ourselves at home." When I think back to my childhood, that was absent. I moved around quite a lot when I was young, and in some areas the only people who spoke Welsh were old people. Young people did not see the relevance of the language.

The role of the media—in 1982 it was about linear television; now it is digital media—in legitimising and giving people the freedom to express themselves, as Rhodri mentioned earlier, and do things and be creative in their own language or the language of their choice is hugely significant. It plays, I would say, a core role in any attempt to, depending how you would like to describe it, preserve or secure the future of a minority language.

Simon Jupp: Fingers crossed for that Oscar. John?

John Morrison: Fingers crossed for us as well. As I mentioned earlier, you need three things when you are trying to grow and revive a language. You need visibility or normalisation; television gives you that. You need usage, which television gives you and encourages in the home, classroom and playground. Because we are now doing a lot of sport on BBC Alba, young people are tuning in to see their favourite football or rugby teams. We would love to do this for other sports. It is also encouraging people to learn the language. We have SpeakGaelic and LearnGaelic, and LearnGaelic is getting 500,000 unique users, which is really important.

The critical thing from our point of view is that we are not looking for a handout here. This is really important for the public purse strings in these times where we know money is tight. We had analysis done on what the money that is spent on MG Alba means. For every pound we get, we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

create £1.34 for the economy. That means that you are not wasting your money. You are actively investing it in the UK and the Scottish economy.

We are creating jobs in places like Stornoway and Uist. We are creating apprenticeships, working with arts organisations. We are creating four apprenticeships based in the Western Isles with arts organisations that are also struggling for funding. These four young people will create digital content for the arts organisation, but we hope to be able to use it on BBC Alba channels as well. It is an investment in young people and the language. It gives the taxpayer a return for their money. We are entertaining 300,000 people every week who tune in to BBC Alba. We would like to do a lot more. If we got more cash and more support, think of the multiplier. We would give you more return for your money.

- Q22 **Simon Jupp:** What are the implications of a language being protected under the Council of Europe charter for regional or minority languages? What does that mean in reality for you?

John Morrison: It gives you protection and status, and hopefully Governments such as this Government and the Scottish Government will listen to that. What we need is the practical application. Practical application is for it to be taught and broadcast, including telling stories. Gaelic radio is on the air from 7.30 in the morning till midnight, so Gaelic speakers all over the country can tune in. They can also learn by hearing people speak. Mr Nicolson was talking about the importance of the different genres. You get all that in radio; we want to see it on television. The lofty ideals of the European charter are fantastic, but what it means for the ordinary Gaelic speaker is manifested only through speaking the language, teaching it and watching it on television. That is the practical aspect of it. It encourages people to use the language. Without usage, the language dies.

Simon Jupp: Thank you, John. The same question to you, Rhodri Williams.

Rhodri Williams: I think the charter is more useful to languages that have lesser support, if you like. The implications for Wales are not particularly significant, because there is such a high level of support for the language, both from the UK Government through what we deliver and what the BBC delivers through the licence fee and through the Welsh Government's interventions across a variety of policy areas. You can draw a comparison with somewhere like Brittany, where the Breton language does not enjoy anything like that level of support from the French Government—indeed, the people I speak to in Brittany certainly say that antagonism towards the Breton language still exists in France. There, I think, the significance of the European charter is essential. However, for us, in a sense, we have moved on to a higher level of support and activity.

- Q23 **Simon Jupp:** Moving over to the BBC, Rhodri, what does the charter mean for the BBC and the services that it provides?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: In truth, the primary mechanism in terms of minority languages for the BBC is the charter agreement. As it stands, the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

charter makes clear commitments on Gaelic, Welsh, Ulster-Scots and the Irish language. Clearly the Media Bill is looking at expanding the PSB remit into Scots and Cornish, so that would then be a conversation between us and Ofcom at the point of the renewal of the charter. I think that is the primary driver for our linguistic policy development, if you like, rather than the Council charter.

- Q24 **Simon Jupp:** Let us focus on Cornish for a second. Radio Cornwall used to provide a weekly news bulletin in Cornish, which I have heard a couple of times. I cannot pretend that I understood a word of it, but it was nice to hear it. Are you committed to that sort of programming in the future, and does it still actually exist?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: Yes, it still exists. It is one original broadcast a week; I believe that it is repeated on Friday and Sunday, but I may be corrected on that. We are committed to that. We have also made some steps in terms of Cornish short films on iPlayer, which I welcome. However, this clearly goes back to Mr Nicolson's question earlier. I think the evolution of the policy discussion around Cornish is at an earlier stage. If we were to look at any expansion in that space, my question would be: do you focus on building a presence on Radio Cornwall, or do you focus on the digital opportunity online?

- Q25 **Simon Jupp:** What would be your preference at this stage?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: The honest answer is that it would depend—forgive my ignorance—on the linguistic composition of that audience. You need to look at whether, to go back to the conversation we had earlier about Gaelic, growth or the large part of the Cornish speakers are being driven through education, and are younger or older. You need to look at the demographic profile of the language, and you need to adapt your media response to that profile. I am not sure that I would have a sufficient grasp of the composition of the Cornish cohort at the moment to do that.

- Q26 **Simon Jupp:** There is no devolved government in Cornwall, but there is a devolution deal. Moving to the Channel Islands for a second, the States of Jersey and Guernsey have obviously done work to protect their individual languages, Jèrriais and Guernésiais. What do you think could be done to protect those languages, which obviously were hugely reduced due to the evacuation back in the second world war?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: I think the right response would probably be to work through the two local radio stations. There is clearly an online news presence there as well, but I guess the key question is: how can both stations reflect the linguistic diversity of the islands? Again, I would need to look at the detail of that to work out what the best response would be.

- Q27 **Simon Jupp:** To be clear, at one point when I worked at BBC Radio Jersey, it had a weekly news bulletin in Jèrriais. I tried to learn Jèrriais live on air. I am glad that no clips exist of that.

Rhodri Talfan Davies: But yet they might!

- Q28 **Simon Jupp:** It would be great if they could continue to be lost. It is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

really important to protect those languages too, because we see the surnames in the UK of the families who were evacuated. Keeping those flames alive is really important, even if the number of people who speak Guernésiais in particular, I believe, is very low.

Rhodri Talfan Davies: One of the challenges, which goes back to Cornish as well, is having a really clear sense of the scale of the community and what demographic changes are happening in that linguistic community. Our understanding of Gaelic and Welsh and, for different reasons, Ulster-Scots and the Irish language is probably ahead of our detailed understanding of both Scots and Cornish.

Q29 **Simon Jupp:** Do you know whether there is regular discussion between the States of Jersey, the States of Guernsey and the BBC about language provision in the Channel Islands?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: I wouldn't say that there is regular conversation. Clearly, the editors and our head of south-west, Steph Marshall, engage with those authorities. I couldn't tell you the frequency of that.

Chair: I never had you down as a Jèrriais speaker, Simon.

Simon Jupp: Trust me, I wasn't.

Chair: Clive Efford, please.

Clive Efford: I feel challenged by that, Simon.

Chair: Come on, Clive, what have you got?

Q30 **Clive Efford:** I think we're waiting for the weather in Cockney rhyming slang!

This question was partly answered earlier, but can I come to you, Rhodri Williams? Broadcasting policy is a reserved power for the UK Government, but the responsibility for promoting minority languages is devolved. What challenges does that create for you?

Rhodri Williams: If you listen to views expressed in the Senedd in Cardiff, you can see that there is a desire in some quarters to have greater influence in broadcasting policy. It is currently discussed in the context of appointing my successor. You have three different models with three different organisations. My successor will be appointed by a panel that has a Welsh Government representative on it. The member of the BBC board is appointed by, again, the DCMS, but this time the Welsh Government actually have to agree with the DCMS about who that person is. If you go to Ofcom, the Welsh member—Sir Clive Jones is the recent new appointment as the Welsh member of the Ofcom board—is appointed by the Welsh Government.

I think there are tensions there, but I stress that I think that—I should declare an interest, in that I worked for Ofcom for almost 15 years—there is an interest in having media policy, at some level, in one place. We, as a very small part of the ecology of UK broadcasting, are governed by the same rules and regulations that apply to the BBC, ITV and Sky. There is



expertise in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that is shared across the various organisations for which it has responsibility. There is value in that. There is also great value in having, as we do now have—this is something that came into existence following an independent review of S4C, undertaken in 2018—a memorandum of understanding with the Welsh Government to secure co-operation on educational resources, on supporting Welsh learners and on work on intergenerational transmission of the language. That is the best of both worlds.

I find it very difficult to imagine a situation whereby you could take one piece of broadcasting out of the rest of the family of UK public service broadcasting. There is also the importance of the current situation, whereby we work closely with and are beneficiaries of having such an agreement as we have with the BBC. I cannot stress too much how important it is that S4C's content is distributed on iPlayer. More people are accessing it on iPlayer as time goes on, and that is of huge significance. Whether you could have that if we were cut loose and completely independent of the family of UK public service broadcasters, I am not sure.

Q31 Clive Efford: Would you say that the balance is right, or would you see more devolved?

Rhodri Williams: At the moment, I think it is right. I think there are benefits that come from being a part of the UK regulation of broadcasting, and there are benefits, clearly, of working closely with the Welsh Government to secure that we are working in cohesion with each other. It is not only the Welsh Government; it is also with organisations such as the National Centre for Learning Welsh. That means that what we are doing ties in with what is being done in schools and other institutions in Wales, so that there is a co-ordinated policy there. We are not just going off and doing our own thing. What we are doing is tying in with what is being done by other organisations. I am certainly pretty satisfied with the status quo.

Q32 Clive Efford: John, do you have anything to add to that? Are you doing your own thing?

John Morrison: I think we are very happy with the relationship with the BBC, because the iPlayer is really important for Gaelic programming going forward. In terms of between the two Governments, this Parliament has been very good to Gaelic. It created Gaelic broadcasting and gave it a cohesion. We have a channel now but, as I said earlier, we need protection. We probably need public service broadcasting status for MG Alba. We also need somewhere between all these stools that govern Gaelic—this Parliament legislating for it, the Scottish Government paying for it through Ofcom, Ofcom regulating us and then the partnership with the BBC. We don't know where to turn. It is really complex.

What we would like is a simple system, where somebody says, "This is what a Gaelic service should look like, and this is how much it should cost and how much the Governments pay for it."

Q33 Clive Efford: Someone, but who? Who would you say should say that?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

John Morrison: I don't think the current structure is working for us, because there doesn't seem to be anybody.

Q34 **Clive Efford:** Is that more devolution to the Scottish Government?

John Morrison: In terms of the politics, it could be the Secretary of State or it could be with the Minister who pays for it. But if you have the Minister who pays for it deciding the sufficiency, there is a bit of a conflict. If you are paying for something and you are deciding how much there should be, I can foresee a bit of an issue there. What we want is clarity sufficient that there is a proper service.

Q35 **Clive Efford:** I am not fully following what the problem is. Is the problem that there is no individual or individual point that you go to to say, "We need more money"? Or is it that there are too many points?

John Morrison: It is a bit of both, actually. The Bill doesn't give any clarification either. Under the Bill, Ofcom decides what is sufficient—that is the phrase used. But if they decided that what was being offered is not sufficient, who do they ask for more money from? Is it from the BBC? Or is it from the Scottish Government? Can they make the BBC pay more money? I think the answer is probably no, because we sit outside the charter. Can they go to the Scottish Government? I don't think Ofcom has any authority over what Scottish Ministers do and pay for.

We are caught in the middle of this. Right now, we have nobody. I suspect from the way the devolution settlement sits at the moment that it should probably sit with the Secretary of State, but I don't want to go into where devolution goes in the future. What we would want is a mechanism whereby our funding is assured and we know who to go to.

Q36 **Clive Efford:** Are there are any areas where the devolved Government could assist? For instance, is there anything preventing them putting more money in, albeit through Ofcom?

John Morrison: You would need to ask them that. We would love if they put more money in.

Q37 **Clive Efford:** Have you asked them?

John Morrison: We have asked them, but they say that they are under funding pressure across every aspect of Government.

Q38 **Clive Efford:** So they have the same problem as the BBC.

John Morrison: Yes, they do. It is a huge issue for us. It is an existentialist threat to us, because the trajectory is downwards. Beyond 2026, we will have less than 50% of the budget we have. We are running out of road at BBC Alba.

Q39 **Clive Efford:** Rhodri, you are in the middle of both Welsh and Scottish language TV. Have you got anything to add?

Rhodri Talfan Davies: If you look through a BBC lens, what you will find is DCMS and UK Government—broadcasting powers are reserved to UK



Government—but we have very active relationships with each of the devolved Governments. If you look at the partnerships that BBC Scotland has with Creative Scotland, or Wales with Creative Wales, BBC Northern Ireland with NI Screen, there are active—we look both ways. Clearly, overall broadcast policy is set here in London. I think there are good reasons why that model works, if you think about the level of international global competition now in the media space and about the debate that we have had over the last two or three years about the importance of prominence.

The ability to take a UK-wide view on those matters probably makes more sense given the scale of the challenge we face in a regulatory setting, but I think we sometimes forget how much things have moved. Rhodri has just described to you the appointment process for the BBC board members for the devolved nations, which effectively the Welsh Government have to approve. We lay our accounts and annual report in front of the Welsh Parliament, and the Scottish Parliament, and we regularly do hearings and sessions, and we see ourselves as accountable to those Parliaments, too, so I think things have moved enormously. The reality is that a broadcaster such as the BBC is always looking in both directions.

Q40 Jane Stevenson: Thank you, gentlemen, for some really interesting thoughts this morning. I was going to ask about digital content and updating, which we have touched on throughout your responses. Rhodri Talfan Davies, you mentioned that the demographic profile of a language is currently dictating output and content, or certainly influences that. How much of your thinking is about the responsibility to grow and nurture new audiences and new languages? How far ahead are you thinking about how your content can affect the growth of language in the future, in combination with that digital challenge? I will start with Rhodri Williams.

Rhodri Williams: I think that is our fundamental purpose. I think it is why S4C was created and why it exists. We undertook an exercise with staff about four or five years ago, when we asked people why they thought we existed. Obviously, you provide a service to people who speak the language every day, but what came out very clearly was that people identified with being part of a process of trying to take the language beyond that, to new audiences—primarily to younger ones, but also to ones from diverse ethnic backgrounds, diverse social backgrounds and diverse geographic backgrounds. That is fundamental to what we do.

You quite often get some discussion in the Welsh media about whether the emphasis is too much on the traditional and those who are committed. We hear stories about people who turn on S4C in the evening and keep it there, and that's all they listen to for a while, but we also know that younger people do not consume media in that way. We need to get the balance right. Providing a service that answers the legitimate needs of Welsh speakers is one half of the equation, but expanding the audience, attracting new viewers and making the language relevant to younger speakers or potential speakers is absolutely fundamental. If there is one thing that S4C has to do, that is it.



- Q41 Jane Stevenson:** I presume that digitalising content and leaving it online, making it available as a resource for schools and so on, has made it easier to fulfil the learning part of that.

Rhodri Williams: Yes, because that gives greater value, if you like. If you have a drama series or a film that is based on Welsh literature, where the book is part of the national curriculum, making that accessible to schools free of charge through the Welsh Government's Hwb network is a key development. Likewise, people who are learning the language—and there are more and more of those—can make use of our programmes. Our programmes use a variety of linguistic registers, including some that you would perhaps need quite a high level of fluency in Welsh to understand completely, but also others that people learning the language would understand. We are able to cover that range and provide something that can be used.

As you say, once it is online it is not a case of "I missed that, it was on last night"; you can go back to it over a long period and through a variety of platforms—not only YouTube, Facebook and the like but through Clic, our own media player, or the BBC's iPlayer, as I referred to earlier. That is one of the huge benefits of digitalisation. This is not a cheap business to run: creating compelling content is not cheap. You get greater value from it, though, if it can be made available on a variety of platforms and for a long period.

- Q42 Jane Stevenson:** I can sing you a bad Welsh national anthem, but I do not speak any Welsh apart from that. Do you subtitle your Welsh language programmes in English, so that people who are non-Welsh speakers can understand?

Rhodri Williams: Yes. I cannot remember the exact percentage, but probably close to 90% of our programmes are subtitled in English. That is another benefit of digital technology: you can provide subtitles in Welsh as well as English. People who may be a fairly long way down the process of learning the language might want to see the Welsh subtitles, whereas other people, if they are listening to commentary on a sporting or cultural event, will appreciate the opportunity; hopefully, they will pick up some Welsh as they listen to it, but they can also read subtitles in English.

- Q43 Jane Stevenson:** John, this probably sounds like the land of milk and honey. Is that what you would hope to do, with Gaelic?

John Morrison: As a board, we have a policy of digital first and we are moving towards that, despite the fact that, unlike the Welsh and Irish, we have been given no money to do it. We know that that is where the future lies, so we have to follow where the audience is. The young audience is already moving there. According to Ofcom, linear television dropped more than 15% last year, so it is falling away. It remains important for us, but digital is where it is at.

I know that the BBC as a whole is trying to develop new audiences. We can help do that, through our content. We have had to have a policy of what we call tent poles. Every month, we will do something that we think



HOUSE OF COMMONS

will have more impact and will draw in new audiences. It could be music, sport or an education programme. We push that really hard, but would love more money to do it. It sounds terrible to be asking for money for everything; but we need digital, we need to be there. We need to be on all these platforms for the young audience. Otherwise, this language is dying.

- Q44 **Jane Stevenson:** Someone mentioned putting content on YouTube—I think it was Rhodri Williams. Do you use YouTube?

John Morrison: We do, and we will look at a variety of platforms. We are finding that for the young audience, short-form content is what they are really interested in. So, we are very keen to produce more short-form content, because it is critical to bring the young people in. When you think about the iPlayer and the huge challenges that a major broadcaster such as the BBC has with Netflix, Amazon Prime and so on, which are global, and then think about trying to encourage people to watch Gaelic programmes—they need to find us. We need to be discoverable on the iPlayer. Thankfully, with the partnership with the BBC, that is something we are working very hard on. We need to be there, but also need to be on other platforms for the young audience.

- Q45 **Jane Stevenson:** My colleague Clive touched on this a little bit. Do you think that the engagement between schools, educators, the Government and content production is good enough, or could there be more done for a grand-scheme masterplan for content?

John Morrison: From our point of view, we do a lot of Gaelic language learning. It started off on radio; it is now on television. It is incredibly popular. Duolingo actually started doing a Gaelic class, and they have 1.8 million people subscribed to Gaelic—there are 70,000 people who use Gaelic every day. That shows not just the appeal within the UK, but the global appeal. We can help that by doing Gaelic programmes, which are then available digitally. We already work very closely with the schools, so all the programmes are available for schools. In a similar way to what they are doing in Wales, if we do a historical programme, that is available through the education process.

- Q46 **Jane Stevenson:** Finally, you mentioned Nova Scotia. Do people in Nova Scotia access your content as far as they can?

John Morrison: They probably do when we put it on digitally. I don't think they will be able to watch BBC Alba legally in Nova Scotia. Very interestingly, we started a thing—just about when the channel started—called FilmG, which was encouraging people in schools to make programmes and short films. It started off with, I think, 16 entries. This year, we had 170 short films created by kids in their own time. This has all been woven into the education curriculum, so it is teaching them writing skills and presentation skills. The confidence that Mr Nicolson spoke about is there; you can see it on the screen. That is available, and FilmG has been a huge success. I have actually met educators from one local authority who said that the most excited their kids get is when they are given mobile phones. We send producers into the schools to work with them and show them, although quite often they are actually adept at



HOUSE OF COMMONS

doing films on their own phones. It is all working. Can we do more? Of course we can.

Jane Stevenson: A lovely thought to finish on.

Chair: Lovely. Gentlemen, thank you very much for your time today. If you have any other thoughts after the end of this session, please feel free to email the Committee. We will be very happy to hear them as we gather our evidence for our report.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Laura Giles, Billy Kay, Helen Mark and Caoimhe Ní Chathail.

Chair: Our second panel focuses on individuals in broadcasting who are serving minority language communities. We are joined by Billy Kay, a Scots-language writer and broadcaster; Caoimhe Ní Chathail, an Irish-language producer and presenter for BBC Gaelic; Helen Mark, a presenter for BBC Northern Ireland in Ulster-Scots; and Laura Giles from Screen Cornwall. Thank you very much for joining us today. You are all very welcome.

Q47 **John Nicolson:** It is lovely to see you all—what an amazing diversity of languages before us. This is an important inquiry, and I think you have been listening to the previous evidence, which was interesting. Could I start off with you, Mr Kay? I put it to Mr Morrison that the decline of Gaelic was not an accidental thing; it was a deliberate matter of policy. On one side, I have a Gaelic-speaking grandmother; on the other side, I have a Scots language-speaking grandmother. My Gaelic-speaking grandmother was belted for speaking Gaelic. My Scots grandmother was just corrected all the time, with the implication being that she was speaking substandard English. I had the same experience at school myself. I remember an essay where I had talked about my “wee brother”. The teacher put a red line through “wee” and asked whether that meant small, stunted or younger. We all know what your wee brother is. What a ridiculous thing to say. What do you think? What effect have the attacks on Scots for 200 years—or since the Union—had on the language?

Billy Kay: First of all, they have given people doubts about their identity: Scottish antiszygy, the pulling of the character in different directions, the heart versus head appeal to both sides. George Gordon, Lord Byron, said, “For I am half a Scot by birth and bred a whole one, and my heart flies to my head.”

Hugh MacDiarmid called Earth in the universe the “bonnie broukit bairn”—the beautiful neglected child. In a way, Scots is the beautiful neglected child of minority languages in the United Kingdom. We are among the strongest with speakers—we have 1.5 million speakers, which is greater than Welsh, Gaelic or probably all the other minority languages put together, but we have less recognition than any of them. That produces a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

dichotomy in the Scottish psyche. It is completely relevant that the greatest works on the divided self, such as those by R. D. Laing and "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" by Robert Louis Stevenson, were written by Scots. It produces a dichotomy—a pulling of different directions.

It has an effect on your confidence growing up if the major institutions do not recognise the way you speak, or your literature is not taught in school apart from on Burns Day. That was an irony that I experienced as a child growing up in Ayrshire in the 1950s: you literally got a prize one day a year for speaking Robert Burns' poetry, but you could get the belt, the tawse, or corporal punishment the other 364 days for speaking his language. Those are the ironies of that situation.

Things are better today. Attitudes are better, and schools are more positive. However, the gaping hole that we are here to discuss today is the fact that people are sympathetic towards Scots in broadcasting, but they usually do nothing about projecting that sympathy on to active encouragement of programming in Scots.

Q48 John Nicolson: That is interesting. I know a Scots language broadcaster who was specifically told by BBC producers not to use Scots. It's his native language, just as it is yours. You are not speaking your native language; you are speaking English, which is not your native language. I understand Scots—you could speak to me in Scots and I think I would get all of it—but I would struggle to construct sentences in Scots. I would have to think about it quite carefully.

You will have heard the evidence from the previous panel. When I asked Rhodri from the BBC why there was no provision of news and current affairs in Scots, I could tell from his expression that he had never even thought about that. He gave quite a corporate answer, but he hadn't really thought about it. He told me, of course, that there is Scots provision in drama and music, but we know that.

Am I right that one of the things that happened after the Act of Union was that all the leaders of the country who had been Scots language speakers—whether it was the lawyers, the aristocrats or the Monarch himself a century before—went south and started speaking English? That meant that society's leaders no longer spoke Scots but spoke English. What effect did that have, and what is the ongoing effect? While you're at it, tell me what the BBC should be doing.

Billy Kay: The effect was a slow percolation down through society of thinking that English was the language of prestige and power. London was where the action was. If you wanted to get ahead and make money, London was the place to be, and to get by in London, you had to adapt your Scots and speak standard English. On the positive side, that led to bilingualism, which is a wonderful thing. The fact that I was brought up bilingual in Scots and English meant that I found it easy to learn French, German, Portuguese and Russian later on in life, so we are all supporting bilingualism. The downside is when your language is curtailed. That is the negative aspect, which needs to be balanced positively by positive discrimination in favour of it today.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The history of Scots at the BBC, for example, is that I made a series in the 1980s called “The Mother Tongue”—the BBC could not quite bring itself to call it “The Mither Tongue”—based on the book I wrote. About 10 years later, there was another series on the history of the language by Carl MacDougall. Then there was another gap of about 15 years until a programme called “Rebel Tongue”, which was broadcast about four years ago and presented by Alistair Heather. Every time the BBC does a major programme or series in Scots, they think, “That’s it. We’ve done it. We can ignore it now for another decade.” Roughly every decade there has been a programme on Scots. That is why, when we hear about the provision for Gaelic and Welsh, where you are talking about literally millions of pounds being poured into the languages—well, good on them, and well done to the professional body that has got that support.

We think of the bonnie broukit bairn—the beautiful neglected child. There is only a couple of hundred thousand pounds to support all the people who work in Scots for half a day a week, two days a week or three days a week, yet there is a glorious language, with a literary tradition that produced the greatest poetry in Europe between 1450 and 1550, that continued in the 18th century to produce world figures like Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns, and that in the 19th century produced great figures like Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Walter Scott, whose best work was in Scots. That continues through to the present day, with MacDiarmid and the great writers working in Scots today. The fact that that language does not have the support of major broadcasters and only appears sporadically, usually around Burns’ Day, is a tragedy.

One of the great Scottish historians of the 20th century, Professor Geoffrey Barrow, in his inaugural lecture at Edinburgh University, said that one of the greatest tragedies of Scottish life in the 20th century was that broadcasting was not devolved. In other words, it is up to London and Westminster to support these native languages. If there is such a thing as Britishness, all the parts of Britishness should be supported and should be funded equally. That is why it is important that groups like this are here today to hear, on a very rare occasion, about the existence of these different traditions within the islands.

Q49 John Nicolson: Excellent—well said. I could not agree more. Turning to Irish, one of the interesting things about Ireland is how much support Irish was given from the foundation of the Irish state and independence for Ireland. But in Northern Ireland, that status has been contested, hasn’t it? We have seen a huge stooshie over the respect that Irish should be given, with one particular community objecting to it. We do not have those issues in Scotland over language. What particular problems does it present for you, given that half of Northern Ireland is encouraged to think of Irish as something “other”?

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: I will start off with the similarities that Billy mentioned. The minority languages within these islands are often looked at as hobby languages—things that people do for enjoyment or because they love music, history or whatever—but for many people within these islands, it is their everyday life. In my own life, I get up in the morning



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and I speak to my daughter in Gaelic. I get her ready and brush her teeth—all of that is done through Gaelic. I bring her to an Irish-medium school. I speak to her classroom assistant and her teacher—all of those interactions are done in the Irish language, so it is very much my everyday reality. I am sure it is the same for many of my colleagues here.

You are saying that half of the community think it is “other”. I would argue with that: I would say that many times, audiences and the community are light years ahead of politicians and legislation. There are many people doing fantastic work in Northern Ireland and other places to dispel those myths around the Irish language belonging to one community. If we look at the role that the Presbyterians had in reviving the Irish language, that is something to be celebrated. That is a really important part of my life: I am in a mixed marriage, as they call it.

Q50 John Nicolson: Oh, I know that expression. Am I right that Carson himself was a Gaelic speaker?

Caoimhe Ni Chathail: He was indeed—born in Dublin. There are many myths surrounding the Irish language.

If I can look at why we do it, why it is important for us to have Irish language broadcasting, for us—and I am sure it is the same for yourselves—our audiences are at the heart of everything we do. It is about representation—about them turning on the TV and seeing themselves, or people similar to themselves, and hearing their own stories. For me, growing up in west Belfast, the BBC was not a place that I could see myself. That has changed over the years: 1981 was the first radio programme in the Irish language and then in 1991 there was the first TV programme. Now, the Irish language is heard almost every day on Radio Ulster. At least weekly, or bi-weekly, we have a programme on BBC Two Northern Ireland as well. That visibility is hugely important. Almost 8,000 children attend an Irish medium of education in Northern Ireland alone. For those children to grow up and see and hear their language is so vital. Let us not forget, they also have English: they have the added value of having all the skills in both languages.

Q51 John Nicolson: And we know that the more children speak different languages, the more languages they learn. Helen, what are the similarities and differences with Scots language in terms of community support for it in Northern Ireland? Do you find you make common cause with the Scots language challenges, with the Irish language challenges, or neither?

Helen Mark: I think they feel a bit of both, but let us say that particularly with the Scots, a lot of what you were saying, Billy, chimes with us. The Ulster-Scots language, like Irish, became politicised. Do you know that it was the common parlance for tens of thousands of people for many centuries? The point came when, just as with Scots, it was banished from schools: you were not speaking “proper English”. All those sorts of things were happening. People were told “You’re never going to get yourself a



good job if you speak like that." It was denigrated and devalued. All those sorts of thing were happening with Ulster-Scots.

I think I am a modern-day Ulster Scot, because I am Scots but have been in Ulster for over 40 years. At first, I was ashamed that when I came to Ulster I had no idea what Ulster-Scots was; I had no idea of the common history between our two countries, which was terrible. It was just never talked about. Although I do lots of other broadcasting work, coming into Ulster-Scots broadcasting I feel really proud to be able to find people who are willing to share their story and their language on air at the BBC. We would love it if there were more of it, though it has definitely developed during the two decades that I have been working on it. It is so much better, which we may come back to. However, it was politicised: Ulster-Scots actually became ridiculed in the media. At one point it was said in the press, "Och, sure they're just making it up for the Good Friday agreement, so they'll have a football to kick back at the Irish language"—which was just—

John Nicolson: Sad.

Helen Mark: It is so aggravating, and just disrespectful of the whole culture that is Ulster-Scots. In the early days I would be out in the streets, doing a recording for an Ulster-Scots programme, say. In that day it was for "A Kist o Wurds." Kist is like a chest; wurds is obviously words. Now it's for "Kintra", which means your homeland, your country. But I remember the verbal abuse on the street when we were making Ulster-Scots programmes—"What are you doing that for? It's a waste of time. It's just a Ballymoney accent." It was so derogatory. Thankfully, I don't get that abuse any more. It has become much better recognised because of all the work that is being done. Seamus Heaney, Bellaghy's most famous son—you will all know him for lots of other reasons—

John Nicolson: He was my tutor at university.

Helen Mark: Was he? Och, that's wonderful. Well, when he wrote "A Birl for Burns", because it was said that in every Ulster household there was a Bible and a copy of Burns poetry, Seamus Heaney has this verse. He says:

"From the start, Burns' birl and rhythm,
That tongue the Ulster Scots brought wi' them
And stick to still in County Antrim
Was in my ear.
From east of Bann it westered in
On the Derry air."

Now, if a man of that magnitude can recognise the Ulster-Scots language, well, to hell with the rest of the people that they can't accept it, because it is a truly important part of the story of Ulster as we live it now.

Q52 **John Nicolson:** Thank you. Laura, Cornish is a fascinating language, related, as we know, to Welsh and to Breton, but am I right in saying there are challenges with Cornish that don't exist with these other languages, because Cornish died, didn't it? In the 1860s, the bridge went



HOUSE OF COMMONS

across and that was the end of Cornish. So we don't actually know how Cornish sounded. We can imagine because of the relationships with other languages, but you are trying to do something very different from all the other witnesses today: you are trying to bring a language back from extinction. I don't think there are many examples around the world where that has been successful. Hebrew is obviously one, but with Hebrew, I think the rhythms continued to be repeated. In Manx, it died the death, didn't it? But it was still repeated in the Manx Parliament. You don't know how Cornish sounded; I think I'm right in saying so. The challenge that you've got—if these guys' challenges are great, yours is mountainous.

Laura Giles: Gool Peran Lowen—Happy Saint Piran's day. Thanks for inviting me. Yes, it is true that Cornish was seen as extinct. I think there are many cultural references, like the Ordinalia plays that are very much preserved. What is amazing about Cornish is that there is a very dedicated voluntary community that continues to maintain, preserve and support the language. The memory of the last speaker is very much in the past, but actually the commitment to making Cornish a contemporary language, making it relevant to the communities, their issues, their portrayal authentically on screen, is absolutely at the heart of what Screen Cornwall is trying to do at the moment.

Yes, we have a challenge, in that we have fewer people declaring themselves as primary Cornish speakers on the census. When the director of BBC Nations was saying earlier that it is about what is sufficient to meet the need and the demand from the audience, it is true that we are at a disadvantage in that space. There are lots of people who have picked up Cornish, who are learning it, for whom it has come through family generations, and there is a lot of exploration of Cornish within music. Gwenno, who is a Welsh-Cornish musician, made an album recently that was nominated for the Mercury Prize. Culturally, the language connects with the heritage and with the present to reflect a reality of Cornwall that isn't seen from other media. We do get a lot of people coming to Cornwall and presenting the tourist external vision of Cornwall, and we saw it particularly around the G7 coming to Cornwall. The creative community there came together and made a film called "Behind the Postcard", which was very much about what Cornwall feels should be portrayed on the screen versus the outside world's portrayal. So we are at a disadvantage, but we are very determined to make sure that contemporary Cornwall is portrayed authentically.

Q53 **Chair:** I am interested to know what more the UK Government or the devolved Governments could do to celebrate diversity of languages across the UK, and indeed to help promote them. Caoimhe, can I start with your thoughts on that?

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: Yes. I think John has touched strongly on the colonial past here and why we are in the situation we are in. There is a challenging environment in the UK for minority languages due to the fact that English is the prevalent language and the language that people expect to use. I think it varies according to the legislation in the various



HOUSE OF COMMONS

areas. In the north, we are in a kind of no man's land at the minute because we are awaiting our implementation of the Identity and Language Act. That will be interesting because there will be two commissioners appointed—one for the Irish language and another for the Ulster-Scots and Ulster British identity—and an office of identity and cultural expression.

Although broadcasting is not devolved, I was interested in the conversation you had earlier about the potential for having roles within devolved as well, which could be looked at, as well as in terms of modern language learning, not just minority languages—Irish is seen as both. Languages no longer being compulsory at GCSE has seen movements in trends, as teenagers choose not to study a language at school any more, because they feel it can be more difficult to achieve the grade they want. I think there has been a rapid decline in quite a lot of languages. Look at German, for example: it is very infrequent now that people would do GCSE German. Interestingly, because of Irish-medium education, the Irish language has kind of held its own in that regard, and the levels of GCSE Irish remain around the same.

I think legislation is key, as is investment in broadcasting. Broadcasting is such an important element of language planning. If you're raising your family through Irish, you want to have content that your child can watch; whether it is cartoons or whatever else, you want to see yourself reflected in that media. In terms of increased investment, I do not think any of us would say that we have sufficient investment at the current levels. I think looking at legislation and looking at investment are key.

Chair: Helen, do you have anything to add to that?

Helen Mark: Within the Ulster-Scots community, because of their experience of being ridiculed and so forth—and probably because they are slightly more reserved as a community, with that whole Presbyterianism thing—they were not great about coming forward and raising their head above the parapet to shout out loud about their Ulster-Scotsness, their language, their culture and their heritage. Although, having said that, look at our pipe bands; we have some of the best in the world. But they would stay behind the door a wee bit and not come forward.

Over the years, anybody who has been making programming has had to encourage people to come forward to be part of Ulster-Scots programming, because there was a reticence. When we started the Ulster-Scots programming, there was a very strong emphasis on looking back to former communities—almost in a way to justify our existence, which I suppose had to be done. There was a lot of work trying to get people back to using the language. We sit, like Scots, on the English language; it's a sister language. We were trying to get them to use those words. They would not very often do so out loud, because they thought they would be ridiculed for it. Ironically, though, I would say a huge amount of the population use Ulster-Scots words, but they do not identify as Ulster-Scots. They might hoak something out of the cupboard, redd it out, or say, "Och, he's a wild slabber." We all use—



Caoimhe Ní Chathail: Clean your oxters.

Helen Mark: Yes, under your oxters! I used that on Radio 4 once and people said, "Why, oh why can't people speak English on Radio 4?" We work really hard at getting people to contribute through magazine programmes and programming that shines a light on Ulster-Scots culture and community—going behind the scenes of a pipe band and looking at what it takes being part of it; there is a real sense of family, with the commitment and the skills. We are trying to shine a light on people who maybe did not know they were Ulster-Scots, but have incredible Ulster-Scots heritage.

There has been a bit of a revival—a reawakening—of Ulster-Scots, and broadcasting has been at the heart of that. If we are going to develop more of that and get more of the language out there and enjoyed and spoken, a lot of that has to come through broadcasting. Of course, it also has to be supported by really good Ulster-Scots education in school—not like with Irish, where you can teach the whole medium of education, but with really good Ulster-Scots education projects in schools. There are many brilliant grassroots organisations, like the Ulster-Scots Community Network and so forth, but there needs to be so much more. I think we will always be able to celebrate our heritage and culture, but what will be lost most of all is the language. That is the greatest threat for us.

Q54 **Chair:** Down in Cornwall, is there anything more the Government could be doing to help you celebrate the diversity of the Cornish language?

Laura Giles: We are a bit of an outlier, in the sense that we are seen as a part of England, so there is not a devolved recognition, although we are obviously a minority nation and recently had a monitoring visit from the Council of Europe. It is great to see Cornish in the Media Bill. We hope that will go through, and it will open up those conversations with the BBC and other public service broadcasters around future funding, and talent and skills development. The Cornish Language Office at Cornwall Council has been a mighty and consistent force in trying to preserve and grow Cornish. Cornwall Council have adopted a lot of Cornish within their structures and systems. To be transformational, we need an increasing scale of funding and support for Cornish content made by Cornish companies, reflecting the language, culture and heritage, to give us an equal footing with other minority languages.

Q55 **Chair:** Billy, broadcasting is of course a reserved matter, but how might the Scottish Languages Bill, which is currently in the Scottish Parliament, affect the use of Scots broadcasting in Scotland?

Billy Kay: Well, unless it is backed up with finance, possibly very little. No new money comes into Scottish broadcasting unless it comes from Westminster, because it is not a devolved matter. The Scottish Government can only do so much, but it is doing a good job in promoting. For example, it produces a budget for books being published in Scots, and it is putting money into Scots education—but broadcasting is a very peculiar thing.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Historically, because of the accident of English being the world power language through the British empire in the 19th century and then the American empire in the 20th century, it is as if we have lost the ability to be aware of other languages in Britain. I think that has got worse even in the last 40 years. I had a series on working-class history called "Odyssey" broadcast on Radio 4 in the early 1980s, which used Scots. You do not hear any voices like that nowadays on Radio 4. It is very Anglocentric and home counties-oriented. It is as if we have lost the ability to recognise linguistic diversity. Britain has suffered because of that too.

Scots reached such a low ebb in status. By giving more programmes in Scots, we could raise awareness and the status of the language, because the dialects are there—they're still spoken. What has been eroded is individual words, but the structure of the dialects is there, and the ability to revive the language is there. As an example of how low the status went, back in the 1990s, when the Scottish Government did not even have the confidence to call themselves the Scottish Government—they called themselves the Scottish Executive—I asked the Minister of Culture in the then Labour Government if he had received a bilingual letter in Scots and English inviting him to the cross-party group on Scots in the Scottish Parliament. His answer was, "Oh, that thing written in the funny writing? I threw it in the bin." Until 30 years ago, that was the level of the attitude towards Scots in certain sections of the devolved Parliament in Scotland. This is what we have been working against. People say, "Isn't it tragic that minority languages are being eroded all the time?" What is amazing is that they have survived against that kind of hostile attitude.

Q56 Dr Huq: I want to ask some questions to all of you about audiences, following on from John Nicolson's point about news not normally being in these indigenous languages. What genre or types of programmes are these audiences after? We have heard about kids' programmes, even, and the fact that there seem to be a lot of cultural events.

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: Currently, BBC Gaeilge are almost a microcosm of the larger BBC NI content. We have programmes around sport. We have a current affairs radio programme. It is not delivering the news—it is not headlines—but it is discussing the news and what makes the news. We have programmes around the arts, drama, educational, youth, music, documentaries and docudramas, whether it is on TV platforms or on radio. Actually, we are producing a huge variety of programmes at the minute with a small team. But our audiences expect that; they expect high-quality broadcasts in their own language. They are licence fee payers as much as anyone else, so they want that. They want to have a variety, and they are hungry for new things.

If we were able to grow that, reporting Government business and having a news service would be amazing. We do not currently have the capacity to do that, but it absolutely would be wanted. People would really love to see more documentaries, high-quality drama and things like that. I was really keen to hear about Celtic Connections and the music programmes that have come out of that in Scotland, because there is a massive capacity to do that with Ulster-Scots and Irish in Northern Ireland, because we have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that really strong music tradition as well. Trying to aim at younger audiences is key. It is about trying to look at the digital strategy and how we can entice new audiences in.

Q57 Dr Huq: Do you know whether you are reaching those younger audiences?

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: We have a radio programme once a week that is aimed at people aged 18 to 35. Unfortunately, I am not in that bracket any more.

John Nicolson: No!

Dr Huq: You're too young—that's why.

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: You're so kind.

It has had a really good response, and there has been a lot of social media interaction with it. Social media is key in having the capacity, which, at the minute, is challenging. We have a digital producer trying to deal with a lot of things, like a digital series focusing on sexual health, for example, and education for teenagers. It is something that we are trying to develop, but you will always have competing interests. With a limited budget and resources, you are always trying to manage that out.

Q58 Dr Huq: Is it the same for you?

Billy Kay: There is no regular programming in Scots in the Scottish media. There is a very good service online called Scots Radio, done by Frieda Morrison, which you can tune into online. But the BBC, or Scottish television and BBC Radio Scotland do not produce regular programming in Scots. There are occasional short films produced by BBC Scotland.

One of the great successes of MG Alba, amazingly, is the traditional music awards show every year—the Trads. They are presented in both Gaelic and Scots, and to me that could be a way forward. They have been a brilliant success story with a huge audience. Scots song is obviously a great source of joy in the Scots language, and more could be done or based on Scots song and traditional music. I know for a fact that even the soap opera on the BBC, "River City", was watered down of its Scots content in the early days. I knew somebody who wrote for it, and they were constantly asked to remove words and water down the Scots content. That is a very sad thing. When the new BBC television channel was opened, if ever there was an opportunity to produce regular programmes in Scots, that was it. I wrote to them at the time and said that that is what they should do, and I was ignored. That should be a channel producing regular programmes in Scots.

Q59 Dr Huq: Are those music awards reaching younger people, or is it old traditional folk?

Billy Kay: Traditional music is thriving. Lots of young, sexy bands are playing great traditional music; the kids love it, and they love to dance to it. One of the glittering occasions of the year is the Trads awards. The last



HOUSE OF COMMONS

one was in Dundee, and it is a great occasion. People dress up. There's an example of a modern audience, beautifully dressed and beautifully turned out, listening to a contemporary Scots and Gaelic programme and just celebrating their culture. It is a wonderful thing.

Helen Mark: Currently across BBC NI television, Radio Ulster and Radio Foyle, which is predominantly up in the north-west, and also on BBC Sounds, we have a regular half-hour programme called "Kintra", 52 weeks of the year.

Q60 **Dr Huq:** Is that online only then?

Helen Mark: No, that is on the BBC, Radio Ulster, Radio Foyle and then for a few weeks afterwards on BBC Sounds, which is very important because you obviously very much extend your reach to an audience. It is a magazine; it has changed over the years—not so much looking back, as I was saying, but very much trying to reflect Ulster-Scots communities while also going beyond those communities to share stories. So on this Sunday's programme, I was at a women's football match with this great women's team who have gone up the divisions. They were using words without being hugely conscious of it: "Come on!" They were guldering, "Get a move on!" from the sidelines and all that sort of stuff. It has music and stories about people and place. It is a lovely listen.

Q61 **Dr Huq:** How often is that?

Helen Mark: That is every Sunday at 6 o'clock. I have to say a big game changer for us is that we have a dedicated senior executive within the BBC, Fiona Keane, who has really moved things forward. It is the same for Irish language. We have an Ulster-Scots broadcast fund and, as of January of this year, they give production companies funding support to make programmes. They had 280 hours of television, radio and digital work across documentary, factual, history, entertainment, education for schools and animation, like the lovely Billy Connolly doing Seamus Heaney's translation of the Five Fables. We still have these links going back and forth, Billy. This past decade we have come on so much and it just shows how much more we can do. We are a lot stronger than we used to be, but we could just grow and grow, couldn't we?

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: Looking at the Ulster-Scots broadcast fund and the Irish language broadcast fund, it is not just the output or the 25 hours of original, new content. That is not what is key; but the training schemes and the apprenticeship schemes that they offer has meant that the workforce talent has been totally expanded. Fifteen years ago, it was difficult to get an editor who spoke Irish, or a camera operator or crew. It was very difficult to get that, but because of the training schemes that have been run through the Irish language broadcast scheme—I am assuming it is similar for Ulster-Scots—we now have the people who have those linguistic skills and have the hard skills they need to create high-quality productions. That has been really key.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

One of the challenges is around children's broadcasting; again, as I said, it is about just not having the capacity to do it. A lot of the programmes have been re-versioned. So maybe they originally—

Q62 **Dr Huq:** Dubbed?

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: They were dubbed over, yes; they originated in French or whatever, and they have their own challenges because all languages are different and the syntax is different. The way it is put together is different, so that can be quite difficult. If there were more investment, having the ability to create original content that is specifically linguistically targeted towards those children would be phenomenal. That would be the dream.

Helen Mark: In the training element, I do not mean to be cruel but a decade ago television production companies would not have touched Ulster-Scots with a bargepole because there was a slight cringe factor. It was too political, all that sort of stuff. In that decade, it is wonderful to see the changes that have taken place. The Ulster-Scots broadcast fund has a trainee television production scheme, which lasts 18 months. They go straight into a television production company. That company is making programmes about Ulster-Scots and all sorts of various forms and those young people are getting hands-on experience. Because they are drawn from Ulster-Scots communities, they are also saying to that production company, "Well, this is what we do. This is what we think. This is what we think our story should be, and this is how we think it should be told." Before that, there was absolutely none of that. It just did not really happen. We have seen a lot of steps in the right direction and a lot more could be achieved.

Q63 **Dr Huq:** Laura, you mentioned Gwenno Saunders. Are you reaching a young audience, and what kind of programmes do you make?

Laura Giles: Rhodri Talfan Davies mentioned the five minutes of news that happen every Sunday. That is translated by volunteers, because no one within BBC Radio Cornwall can do that. There are voluntary radio and magazine programmes produced and distributed via YouTube—that is not funded in any way by us because of limited resources.

Screen Cornwall is a pretty young screen agency. We were only formed in 2019, so we are pretty early days. We focus very much on drama, picking up the tradition of drama-short funding that came through previous iterations of the Cornish Language Office. Looking at drama helps us to transport people into an entirely Cornish world. We do not fund period dramas; we do not necessarily look backwards at myths, legends and heritage—we use Cornish to create a contemporary world that the viewer can lose themselves in, and a great story. Yes, they might be reading the subtitles in English, but for all intents and purposes, that world exists entirely in Cornish.

We have taken that approach, but we are now looking at expanding further into some documentary content and some immersive content. We are experimenting with different programme calls and looking at the



ecosystem we have—the supply chain and the skills and training needed to build a Cornish public service media. We got a small amount of money through the recent devolution deal, and our local council have funded Screen Cornwall through some money from the shared prosperity fund because it recognises the importance of investing in this early stage of a Cornish public service media where we can test and learn.

What is important for us is that we are not necessarily seeking a channel. We are looking at platform-agnostic, digital-first, 21st-century, non-linear commissioning. We are taking the stories to audiences rather than expecting audiences to come to us. Going back to your original question about audiences, not only are there the speakers and learners; there are also the residents of the wider community, the Cornish diaspora globally, and the millions of people who hold Cornwall in great affection—the Kernowphiles out there. The study “A Case for Cornish Public Service Media” has estimated the addressable audience to be 25.5 million people.

We feel that the best route is to commission emerging talent, looking at contemporary issues through drama or documentary, and then taking that content to audiences where they are. We have a month-long programme at the moment around St Piran’s day on authentic Cornish content that is selling out in cinemas in traditional screens. It is also going to be put online to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the recognition of Cornish in 2014. That will be coming out in April as a digital product through a platform that exists in Cornwall, where there is already an audience.

Q64 Dr Huq: Is Gwenno one of a kind, or is there a Cornish rap scene?

Laura Giles: There are loads of people making music in Cornish. Gwenno is bilingual—there is a great clash and celebration of different upbringings, where people get their cultural references and how that feeds into their creative work.

We are also working quite closely with Brittany. We are about to launch a co-commission for a drama short with the Breton broadcasters. We are exploring our Celtic roots and our Celtic connections very actively, recognising that Cornwall is a relatively small nation with a relatively small speaking population at the minute. Those connections with the wider Celtic media and the connections with the Celtic Media Festival are completely invaluable to us.

Q65 Dr Huq: In France, they set quotas for music played on the radio—15% has to be in French. That helped French hip-hop turn into the second market share in the world after the US. Would something like that—putting in actual state quotas—work across any of your languages?

Laura Giles: For us, music is just one element of what the council are trying to develop as a Cornish curriculum. Going back to what people have said about starting at the early years with children and education, all parts of our minority experience need to be reflected. So, that is music and the references that education is using for history—using Richard Trevithick instead of another English inventor is a great way of bringing the culture and heritage to light. Language also goes hand in hand with that, in terms



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of the way that you can start to introduce language and make it feel relevant to people for where they live.

- Q66 **Dr Huq:** We asked whether we know that there is a youth audience. Do you know if there are sort of minority-minority? I speak Bengali—that's not going to serve any of the purposes of this inquiry, but do we know whether BAME communities are getting interested in this kind of dimension as well? Is there a possibility to be a minority-minority in all of this?

Billy Kay: I live across the River Tay from the city of Dundee, which has a very thriving poetry tradition in the Dundee dialect, including people who rap or sing punk music in the Dundee dialect. If there was a television service in Scots, you would see more of that on television, rather than just seeing young, brilliant Gaels performing in Gaelic. But, because there isn't that regular Scots content, people like that tend to remain underground in their own city, rather than being broadcast to the nation.

Interestingly, Cornish, of course, is a Brythonic Celtic language. People discuss, "What's the oldest Scottish language? Is it Gaelic or is it Scots?" They both come into Scotland roughly about the same time, but the ancient language that was there in Scotland when both came in was actually Welsh, and some of the greatest early Welsh epics are set in Scotland.

It strikes me that I'm the only person who hasn't used my native language so far here—everyone's done a little bit—so here are three great lines from Hugh MacDiarmid, the father of the Scottish renaissance, to give you a feel for the flavour of the language.

The first is very relevant to what we are talking about, language and identity:

"To be yersel's—and to mak' that worth bein'.
Nae harder job to mortals has been gi'en."

Then, MacDiarmid on his responsibility to Scottish culture:

"A Scottish poet maun assume
The burden o' his people's doom,
And dee to brak' their livin' tomb."

And, on looking forward with confidence to the future:

"For we ha'e faith in Scotland's hidden poo'ers,
The present's theirs, but a' the past and future's oors."

John Nicolson: *Hansard* has just had a heart attack!

- Q67 **Dr Huq:** Do we know whether there are minority consumers of these minority things?

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: There are minorities within minorities, so, with new communities coming to Northern Ireland, we are seeing people



bringing their own cultural experiences into the Irish language in particular. That is small, however, and it is something that we would love to try and nurture. With the Irish language-medium schools, I think we are seeing more of it, because there are children coming out—they're speaking their home language, whatever that may be, they're speaking English, and then they're speaking Irish as well, because of their opportunities.

It is also certainly through music. Laura, you mentioned the importance of music being a way—a key—to entice people into language learning. I am not sure that I would set firm quotas on it, because I think that what is nice about one of the programmes that I present, which is a traditional Irish music programme, is that listeners will often say to me, "Oh, I just discovered this musician, because I was listening and I heard that gorgeous song that you played from Scotland." And that will be an English speaker who is listening, who then accesses a whole other artist's content because they are listening to a programme that has a mixture of language on it. I'm not sure if you're getting that otherwise.

Helen Mark: The programme I am working on is more verbal, but there is always music integrated within it. Obviously, there are things like the pipes and the Lambeg drum, which is this massive, great big drum that rattles down the street at various times of the year, so we have lots of music. We always finish our programme with a piece of music. Funnily enough, it was Gary the shinty player—he is a great shinty player and he did a piece of music about shinty playing, and we had that at the end of Sunday's programme past.

And yes, we have a growing diversity within Northern Ireland, which is wonderful. One of our programmes just a few weeks ago was an Ulster-Scots/Chinese fusion event. People may go, "What?" But actually, there are historical links that go way back to the 1700s. The first Governor of Hong Kong—Pottinger—was from east Belfast, and there are lots of other things. There was this fusion event, and they had their lion drum and pipes, and we had the flute and the Lambeg drum. Completely without being orchestrated, there was a Chinese/Ulster-Scots drum off. It was absolutely unique to BBC radio, but it was the most wonderful happy event. Then we had Ulster-Scots being translated into Chinese. They even used the phrase, "What's the craic?" That was having to be translated into Chinese. It was terrific that we could fuse with another community like that. I think a lot more of that could be done. We share a lot; when you are a small ethnic community you share a lot of experiences. It is good—it is great.

Laura Giles: The thing that unites all our Celtic nations is our outward-looking perspective. We have all got ports; we have all got shipping and marine traditions. I think the cultural richness that comes from people coming and going through the centuries really built what is possible today in terms of contemporary reflection. There are other parts of England that I am sure do not have that same outward-looking focus.

Q68 **Dr Huq:** Conversely, when I was little the BBC used to have Asian language programming—it was in Hindi. I am googling "Nai Zindagi Naya



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jeevan", and it says it was on from 1968 to 1982. I think they realised, "Everyone can speak English nowadays," so those programmes went out of existence. It is interesting to see the opposite movement here, keeping these languages alive, and there isn't David Blunkett saying everyone must learn English and all that.

My last question is about how you strike the balance with these programmes between someone who is still learning and the fluent speaker? Could you use your services to educate in a Duolingo kind of a way?

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: It is a challenge, because there are very different target audiences. It is much more accessible on television because you have visual cues and accessibility features such as subtitling. We find that short digital series are really effective in that sense. They are easily consumable; they are short chunks and are not overwhelming. Sometimes when you sit down to watch an hour-long documentary it can feel a bit overwhelming as a language learner. So that is something that can be effective.

As I have said, because of limited resources you will always have competing priorities. Another tactic we tried to use was, because we have radio content throughout the week, we developed a podcast that is sort of a simplified version of the highlights of the week, broken down in an easier, digested form.

You are right that language learning since the pandemic has largely been online, and on Duolingo. That is not just within the UK. If you look worldwide, the Irish language has become phenomenally successful in the United States and places like that. I think we mentioned earlier "An Cailín Ciúin", the Oscar-nominated movie, which was an Irish-language production. I think that speaks to the added asset that any of those productions have when they have a minority language with them. Because there are accessibility features, they can be consumed by a larger audience. Language learners can absolutely access those services because they have subtitles, and they are able to tap into what the essence of the programme is about.

Billy Kay: In Scots, there is not such a problem because it is a sister language. It is usually a matter of people tuning in, and then once they are used to hearing it, they are able to understand most of it from the context that is broadcast. Scots has been eroded but it has not been replaced. With people of sister languages—similar to Catalans understanding Spanish, or Dutch understanding German—most people whose native language is English can, with a bit of effort, tune into Scots and understand it, and vice versa. There is not the same problem with Scots.

Again, I think our linguistic ability has been eroded in the 20th century. For example, Abraham Lincoln was a great fan of Robert Burns and could quote Burns in Scots—screeds of it—because a friend of his was a Scots speaker from Ayrshire who taught him the works of Burns. That probably



HOUSE OF COMMONS

wouldn't happen today, because people would not have the linguistic confidence to do that. I think there has been an erosion of confidence in linguistic ability, and Britain and France, interestingly, are unique in that. If you spoke, say, Cornish, Welsh, Irish, Scots and Gaelic in Britain, you would be regarded as an eccentric. You wouldn't be regarded as somebody who was educated and erudite; you'd be regarded as a total eccentric, whereas somebody who is a monoglot RP English speaker is regarded as mainstream and sophisticated and at the centre of things. A very different world picture has happened in the United Kingdom because of the accident of America replacing Britain as the world power and English being so dominant in our history.

Q69 **Dr Huq:** Esperanto never took off, did it? Remember that?

Billy Kay: I do; I was a member of the Esperanto Society, Edinburgh University.

Chair: Conversely, regional accents have become much more common on all our broadcasting channels. We are much more accepting and welcoming of diversity of regional accent. Certainly, back in the early '70s, when my dad, who's from Birmingham, was broadcasting, he spoke a very southern English, and I have noticed that even his accent over the years has changed.

Q70 **John Nicolson:** But not in news. You will never hear somebody with a strong Scouse accent reading the news. They would never be chosen for that. Certain accents are respectable—Welsh, with Huw Edwards. Scottish was seen as trustworthy; I always used a Scottish accent—my own accent—when I read the news. I think what you were describing, Billy, is the cultural cringe, as it is called, where people are embarrassed about their own culture—they have been taught to be embarrassed about their own culture.

I just wanted to ask you all a question. We are writing a report, so I think what we'd like are just some one-line recommendations from you. I am sure we would like to see—I know you would—the numbers increasing in all your languages, so that Cornwall is bilingual, and Scotland and Ireland are trilingual, and confidently so. It would be good for education and learning other languages. What do you think is the key? What would you like us to put in this report that would lead to the revival that you guys want to see? Can I start with you, Laura?

Laura Giles: From the Cornish perspective, it will be equity of support from Government to build up both the education and the media side of our community—so, something very simple from where we are: improvement.

Q71 **John Nicolson:** Or status?

Laura Giles: Yes.

Q72 **John Nicolson:** Maybe a Parliament might help. Billy?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Billy Kay: Just recognition of the multilingual diversity that exists in the United Kingdom and that these languages, like English, need status and support, and cherishing and love.

Helen Mark: Definitely the long-awaited and promised movements within Government to have our language—and this goes the same as for Irish—properly represented and respected, and to have the institutions that they have promised set up. We are sick of waiting; we want them now, because that will make a huge difference.

Q73 **John Nicolson:** The institutions being?

Helen Mark: The office of culture and identity and our commissioners within that. We need that. That will move things forward a lot and ensure education, and that transfers into broadcasting. It's a two-way street.

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: I would absolutely echo that, Helen. For me, it looks like further investment. It also looks like increased visibility. In terms of marketing, the fact that these programmes exist does not always mean that they get the marketing and publicity they deserve. I would like to see increased awareness of that support and a celebration of the fact that we are making high-quality, successful, award-winning programmes within these minority languages.

Chair: Last but not least, Clive.

Q74 **Clive Efford:** Can I ask how broadcasting has changed, particularly with digital media? Does the future of minority languages lie in digital media, in the sense that people can choose to go there when it suits them, or do you need linear TV to drive forward numbers, so that people are almost forced to experience a language? Which is it, or is it a bit of both? I will start with Laura.

Laura Giles: I don't think Cornish needs a linear channel. I think that the proportion of resource that would need to, as you say, force people into Cornish is not the right strategy for our nation.

Identity is so complex these days, particularly among that younger generation. They are defining themselves and where they want to find content, and they will seek it out, or they will go to platforms that they know will serve content that they like, appreciate and will share.

So, my view is that the digital aspect takes content out to people and finds those beautiful niches where Cornish comes together with another form of identity. We commissioned one LGBTQ short film that has done incredibly well, selling internationally on to subscription video on demand or SVOD platforms, because the story connects with an audience, due to the multiple themes of identity. It just happens to be in Cornish, but it's a great story.

For me, it's taking that approach of looking for the connections between story and audience and identity, and then putting the content where those—



- Q75 Clive Efford:** That was going to be my next question to you, actually: how do you decide on that content? How do you decide what will attract people to what you produce?

Laura Giles: We run all our commissioning through open calls, because of where we are in our journey towards being a public service media. We don't have a big commissioning team or a lot of resource to nurture relationships with talent in that way, so we run open calls and we evaluate scripts in English; we don't expect people to be fluent Cornish speakers in order to apply for us. Then a lot of support is given to those people who want to tell authentic stories; from their experiences, they can tell them in a meaningful way. They have the film-making skills around the storytelling skills to pull it off.

We then support them with the Cornish language element. The scripts are translated by the Cornish Language Office; voice notes are recorded about pronunciation for the actors and the director to use; and we and the Cornish Language Office are involved at every stage of the production. So, we probably do it slightly a different way round to other parts of the UK, but that actually builds capacity and talent. There are a lot of people in the region interested in working in Kernewek as well as in English.

- Q76 Clive Efford:** What has been your experience, because you are very much in the embryonic stage from where we are with Welsh, Gaelic and Scots? They have a longer history, let us say, than Cornish. What has been the reaction of people in Cornwall as you have gained more traction and more reach? Are they talking about respecting their identity more? What sort of response do you get to what you have produced?

Laura Giles: We are still at quite an early stage relatively when it comes to engaging the public. Our shared prosperity fund project is very much about building audience, and the sold-out screenings that we have this month, for example, are an early-stage indication of how much appetite there is.

However, I think there is loads more that we can do and getting beyond the Cornish-resident population to the global diaspora is really important, because we know from previous films that have been made by Cornish film-makers that there is a really big audience in that wider world.

- Q77 Clive Efford:** Okay. Billy, is digital the future for Scots?

Billy Kay: I think it will be, but for my generation I think there still is a status that comes from seeing your language produced on the major television services. You mentioned the news in Scots. A natural would be the weather in Scots, because you can hardly describe the Scottish weather without words like "dreich", "droukit" and so on.

It would be good just to see that for the status of older speakers, who still are the ones who have the treasure trove of the language. I myself was in the last of the pre-television generations born in the early 1950s. Our treasure trove of Scots vocabulary is huge, and we still could provide rich programming in Scots, but for the younger generation, digital is definitely



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the way to go. There is a thriving Scots language culture, as I say, through music, poetry, plays and so on that is there to be tapped into, but we need recognition and to be given a platform on the major channels of the United Kingdom.

Q78 Clive Efford: Caoimhe and Helen, do you have anything to add?

Helen Mark: I would say that our radio is still set quietly at 6 pm on a Sunday evening for Ulster-Scots broadcasting, and that has long been the case. The fact that it has a few weeks on BBC Sounds is great because you reach a wider audience. We are definitely seeing that, as television programmes have been made, they are creating beautiful programmes that people across the whole of Ulster will enjoy. You do not have to be an Ulster Scot to enjoy our programme or series we are seeing like “The Band”, which is about the life of the pipe bands; “Family Footsteps”; and particularly the “Hamely Kitchen” presented by Paula McIntyre, who has become something of an Ulster-Scots icon at the minute—she is wonderful. That has got on to mainstream BBC Northern Ireland television; you would not have had that. Any wonderful documentaries that were made were always at 10.30 pm when folk were going to bed. It is wonderful to see a little bit coming on to mainstream. Within the Ulster-Scots broadcast fund, they are producing a lot of material devoted to language, storytelling and so forth that has a digital presence. Sometimes I do not quite understand how different digital is. Is it that you bring it on to your social media? Is that what you mean by digital?

Q79 Clive Efford: My original question was about the difference between digital and linear TV. Is it necessary to have linear TV to drive forward the numbers, or is it about going digital so people can choose to listen or view whenever suits them?

Helen Mark: You need both because one of them works for t’other.

Caoimhe Ní Chathail: I agree that it needs to be both. When you look at people’s habits and how they consume media, it is usually within a domestic setting. It is usually with their family, and they are usually sitting on their sofa. You only need to watch “Gogglebox” to see how we all consume TV. I think having the status of having your slot and saying, “Right, this is the Irish language slot. We know what we’re going to expect” is hugely important. Also, over the last few years, we have managed to put in some Irish-language continuity announcements before the programmes come on, which have been really welcomed by the community because they now feel that, “Oh, here comes my programme, and it is not being announced in English anymore.” Obviously, we are working within a digital-first strategy, which has meant that many of our new series appear as a digital drop on iPlayer. While they are broadcast linear—say, it is a four-part series—you can also now binge them to your heart’s content on iPlayer, which has been really good for increasing reach and keeping people clued in, particularly the younger audiences. Also, it has allowed that content to be embedded alongside mainstream content within the iPlayer. We do not have a drop-down Irish language section, if you like, where all the programmes live. If you search for dramas, they

are alongside the English-medium dramas as well. That feature has been really important in terms of increasing awareness and giving it that status.

Also, on the digital reels, if you are publicising or pushing a particular programme on the local reel, which is what is happening in your area—Northern Ireland in this case—seeing an Irish-language programme feature alongside English-language programmes has been a huge lift in promoting the programmes we are making. I think that you need both. I don't think that one can exist without the other, to be honest.

Q80 Clive Efford: Do you want to tell us a bit about FylmK and Cornish filmmaking? Is there anything you want to add, because you have mentioned it already?

Laura Giles: Yes. The short-form drama we talked about was running from 2003. There was then a pause, and it was revitalised in 2018. What is interesting for us, and hearing colleagues talk today about the importance of prominence and support from BBC iPlayer, is that we have always had the ambition that the quality of our content produced locally with local funding should work on those national platforms. We made a good start by getting four shorts on the iPlayer. It took probably two years to persuade the BBC to list those, and we have not yet had any success with getting them to list any more. I hope that was not just a one-off tick-box exercise to keep Cornish people happy, but the short-form content, in terms of audience behaviour and the way people consume media, is a great place to start for an earlier-stage public service media like ours, because it gives people a chance to dip in and get lost in the world of a story and then go and find more.

Q81 Clive Efford: My last question was going to be about ambition. You mentioned that the ambition was to get it on the BBC iPlayer platform. You succeeded in doing that and you want more. Are there any other ambitions that you have for FylmK?

Laura Giles: FylmK is just part of the wider ambition we have for a Cornish public service media. We would like to see programming across all genres. We would love to see a magazine show, news and sport. Weather, as these guys described, works well in people's own communities. For us, we are at a very early stage, but the ambition is to be treated equitably to reflect our communities and be seen within the large presence that is in England as something separate and distinct.

Clive Efford: And you are not going to go away.

Laura Giles: Probably not.

Chair: Thank you, Clive. I thank you all very much for your evidence today. It has been absolutely fascinating—a whistle-stop tour of the diversity of the British Isles. It was great to hear from you all. Thank you all so much, indeed. If you have anything you are desperate to say that we did not get to, please feel free to drop us a line afterwards, and we will add it to our inquiry. In the meantime, thank you all for coming along and joining us.