

Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland, HC 574](#)

Tuesday 20 July 2021

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Members present: Pete Wishart (Chair); Mhairi Black; Andrew Bowie; Deidre Brock; Wendy Chamberlain; Alberto Costa; John Lamont; Douglas Ross.

Questions 1-72

Witnesses

I: Steve Carson, Director, BBC Scotland, Gary Smith, Head of News and Current Affairs, BBC Scotland, and Louise Thornton, Head of Multiplatform Commissioning, BBC Scotland.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Steve Carson, Gary Smith and Louise Thornton.

- Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the Scottish Affairs Committee for this one-off session with BBC Scotland, in which we will explore some of the pressing issues which are engaging us just now. Before we get started with the questions, I will let our colleagues introduce themselves. Mr Carson, please tell us anything by way of a short introductory statement, and please introduce your colleagues while you're there.

Steve Carson: Good morning Chair and members of the Committee. BBC Scotland last appeared at the Scottish Affairs Committee in December 2018, a few months before the launch of our BBC Scotland channel. Since then, I am delighted to say that that service has become the most-watched digital channel in Scotland, with a higher reach and higher share than some long-established household names.

Over the past year and a half, the landscape has been dominated by covid and, like all other industries in Scotland, public broadcasting has adapted and changed its speed to meet the needs of our audiences during this time.

Since we last met, I have had the privilege of being appointed the director of BBC Scotland. I am joined today, virtually, by Louise Thornton, BBC Scotland's head of multi-platform commissioning, and Gary Smith, BBC Scotland's head of news and current affairs. We are looking forward to discussing public broadcasting in Scotland with the Committee this morning.

- Q2 **Chair:** Thank you ever so much for that. It is really good to see you all again. I know that you and Mr Smith are veterans of this Committee; welcome, Ms Thornton, to the Committee for the first time. Just for the record, and from the whole Committee, we want to recognise the effort that you have put into making sure that Scotland has continued to be informed during the covid crisis. I know that it has been very challenging for the BBC, broadcasting and all of our colleagues in journalism. We want to make sure that that is recognised and communicated to you from the whole Committee.

A lot has changed since the last time you appeared. You mentioned the digital BBC Scotland channel, which we will go into, but I want to start with some of the findings of our colleagues on the DCMS Committee. Their inquiry into public service broadcasting found that it is facing continuing "budgetary constraints". They go on to mention issues such as the returns from the licence fee and how that is placing increased pressure on BBC services. Ofcom has also found that there has been a decline in commercial revenues from BBC Studios, meaning that the BBC has to make cash savings. We know, as a matter of record, that those



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cash savings will be made, but can you tell us a little about how you see those “budgetary constraints” affecting the BBC’s commitments to Scotland? Where will they hit, how will they hit, and what type of service can we expect as we go forwards?

Steve Carson: As with the rest of the BBC—and, given it is public money, quite rightly—we have all had to meet efficiencies and savings targets over recent years. The overall context is that the real value of income to the BBC has reduced by, I think, 30% since 2010. Quite rightly, we have all had to focus on being as efficient as we can in delivering services.

Last year, commercial revenue was, of course, impacted by covid—by the inability to make certain productions, sell them on and generate other forms of commercial revenue. You will see in the annual report and accounts that there are also significant dips in spend. Over the last year, we have contributed to the overall BBC savings targets. However, going into this financial year, we have rebalanced the budget and we are proceeding, as the rest of the BBC is, with reinvestment in a range of services across Scotland.

We have made efficiency savings, and we have met savings targets. However, in 2017 the BBC announced significant levels of extra investment in Scotland, which began to flow through from 2018-19—impacted last year by covid and savings targets. Going through to the end of this year, we will see production activity pick up and spend and generation of content going up significantly.

Over the last year, despite the challenges, we did manage to make more programming, some of which was specifically covid-related. We put religious programmes on: “Reflections at the Quay” and “The Service”. Louise and her team had key responsibilities for “Bitesize Scotland” going on air as schools closed and for making sure that, through our news outlets, led by Gary, we had a huge amount of up-to-date, accurate, trusted information on covid.

Q3 **Chair:** We know that the BBC is cutting 900 jobs in news and in the nations and regions. What sort of impact will that have on BBC Scotland services, and how will those cuts affect the services that you hope to provide?

Steve Carson: Again, through the last financial year, that has been managed. We did a call for voluntary redundancies, and more than 80 colleagues availed of that to move on and pursue other opportunities. We have had nine post closures, which unfortunately involve compulsory redundancies: there were six compulsory redundancies, two other people were able to be reassigned and one is still in process. That has been over the course of the last year. People with long service in public service broadcasting have left the business, and we have had to manage that.

Equally, that creates opportunities for other people to come through. As part of launching the channel and, moreover, investing in journalism and broadcasting, we have been able to bring new people into BBC Scotland: some at the very start of their careers and some established people. You



will see that now move through to the rest of the schedule. Gary might want to say a word on that, if that's okay.

- Q4 **Chair:** Just before you do, Gary, obviously I have seen quite a lot of change in BBC news services, with a number of people moving on who members of the Committee will be very familiar with. Could you just tell us a little about what is happening with news services? I take it, from what Mr Carson says, that people are being relocated, but is the service being lost? Is the service being diminished?

Gary Smith: I would not say it has been diminished. As Steve says, there was a voluntary redundancy window and a number of people from my news operation volunteered. We ended up with about 25 people leaving the news department. Some were well-known names, presenters and correspondents, who have done fine service over many years, such as Isabel Fraser from radio and the correspondent Ken MacDonald. A number left, and we have found ways—partly because we had the reinvestment in 2017 and 2018, which expanded our news operation—to cover for the people who left by giving new opportunities to others. It is very sad to see a load of talented people go, but they had decided themselves that they wanted to, and it has given opportunities for others to develop their careers. For example, we hired Martin Geissler as a presenter of “The Nine” when it launched in 2019. He now presents on radio’s “Good Morning Scotland” one day a week and our new “The Sunday Show”—the replacement for “Politics Scotland” and GMS. We have done that with others too to expand opportunities.

As Steve says, even during that period when we lost people, we increased our output over the past year, which has been quite a strain—I have to say—on staff, given the conditions many have been working under. Over the past 16 months, we have put additional programmes on BBC One in the evening to cover the coronavirus crisis, which proved popular with audiences. Obviously, we broadcast a fair number of Scottish Government briefings over the past 18 months as well. Our service has not been affected by cutting back, but it has been challenging to carry on everything we do with a bit more on top.

- Q5 **Chair:** One thing I found curious that Tim Davie said when he appeared before the DCMS Committee, and perhaps you could help us with what he meant. He said there was “a case for concentrating the BBC’s current affairs resources on slightly less hours to get more audience and bigger investigations”. Is this something that tempts you at BBC Scotland? What does that actually mean and how would it work in practice?

Gary Smith: I think what the DG was talking about is the impact of original journalism. It means, on occasion—and this is something my colleague in network news Frans Unsworth is doing—focusing on really good, original journalism, the impact of which will carry across our various services. If it means cutting overall the number of stories that are done on a day, that is something we judge is the right way forward. For example, to do more investigative journalism, journalism that gets under the skin of stories and journalism that we then spread across our different



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platforms—TV news, radio, the website and social media, it is worth focusing the effort on strong journalism that will have an impact across our services.

I am talking about network news, but it is something we do within BBC Scotland, for example, with our investigative TV series “Disclosure”. Over the past couple of years, we have tried to make the most of the journalism in these programmes, which has often taken months to get together, by crafting pieces for the website and social media videos, so that audiences don’t only get the quality of that journalism by watching a half hour film on the TV, but can subsequently watch it on iPlayer. It is very important to get as much of our content there, but also to hear and see it elsewhere on our services.

Q6 Chair: Does that not mean cutting things such as “Reporting Scotland” to pay for all that and concentrating resources?

Gary Smith: At this stage, it does not mean cutting any programmes at all. One example that helps understand it is what we have done on Sundays. We used to have the Sunday edition of “Good Morning Scotland” which went out between 8 o’clock and 10 o’clock. We had “Politics Scotland” which went out after the “Andrew Marr Show” on TV.

With another of our presenters who moved on, Gordon Brewer, from TV, we decided to do something different with our Sunday morning offer, so we combined the radio and TV in a simulcast programme. For those of you have seen it, the programme now comes on air at 10 o’clock in the morning on both TV and radio. The first half hour is on the TV, then the programme carries on on the radio.

That has allowed us to pull together the best of our journalism on a Sunday morning. Sunday mornings, as you all know, is a good time for political journalism—it is the start of the week, lots of interviews are done on various political programmes, and there are stories in the Sunday papers. We have been able to combine our editorial efforts in one programme, which has proved very popular with audiences, particularly because they can still go for a walk in the sunshine while listening to the programme. They don’t have to sit glued to their TVs to hear the political interviews of the day.

It is things like that. I don’t think we have lost anything by doing that, but it has combined forces around one piece of journalism.

Q7 Chair: Last one from me, and it is back to our old friend, how Scotland is represented and portrayed on BBC services. Ofcom has noted that that has improved, primarily with the impact of the BBC Scotland channel, but still something like 25% of those surveyed in Scotland think that the BBC is ineffective at reflecting people like them. We still lag behind all the other parts of the UK when it comes to making sure that our nation is represented in BBC services. What do you feel about where we still are, noting the improvement, which primarily seems to come from the BBC Scotland channel? What do you do to address it?



Steve Carson: I will pick that up first, Chair, if that is okay, and then I would like to bring in Louise, our head of commissioning. I think you are right that the channel has been a means by which the whole creative sector in Scotland can come together to generate significantly more high-quality programmes that represent Scotland to Scottish audiences. What has also been important with the channel is that, through iPlayer, where we have seen significant growth—consumption of BBC Scotland titles more than doubled on iPlayer in the first year, and that trend has continued to grow—two thirds of the viewing was actually outside Scotland, so in a sense we are serving audiences in Scotland and the same content can then portray Scotland to the rest of the UK.

The Across the UK strategy is absolutely where the BBC is heading, through moving production spend outside London to a significant degree, which I can talk about in more detail later, if you like, and increasingly to make sure that each nation is portrayed properly. Within that, there are some new initiatives, which we are working on, co-commissioning with network colleagues to make sure that they are, through network spend, portraying Scotland. Louise is leading on that for us from a Scotland point of view. She might talk through how that is working, with some examples to date.

Louise Thornton: We are aware that we have got work to do, in terms of portrayal of Scotland's voices and talents, but we can see when it really works. It is fantastic to see that the channel is reaching one in five people. We also know that our growth on iPlayer is consistent every year.

We have got some great examples of working with networks—"Murder Case", a true crime series that we do with a fantastic indie called Firecrest—and we know that the appetite in Scotland for comedy and drama is really high. When we work on a title like "Guilt", we can really see the audience appreciation around it, and we can see how well it does on channel, on network and on iPlayer. I am pleased to say that "Guilt" series 2 is coming back this autumn—we are all excited about that. It is an example of where we are working well in partnership with the likes of Screen Scotland and our colleagues in network.

The co-commissioning strategy is absolutely about focusing on that. How can we get more premium, factual and scripted coming from Scotland? That does a real job for us, being authentic for Scottish audiences, but showing how brilliant Scottish creativity is to network audiences, getting that Scottish voice out wide, which we know audiences in Scotland appreciate.

Q8 **Chair:** This is probably for you, Mr Smith. Ofcom, in that same survey, found that BBC news is perceived by some as representing a mainly white, middle-class and London-centric point of view. Do you talk to UK colleagues? One of the things that we found people got in touch about, probably not unusually, was the coverage of the European football. We were seeing that Gazza goal continually and references to 1966. What communication do you have with colleagues in Salford or London about how this is being communicated and presented to Scotland and the



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impact and effect that has on how Scottish viewers perceive and experience some of the news that we see, particularly from the BBC?

Gary Smith: I think all of us here from the BBC today have a lot of contact with colleagues in other parts of the BBC. I can speak for the contacts that I have with colleagues in news, and possibly Louise might pick up on the sport side of things.

We talk a lot. We talk a lot about the stories we are covering. We talk about how they have been covered. On the points that you quoted there about the nature of news being London-centric, it is really important, as Steve says—we may talk a bit more about this later—to look at the Across the UK policy that was announced by the director-general just some months ago, which will mean a considerable number of extra news jobs moving to Scotland. There will be 20 or so extra jobs here in one of the specialist network news teams, which is currently based in London. There are moves of other teams around different parts of the UK. That is a really important development.

In terms of the white, middle-class thing, I am sure you and others will have noticed some of the changes in network news in recent years and some of the journalists who have prominent on-screen roles. Clive Myrie is one to speak of who presents a lot of programmes but also does some great reporting work. He was across in America for the elections and moves all over the place. He is actually going to move outside news and do some “Mastermind” as well. There is someone like Rianna Croxford—if you are familiar with her work—who does investigative work for network news.

There have been some real efforts in network news, similar to what we are trying to do in Scotland, to expand the diversity of the whole production team, including the on-screen people. There is work to do, but there are a lot of positives there, in terms of what network news is doing and what we are trying to do ourselves.

Q9 Wendy Chamberlain: Thanks very much to our witnesses for being here today. I want to move on to some questions about recent results. The BBC failed to make 15 of its 140 operating licence conditions in the 2021 financial year. The reason that has been given is that it is due to the pandemic, but it did include spending only 6.5% on programming made in Scotland, compared with the minimum quota of 8%. I understand that the pandemic played a part in that, but can you give us more details about why that quota was missed?

Steve Carson: As you could see, the entire creative sector was absolutely affected by covid. In terms of missing that Ofcom requirement last year, that is driven by productions that had been planned that were not able to occur. I can give you some examples of that. Just as lockdown was coming in, we had a children’s show called “Swashbuckle” in our main studio here that required an audience. That had to go dark. I am delighted to say that “Swashbuckle” is about to come back into production, so the cost of that will now be in this financial year. “Shetland” is another example. I was up



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recently visiting the Radio Shetland team, and I went on set with "Shetland". A planned series last year—series 6—was not able to happen, and is now happening back to back with series 7. Again, that spend will now move into this year.

I think that, on the production activity that we can see this financial year, the projections we are getting show that that figure will rebound, in terms of network spend in Scotland. There were a number of efforts in network to put some covid-safe productions on air. A couple of Scottish indies were commissioned to do additional programming that could be made during covid. We in BBC Scotland put some specific covid programmes on air, including "Reflections at the Quay". We also did calls for ideas for programmes that could be made covid safe to keep supporting the sector. Overall, content spend levels did drop over the last financial year, driven by covid. There was an element of savings in that financial year too, but the figures we are looking at and the production activity show that we are going to come back strongly.

Q10 Wendy Chamberlain: It is my understanding, then, that the decision making was based around what productions could be done in a covid-safe environment, and obviously there were clearly ones that could not be done, as opposed to closing the studio and not being able to put out anything.

Steve Carson: There was a whole host of things. Certain productions—scripted productions—are incredibly complex; you have an awful lot of people on set at the one time. It took really until the latter part of autumn before we could work out effective covid safety protocols. There was also an underlying production insurance issue there. These are big, sponsored productions—what happens if someone gets ill?

There were other forms of production—factual production—that we could manage through. Again, like everybody else, you are working this through on the hoof. We could work out how that was made. A good example on our slate was the very popular series, "Scotland's Home of the Year". We were able, with a really effective production company and team, to work out covid-safe ways whereby that could still be made under the restrictions. Clearly, studio productions with audiences were impacted; they were just not possible during covid.

Q11 Wendy Chamberlain: So what you are saying is that the expectation, when we look at 2021-22 figures, is that we will see that that decline is totally compensated for in the coming year, despite the fact—obviously—that you are still working under covid restrictions?

Steve Carson: Yes, we are projecting that the figures will rise very significantly and that the Ofcom quota for Scotland will be met, or exceeded.

Q12 Wendy Chamberlain: Moving on, I think you mentioned in an earlier answer, Mr Carson, that the BBC has obviously said it has plans to exceed existing out-of-London quotas in future years. Can you give us a bit more information about what that will look like and, of course, what



the implications would be for Scotland, both from an output parameter and a spending parameter?

Steve Carson: I think that the ambition of the Across the UK strategy is really significant. Previous strategies have been focused on a specific part of the BBC—you know, “We will open a very significant new production base in Salford” for example. This affects every part of the BBC. Essentially, what it is saying is that for the first time the majority of television production will be made outside London, quite rightly, and the target there is moving from 50% of spend to 60% of spend—that is BBC content, the network division spend. That is an additional £80 million a year.

A lot of that is focused on portrayal. Across the devolved nations we are talking in the next three years about 20 drama and comedy series that we deliver. Long-running dramas will be based—one is likely to be in the north of England and one in one of the devolved nations, which we are obviously engaged in as well. And half of network radio spend as well.

So these are very significant changes, to say—quite rightly—that the BBC needs to serve audiences in every nation and all over the UK. We know ourselves that audiences really value content that is relatable and that portrays their voices and their stories. It is actually a distinctive part in the market. Take the streamers, for example; in every market that Netflix is in, it wants to be as local as it can be. But essentially the way that the BBC is already constructed means we have the ability, the range and the assets across Scotland and across the rest of the UK to deliver this.

For some specifics, I would again like to hand to Gary and Louise about how we are actually implementing that strategy in Scotland.

Q13 **Wendy Chamberlain:** I would be interested in asking Ms Thornton a question. You mentioned a couple of independents that you are working with as well. What do you see as the opportunities for them in relation to this strategy?

Louise Thornton: The commissioning UK strategy is all about putting a framework around how commissioners in the nations work with network. We have great examples of where we have done this effectively before, which I have cited, with “Murder Case” and “Guilt”. Actually, however, the bigger opportunity going forward is to have a proper commitment to that, in terms of money and editorial ambition.

So I am really pleased to be taking over from Steve at this point, because Steve and Rhodri have been doing lots of work on this. We already have a really good start in Scotland, with those titles that I have mentioned, but now what we are looking at is this: what is our next big premium factual series to come out of Scotland? That is about really getting us brilliant Scottish representation, but also fulfilling that network ambition to make really high-quality programming. That is one area where Patrick Holland, who is the head of factual for the BBC, and I are working on together.



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Another priority for indies—independent companies—to think about is returning series. We can see the benefit when we get a title like “Scotland’s Home of the Year”—what that really means to audiences. They can build a habit, they can follow a narrative, so that is an area that we are really looking to explore with network. We know that it is brilliant for the independent companies as well, in terms of their business.

Actually, we have seen great success during covid times. We managed to work on a scheme with BBC 3 that was part-funded by Screen Scotland, which was about finding the next factual entertainment series coming out of Scotland. I do not think that has been announced yet, but I am pleased to say that we have had a pilot commissioned, and also a long-running series that we are looking at together with BBC 3. So we really want to do more of that in the factual domain; just things that can have impact, both for audience and the economy in Scotland.

We are also committed to investing in scripted and scripted development. We know that it takes a while to get scripted ideas that are ready to go to network, so my commissioning colleague Gavin Smith is working really hard in terms of his development strategy, both with comedy and drama. We know we want the next BBC One sitcom to go to network, so that is a real target for us. Again, it is brilliant for the industry here and it is brilliant for the audience. We know audiences in Scotland love comedy. So there is a development strategy there, along with a commitment to look for our next “Guilt”. It has been such a success for us. So those are the key areas. It is premium factual, it is investment in scripted and it is returning series.

Q14 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Thank you very much. Mr Smith?

Gary Smith: To expand on what I mentioned a minute ago, as part of the Across the UK strategy for network news, the team that is coming to Scotland, which is currently based in London, is the technology and innovation team. You will see members of that team on network news programmes, but also they make a programme called “Click”, which is shown on the news channel and on BBC World. It is very popular. It is a brilliant thing that that team is going to be operating out of Scotland, because they will do a lot of their filming in Scotland. A lot of their examples and case studies for stories they are doing will be in Scotland, which really helps add to the kind of thing that Steve and Louise have been talking about, which is that the representation of people and technological innovation that is happening in Scotland will be seen by a network audience in a way in which it is perhaps not at the minute.

Q15 The move of that team involves 20 posts being relocated from London to Glasgow. Some of the people in those posts currently will come to Scotland. Some will choose not to and will do other things in London, which means there will be some recruitment in Scotland. The editor of that team has now been recruited and that person is a journalist who is currently deputy editor on “The Nine”. It is great for us within BBC Scotland that we will have new colleagues here who we can work with, who, as well as doing their own programming with “Click”, will play into



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our news programmes coming out of Scotland. The synergies between network and BBC Scotland staff working together could be really useful and beneficial in audience terms.

Wendy Chamberlain: And giving development opportunities to those who have not taken voluntary redundancy and stayed within the organisation. Thank you very much, Mr Smith.

Q16 **Mhairi Black:** Thanks to our witnesses for giving us your time. My apologies if I dip out at any point. My internet is fighting me today. I have already been kicked out of the meeting twice, but I will persevere. I think you covered a lot of what I was initially going to ask in the previous questions, but is there anything else that you have not mentioned that the BBC is doing to support the creative economy in Scotland in particular, which you want to mention? I will go to Steve first.

Steve Carson: As covid hit, I was in a different role, but you could not help but be incredibly proud of the production teams across BBC Scotland and then across the independent production sector. People just worked out ways to keep going as far as possible. Obviously, they were keen to preserve news and information output in BBC Scotland, but equally, to preserve late-night music programming to offer something of a break and then even new services being launched. As churches, mosques, synagogues and temples closed, we then moved into a need to supply religious programming and that sort of spiritual succour. Inevitably, so much production had to be put on hold. What BBC Scotland did then, in conjunction with the indies, was to put out a couple of quick calls for ideas for programmes that could be made, as additional work. That was to serve audiences but also to support the creative sector—artists, musicians—where everything is suddenly without a pay cheque. We had a Susan Calman show set in her garden, called “Socially Distant”. That was also partly a way to give actors, writers and musicians just some kind of support during that early stage.

It was not just us. I think Screen Scotland, which is a really effective screen agency and a real asset to Scotland, had a bursary scheme very early on to support artists. BBC-wide, there was also the Small Indie Fund, and I think 15 companies were supported through that. Ultimately, the best support can only be making content and getting that spend back, which we can see now, even under the current level of restrictions, has returned at great volume.

I have to say that Louise led the way on another example of support in the arts sector, on a partnership that is important to us. We partnered with the National Theatre of Scotland to launch “Scenes for Survival”, which included really popular pieces. That gave those artists a chance to express themselves and also to make some kind of a living during that.

Q17 **Mhairi Black:** Excellent, thank you. Could you tell us particularly about the Small Indie Fund, how it has been used in Scotland and whether there is any scope to expand it or any other funds like it?



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Steve Carson: That fund is operated by our colleagues in BBC Content, which is the former network TV division; it is now a TV and radio division. In fact, I was having a conversation with our chief operating officer last week about how we can effectively align with it to support the co-commissioning work that Louise and other nations' heads of commissioning are doing. The Small Indie Fund is a strategic fund designed to help promising companies grow to scale. As I say, last year it was used in part to help maintain the sector. I think you are right to highlight it. It is a really strong initiative, and I am keen that Scotland is involved in it more in the coming years.

Q18 **Mhairi Black:** But so to speak, right now, there are no concrete plans as such?

Steve Carson: I think, as part of that co-commissioning work, which Scotland has led on—there are individual nations and individual content commissioners, as it were— I think the Small Indie Fund is a big part of that. Our strong belief is that BBC Scotland is here to generate our own programmes and to serve audiences in that way, but also to help grow and build the creative sector as a whole. With partners like Screen Scotland, that is really part of our ambition. I think the Small Indie Fund is a significant way to do that, and I think we will expand our involvement in it with colleagues in Content.

Q19 **Deidre Brock:** I watched "Scenes for Survival", and the pieces I saw were brilliant—wonderful actors and great writing. The Across the UK strategy that you have all mentioned is an interesting notion and is good to hear about. However, it was widely reported in the media that there was a big stooshie recently over A and B studios, with the BBC actually considering moving the running of those from Pacific Quay in Glasgow down to Elstree. Could you confirm whether those reports were accurate—that this was actively being considered by BBC management in London?

Steve Carson: I think the first thing to say is that the decision is very clear that studio A and studio B remain owned and operated by BBC Scotland, and that is how we will go forward into the future. A number of things were happening at the same time. There is the overall positive piece, through Across the UK and other strategies, that the BBC wants to expand production and spend in Scotland and wants to build up broadcast infrastructure where possible. Kelvin Hall, a large new facility owned and funded by Glasgow City Council and Screen Scotland, is due to come online next year. I think the overall BBC ambition then attracted Studioworks, a commercial studio subsidiary of the BBC, which is now in very detailed negotiations to be the operator of that. Those sort of things were happening simultaneously. We were looking, at BBC Scotland, at how to relate to that new studio, again with the aim of the win-win of growing and developing the sector as a whole, while obviously making sure that our existing facilities were being properly utilised.

Separate from that, a project was established within the BBC called Project Ocean, which was looking at the whole studio estate across the



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UK. Ocean made a recommendation that the ownership of studio infrastructure in the BBC should be in the hands of a single entity, not spread, as it were. In Scotland, as they were moving to the approvals process, it was decided that there needed to be a separate financial review of the implications of that. That is the proposal that was made, and that is the work that was done to show that separating out studio A, for example, from the integrated studio base we have at Pacific Quay was technically extremely complicated and also very expensive—it did not make financial sense.

We also established as part of that review that the TUPE rules would not apply, so if the ownership was transferred, people's jobs would not necessarily follow. That had complications and implications for the staff base. BBC Scotland is funded by the licence fee, so, crucially, we were able to show through the BBC's fair trading rules that we would be able to continue to operate studios in a new market.

It was a specific review looking across all the proposals that Ocean was making, as it was making serious proposals across the whole UK estate, not just Scotland, but in Scotland we went through a detailed model review. We were able to generate facts and figures to show that retention of ownership of Studio A was the best option. The option we are now pursuing as the BBC as a whole is how we can best creatively collaborate with Studioworks if it becomes the operator of Kelvin Hall, and look at synergies in terms of staff utilisation and technology.

Q20 Deidre Brock: Is BBC Studioworks taking over the production facility at Kelvin Hall? Is that what you are saying?

Steve Carson: They are in negotiations with the funders of Kelvin Hall, Glasgow City Council. Again, that is a separate piece to this. They are in advanced negotiations with that.

Q21 Deidre Brock: Is that going to be separate from you at BBC Scotland? Will whatever decisions BBC Studioworks takes be taken at HQ down in London, or will you have some input into what productions they do in Kelvin Hall?

Steve Carson: The model we are pursuing now, if Studioworks becomes the operator, is how BBC Scotland and Studioworks, the commercial subsidiary, can collaborate across the sites to help grow demand overall, and to help make sure that the sector expands overall.

The variable there is that Studioworks is still in advanced negotiations with Glasgow City Council about being the operator—not the owner, but the operator—of the Kelvin Hall site.

Q22 Deidre Brock: Was that not something that BBC Scotland could have taken on?

Steve Carson: It is not an option we considered. We obviously operate a very successful existing base within the public service, and again the fair trading rules say that we can do that. I think expanding into a commercial site wouldn't be core public service.



Q23 **Deidre Brock:** I see. Studioworks is, in effect, a commercial enterprise, isn't it?

Steve Carson: Yes. We are licence-fee funded, but we have a very clear policy that we can continue to trade with them within the market like that. If there are creative collaborations and synergies in working with two sites, if Studioworks becomes the operator, that is what we are pursuing now.

Q24 **Deidre Brock:** Basically, the takeover of studios A and B was being actively considered. Could I ask what sort of works are produced in those studios by BBC Scotland?

Steve Carson: A whole range of things. It is an integrated studio base across all of our studios. You will see it impacts on our extensive election coverage. Studio A would currently produce a lot of our network studio entertainment business, children's and others, and quiz shows such as "Pointless" or "Swashbuckle". It is a strong part of the craft base in Scotland. It is a really strong asset within the Scottish creative sector, and I am pleased that working on it going forward is going to maybe retain ownership and be operated by BBC Scotland.

Kelvin Hall, as we discussed, is a separate initiative from Glasgow City Council and Screen Scotland. It is coming into the market and I think there is confidence that the overall market will grow. They have their own business plans. The BBC wants to invest more in Scotland, and Channel 4 has made the same points. There is a whole global business as well—Amazon is now shooting in Scotland. That is the ambition of Kelvin Hall and Studioworks.

Q25 **Deidre Brock:** I absolutely get that, and I think there are some really interesting things happening now in the creative economy, and the BBC is a big part that. However, it did surprise me—I should put on the record that I am a member of the BBC APPG—as the director-general has been at pains to stress the importance of the devolution of BBC activities throughout the nations and regions. So I find it surprising that they were actively considering that. There have been some who suggest that it is symptomatic of a sort of power struggle between London and Scotland. What would you say to that?

Steve Carson: I think Project Ocean had its own remit to look at the future of studio production across the UK, and it made its own recommendations. What was clear to us is that that needed to be a subject in Scotland, with different conditions on the ground to other sites they were being looking at. We did the detailed work to show why, financially, operationally and logistically, it wasn't a good solution. We did the detailed work and then the right decision was reached.

Q26 **Deidre Brock:** Do you think that is the end of it? Do you think they will stop thinking of this as a possible option for the future?

Steve Carson: The clear BBC decision is that studio A and, for the avoidance of doubt, studio B, will remain operated by BBC Scotland. Dumbarton was also looked at, where "River City" is made. That is a lease



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arrangement, not an ownership arrangement. Again, there is going to be no change to Dumbarton. What we are now looking at is how we can collaborate with Studioworks if they become the operator.

Q27 Deidre Brock: If they do. Right, okay.

In doing my prep for this meeting, I came across a *New York Times* article, "The world wants more Danish TV than Denmark can handle." Do you ever look over to Denmark? The production over there has just exploded in TV and film, in the last decade in particular. It is a similar size to Scotland. What can we learn from their success, particularly in the international market, and apply to Scotland? Is there an opportunity there for Scotland to be able to compete at the same level as Denmark? What needs to happen for that to happen?

Steve Carson: I visited Denmark in a previous job. At one point, I was on the TV Committee of the European Broadcasting Union. There are a couple of things from the Scandinavian example that Scotland can do and, with Screen Scotland, is looking at.

They were all active co-productions between individual nations, so that you were able to pool production budgets and have very high-quality productions. They were always export-orientated. They are clearly serving their local audiences, so DR was important, but there was always an eye for export. I think it has also showed that the genre they went into—

Deidre Brock: Scandi noir.

Steve Carson: Crime-based, slightly noir-ish—there was a big global market for that. I think you already see some BBC titles, such as "Shetland", in some ways already serving that audience too.

I think the Danish example can give us in Scotland confidence, if you have the right infrastructure and the right creative talent. I am a huge believer in the Scottish creative sector; we had built some incredible momentum there from '18-19 onwards. Last year was a setback, but you can see the energy building back up again and with partners such as Screen Scotland and the BBC pushing more demand here, and hopefully Channel4 as well, I think the creative sector can rise to that occasion. You've got Amazon landing a Neil Gaiman title because of a key Scottish director. Going back to the studio infrastructure, as I understand it, five years ago, there was an absolute dearth of sound stages and productions just couldn't be made here. I think that situation is changing. I think that is positive.

Q28 Deidre Brock: Good. I must put in a plug for the Big Blue Shed in my constituency of Edinburgh North and Leith here.

Lastly, I want to ask you about Gaelic and BBC Alba. Obviously, there have been a lot of concerns raised quite recently about the fragile position of Scottish Gaelic in Scotland. Can you tell us a little bit about what BBC Scotland is doing to assist with that? I will ask you about a particular point that the DCMS Committee raised about the discoverability of minority language channels or content such as BBC Alba, but first can you tell us a little bit about how its position is at the moment in the



family of BBC Scotland?

Steve Carson: Within BBC Scotland's in-house production base, the Gaelic team are very significant. Obviously, we directly make and broadcast BBC Radio nan Gàidheal as a key service—as a national radio station. Another example of a good creative partnership is with MG Alba. With them, the BBC Alba channel is operated. You can see in the ARA figures that our spend on Gaelic services was maintained even during the difficulties over the past year.

One future-looking piece that we are doing in terms of some of the risks to the language, with partners MG Alba and others, is a big-scale language-learning piece called SpeakGaelic. To your point about digital, it is going to have digital tools. It has got radio. It has got TV elements. We are at the active stage of how we roll that out over the next few years.

I think we have discussed this before, possibly. You see the Duolingo phenomenon. There is a real appetite to learn Gaelic. How can the BBC serve that need, with partners MG Alba in the lead? It is all about serving audiences.

It is fair to say that, without BBC Scotland, we wouldn't have Gaelic television and radio services in the way that we do and the prominence that we do. Bear in mind, Alba has a very prominent position on BBC iPlayer as a BBC channel. On every iteration of iPlayer, you will see the Alba button there. That itself is hugely valuable in getting Gaelic content out to people where they are.

Q29 **Deidre Brock:** Yet the DCMS Committee raised concerns about the discoverability of minority language content, particularly how they access that content—through smart TVs and voice-activated technology, What kind of work are you doing with the tech industry to improve that?

Steve Carson: BBC Scotland is host to a design and engineering team who are looking at voice and speakers as one way to access. Looking at the Ofcom report last week, prominence on these new and newish platforms, from smart TVs, streaming sticks, gaming consoles, is really important. Bear in mind that this is public service content that the audiences have paid for through their licence fee. They should be able to find it and access it easily. It should not be a matter of prominence on those platforms being sold to the highest bidder. Corporately, on a policy level, putting into that, we want to make sure that the content is freely available—that does require legislation, as I understand it. BBC Alba operates quite successful social media accounts, to make sure we reach audiences in that way. I think you are right to highlight that; public service media as a whole needs to have the clear prominence that traditionally we have had in the linear world of being channels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 on people's programme guides.

Q30 **Deidre Brock:** I have to say that, as the parent of two Gaelic speakers, I am pleased to hear that. I hope that you will look at the younger audiences in particular for Gaelic, because that is vital.



Steve Carson: Sorry to interrupt. For the past few years, led by Margaret Mary Murray, CBeebies Alba has come through.

- Q31 **Deidre Brock:** Lastly, I think the DCMS Committee suggested that the Government could update legislation to ensure that minority language content was given more prominence—or made sufficient discoverability, as I think it is described—on the relevant platforms. Do you think that would assist, and why?

Steve Carson: As I say, it is very important that people are able to access that content easily. Within our current digital products, BBC Radio nan Gàidheal is prominent on Sounds—it has its own station while BBC Alba has the position on iPlayer.

Another BBC strategy that I think will benefit from this, and I think we need to encourage, is personalisation. Previously, if you went on iPlayer, the iPlayer will be looking to see what sort of programming you like, such as comedy or documentaries. Through personalisation, it now has to be where you are based. That will really help. If you have a Scottish postcode, it will start off with more Scottish content, which our evidence shows people are interested in. If you are interested in Gaelic broadcasting, that will also be driven through the personalisation of Sounds and iPlayer.

Deidre Brock: That is interesting to hear. I know the BBC has been exploring that as a possibility for some time. It is good to hear that it has finally come through. Thank you.

- Q32 **Andrew Bowie:** I should probably say from the off that as good as Danish television is, it pales in comparison to Swedish TV, which is definitely the market leader in Scandinavian output. I declare an interest as a member of the all-party parliamentary group for the BBC. Following on from the discussion about language, there is obviously a great story to tell about BBC Scotland being, as I think you said, the most watched platform right now, with 21% market share, which is fantastic. But I think there is one area of the country that does not seem to be served as well as others—the north-east of Scotland. Two of the greatest programmes from the north-east in recent years, “The Mart” and “The Harbour” were both produced before the BBC Scotland channel came into existence. Despite the fact that “Guilt”, *[Inaudible.]* and “Inside Central Station” are really good TV shows, they are all Edinburgh and Glasgow-based. Are there any plans to have a significant investment in programming from the north-east of Scotland, possibly Aberdeen-based?

Steve Carson: I would add “Fish Town”, which was commissioned for BBC One Scotland. I would pass that question to Louise, if that is okay.

Louise Thornton: Thank you for the question. We are committed to commissioning programmes from all over Scotland. It is an absolute mantra in the commissioning team that we need to get out of Glasgow; we know we do. Yes, “Fish Town” is a great example. “The Children’s Hospital”, another fantastic show for us, came from Aberdeen. Obviously, “The Beechgrove Garden” continues to perform. Just recently, on one of



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our multiplatform commissions, "TUNE", which is a great, young-skewing music show, we actually had a short film on bothy ballads, which was all from young Aberdeen performers. So we really are actively seeking those voices; it is absolutely an ambition for us. One of our great new comedy stars is Jim Smith. He's from Perthshire, but he likes to do an Aberdeen farmer as well. We welcome that, absolutely.

Q33 Andrew Bowie: You can't beat a bothy ballad. It's good to hear that the BBC are committed to broadcasting more bothy ballads on the BBC Scotland channel.

I want to raise an issue linking into that. In the course of the first lockdown, through the pandemic, "STV News" surged ahead to be the most watched 6 pm news in Scotland, I think, with about 30% of all viewers—followed very closely by "Reporting Scotland". I just wondered: could that be a result of the fact that STV have remained committed—although obviously they stopped this during the very first weeks of lockdown—to having two distinct regional news programmes, one for the north-east and the Northern Isles and one for the central belt? Do you think that "Reporting Scotland" spends enough time looking at stories outwith the central belt, or is it too central belt focused? And is there a commitment to expand on that within news?

Gary Smith: I could pick that one up. I will just make one point of clarification. In the very early days of lockdown back last year, "Reporting Scotland" actually increased its lead over STV—in the initial weeks of lockdown—which I think shows that in times of serious trouble a lot of audiences do turn to the BBC. But you are absolutely right that STV's more local service does perform well in the north-east and is much appreciated. What I would say on that is that, at the time of our investment back in 2018, we were very committed to not just hiring lots of new jobs in Glasgow but trying to spread them out around Scotland, including in Aberdeen, so we did reinforce the team in Aberdeen now with extra reporting and shooting staff.

One of the specialist correspondents that we had at that time, our technology and innovation correspondent, Laura Goodwin, is based between Aberdeen and Dundee and sometimes does her reporting from Aberdeen. We have actually made Aberdeen, under the guy who runs our Aberdeen news operation, Steven Duff, the people who are specialists on vaccination, so a lot of Laura Goodwin's work on vaccination is done from there. We are doing things like that in Aberdeen and at other bases, too. We increased the numbers in Inverness, and substantially actually in Dundee, where, I think it is fair to say, we had been under-represented before, in terms of BBC News presence; we have now got quite a number of people based there.

So we have made that effort. We are very conscious that it has been a criticism through the years that "Reporting Scotland" and some of our other programmes are either too Glasgow focused or too central belt focused. So we do make a conscious effort in "Reporting Scotland", which you were talking about. We do this with "The Nine" very much as well; we



try to spread our journalism around the whole of the country. I don't know whether you happened to watch "The Nine" last night, but we had a big story around the changes on covid restrictions and we reported that from various places, including Aberdeen and Lerwick—doing something about the cruise liners going in there. There is a conscious effort we make to expand our reporting around as much of the country as possible. And similarly on radio, where it is a bit easier, we try to be doing stories from around the whole country.

- Q34 **Andrew Bowie:** I will come back in, later in the session to talk about radio specifically, but one of the things that "Good Morning Scotland" does is obviously to break off, during the morning programme, for five minutes of dedicated local news for the north-east, coming from Aberdeen. I read somewhere—I couldn't find it when I was prepping for this session—that that was something that was considered a few years ago by the television news. Is it something that may still be—*[Inaudible.]* Would there be any value in that?

Gary Smith: Sorry, I didn't hear—you are breaking up slightly. Were you asking whether it was considered by our TV news teams?

- Q35 **Andrew Bowie:** Yes. Has it ever been considered as an option during the 6.30 pm "Reporting Scotland"?

Gary Smith: It has not been considered in my time here, I have to say. We very much see "Reporting Scotland" as a national news service for the whole of Scotland—covering as many parts of Scotland as we possibly can, but doing it as a joint programme. I believe that there are very strong stories in all parts of Scotland that merit a national audience of Scottish viewers, rather than dividing the audience into pockets around the country. I am not saying it may not have been considered in the past. I have been here for only a few years and it may have been considered previously, but that is not something we have looked at in the last few years.

- Q36 **Andrew Bowie:** My final question. According to BARB, 77% of adults with a television watch some form of BBC output during the course of an average week, and 88% of adults in Scotland access BBC radio, TV or iPlayer on demand. Even though that has dipped very slightly in the past year, it is still an incredibly large audience, and Scotland must be one of the most successful parts of the country for the BBC. My question is contrary to what I was going to ask. What is it that you are doing right in Scotland that the rest of the BBC can learn from?

Steve Carson: Louise?

Louise Thornton: That is a great question. What are we doing right? Having taken over in this job from Steve in December, I was heartened to see that we were in a good, strong position. We never rest on our laurels, but I think our strategy is working. We want to reflect modern Scotland. We are a multi-platform commissioning team, which means that we look at ideas and do not just think, "This is telly" or "This is radio". We have examples. Gary gave the great example of "The Sunday Show", which is



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fantastic in the way it moves between platforms. We have just had great success with a podcast from the “Disclosure” team that is called “Who Killed Emma?”, which I think is approaching about 1 million downloads. Again, it is about making the most of all the fantastic talent we have within the BBC, but it is also about the fact that we are small enough to talk to one another.

When I took over from Steve, I looked at all the slates that the commissioners have, to make sure that they have more than one platform that they are considering when they commission. Gareth Hydes, who commissions for Radio Scotland, also commissions our music output. He now commissions all our arts output as well. That is across platforms. He commissions “Loop”, which is an arts strand that sits very comfortably on digital but also has a presence on a channel. Gareth is making sure that that also connects with “The Afternoon Show”, which comes from Aberdeen on a Friday, Mr Bowie—that is good news there. We are getting those things right.

We see that audiences absolutely love our sports output. I think we can do more. The documentary on Rangers when they won the league—we can see that that really activated a new audience for us, so what more can we do on sport? I commissioned a documentary on Gary O’Connor, who was a footballer. Again, that activated a new, young audience. Those are interesting measures for us, because we see growth on those types of programmes. Then there are the programmes that, as I said before, are returnable and that can have long runs—for example, “Scotland’s Home of the Year”. We can build a great audience with that, but it can also have an outing on a network, which is great. It is the same story for “Paramedics on Scene”. Again, it is a great representation for Scotland—a really strong blue-light show. I think it also goes out, as a cutdown, in the daytime. These things are all hopefully adding up, but we do not rest. We know we need to do more, and we are always looking at how we adjust our strategy against the audience’s consumption habits.

Steve Carson: It is worth hearing from Gary as well on that joined-up approach, if you have time, Chair.

Gary Smith: Absolutely, it is something we try very hard to do. It goes back to the point I was making earlier about impact. I suppose one example that I would use is that—I don’t know whether people saw this—our chief news correspondent, James Cook, who works mostly for “The Nine” on the Scotland channel, made a piece as a preview to the Euros starting. It looked at what changes there had been in Scotland since the last time the Scottish men’s football team featured in the finals of a major tournament, which was back in 1998. It looked at the changes in Scotland and the changes in Scotland’s attitude towards football. It was a really fascinating piece of journalism, which ran, as I say, on “The Nine”, but it also ran on “Good Morning Scotland” the next day, on the “Today” programme”, on the BBC World Service, on “Breakfast” on the news channel, and he wrote a version for the website, which something like 350,000 people read. I think that kind of makes my point that when we do



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something that we think is really good, we try to get it out to as many places as possible, both on our own services at BBC Scotland and on network as well, to get it to as much of our potential audience as possible.

- Q37 **Douglas Ross:** Good morning to our witnesses. May I start by picking up a couple of points that have been made so far before I go on to my questions? Mr Smith, you asked if Mr Bowie watched "The Nine". Can you tell us how many people do watch it?

Gary Smith: I can, and I hope Mr Bowie is one of them. We have a weekly reach for "The Nine" of 160,000 people, which we are very pleased with. That means that, across the week, 160,000 people dip into part of a programme at least once. The audience figures—the things you will see in overnights—average around 20,000 for a programme, which, again, is very good for a news programme on a digital channel. It is important to say that, as I have mentioned on a couple of occasions, the impact of our journalism spreads far beyond the programme as well.

- Q38 **Douglas Ross:** But has it achieved what you wanted it to? An awful lot of resources go into "The Nine". Do they match the numbers who watch it?

Gary Smith: I would say yes. There was a considerable investment in journalism back in 2018, which I was very pleased to see. We have used that to create on the channel not just "The Nine", but "Debate Night", which many of you have probably appeared on. That has been very successful, and we run 24 episodes across the year. We have a review programme now currently running on Sunday nights called "Seven Days", which I think does a good job. We have an entertainment news programme. We have created a lot of output for the channel itself.

As I say, a lot of the people we hired in that period of recruitment work across other programmes as well. I mentioned Martin Geissler earlier. He has expanded into things that are on BBC One or Radio Scotland. A lot of the other staff there have helped to improve, frankly, a lot of our output across the whole of BBC Scotland.

I personally think "The Nine" is a really good programme. What I hear from most people who watch and comment on it is that they appreciate the fact that we have an hour to get properly under the skin of stories and do interviews around stories to make it more current affairs as well as news. I think it does a very good job there. It does something really important, in that it has combined people with a lot of experience in the world of broadcasting with a lot of new talent. That is something that has been very important to all of us—Louise, Steve and me—about the opportunities that the channel has given us to bring new people into the business and give them an opportunity. Some of them fly and do really well, and are already going on to do broadcasting elsewhere. "The Nine" and other programmes have allowed us to take some risks with our journalism, to tell stories in different ways and to do different kinds of stories that previously, in a more limited output, we were not able to do. For all those reasons, I would say it is a success.

- Q39 **Douglas Ross:** So you are happy with the viewer numbers? How does it



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compare with a similar programme, "Scotland Tonight" on STV?

Gary Smith: Well, I would not actually say that that was a similar programme.

Q40 **Douglas Ross:** I think it is, so that is my question. You may disagree, but I think they are similar. How do the viewer numbers compare?

Gary Smith: There are obviously more viewers for news programmes on BBC One or STV.

Q41 **Douglas Ross:** How many more? What is the comparison? What percentage of the STV "Scotland Tonight" audience do you get for "The Nine"? You said you are really happy with those numbers, so gosh, someone at STV must be delighted with the numbers they get.

Gary Smith: I am also happy with the numbers for "Reporting Scotland" on BBC One, which is more of a direct competitor to either STV's "News at Six" or "Scotland Tonight". Across the piece, we do very well for our audiences. As I said earlier—

Douglas Ross: My question was, how does it compare? Are you able to tell us how it compares, "The Nine" with "Scotland Tonight"?

Gary Smith: "Scotland Tonight" at 10.30 gets something like 80,000, 90,000 or maybe 100,000 viewers—

Douglas Ross: Four or five times as many as "The Nine".

Gary Smith: And substantially less than our news at 10.30 on BBC One has watching.

Q42 **Douglas Ross:** But for people who watch something outwith the main news time, later on in the evening in Scotland, four or five times as many people watch STV as watch your offering on "The Nine". Is that correct?

Gary Smith: That is correct, but personally I don't think it is a fair comparison, because what we do on BBC One significantly outperforms STV at 10.30 at night.

Steve Carson: Other comparators for "The Nine" on the digital service would be Sky News or the BBC News channels.

Q43 **Douglas Ross:** How does that go?

Steve Carson: We are under BARB contract—*[Inaudible]*—strong similar performance to news on digital channels.

Q44 **Douglas Ross:** Mr Smith, you also mentioned the daily briefings. Will you outline to the Committee and people watching what process you go through to authorise a daily briefing to take place?

Gary Smith: When we have some information—I would not call them daily briefings; currently, they happen once or twice a week—when we hear from the Scottish Government that a briefing is planned either for the next day or for later in the week, I will discuss with my two colleagues on



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the call here, with Louise who oversees all our commissioning and Steve who is the overall director, whether we should broadcast and where we should broadcast. We have the discussions, we agree and we make the arrangements to put the briefing on the air.

Q45 **Douglas Ross:** How many have you refused to broadcast?

Gary Smith: Of the Scottish Government covid briefings, we have broadcast almost all of them—

Douglas Ross: How many have you not? Just a number would be useful.

Gary Smith: I was just about to say, I think there was one briefing during the election that we did not broadcast on either BBC One Scotland or BBC Scotland; it was broadcast, at least part of it, on the news channel.

Q46 **Douglas Ross:** So you have never refused to broadcast one.

Gary Smith: Again, I wouldn't use the word "refused". We made decisions about what we think is appropriate. We decided that it was right to put these briefings on the television, because we think that they contained important public health information—

Q47 **Douglas Ross:** I agree with that point. What I am trying to get at is, how do you know what is in that briefing?

Gary Smith: We have conversations with the people who organise them within the Scottish Government beforehand, about the main themes, in exactly the same way that my colleagues in network news have with people around Downing Street about what is going to be in the UK Government briefings.

Q48 **Douglas Ross:** Also, are you looking for something substantial? You do not just want the First Minister to be standing up and making a statement with no major story connected to it.

Gary Smith: You will be aware that some of the briefings that have happened since the election we have put on BBC One Scotland, and others we have put on the BBC Scotland channel. The thinking around that is that there are certain formal review points. For example, last week when the First Minister gave a virtual statement at Holyrood, that was a formal review date for the easing of restrictions, so we broadcast that on BBC One Scotland as a formal review point. There is a briefing later today—possibly, you are appearing on that programme yourself—which is not a formal review point, but it is an update at a time when there is a lot of audience interest in the level of infections and hospitalisations as restrictions are eased. That is appearing on the BBC Scotland channel today.

Q49 **Douglas Ross:** For clarity, are you saying, if you deem it more important—if it is a big point in the three-week cycle—it will go on the main BBC Scotland channel, but if not, it will go on the dedicated BBC Scotland channel—rather than BBC One Scotland?



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Gary Smith: That is broadly what we do just now. There may be other considerations about the editorial context, but where we are at the minute with the pandemic, that is broadly how we make our decisions.

Q50 **Douglas Ross:** I used the word, “substantial”. If you are getting information from the Scottish Government to make you think that this needs to go on BBC One Scotland, surely that would meet the criterion of the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament that it should be to Parliament, not to the BBC.

Gary Smith: In the BBC we do not have the power to ask the Presiding Officer either to call Parliament back from recess—

Q51 **Douglas Ross:** But you are determining if something is substantial enough to go on BBC One Scotland or to go on to the BBC Scotland channel.

Gary Smith: We make editorial decisions around what we understand the briefing is going to contain—absolutely.

Q52 **Douglas Ross:** Finally, that is on very limited information: a copy of the statement the First Minister is going to give, someone in the First Minister’s office telling you, “Look, this is going to be a big statement that should be on BBC One Scotland.” I do not think that we, as a Committee, fully understand that process, based on your answers so far.

Gary Smith: We do not see, the day before one of those briefings, a full copy of a statement or speech. We get some indication of the main thrust of what it is going to be about. Some of those things we know in advance. We know when formal review dates are coming up. We know there is another one in a couple of weeks’ time. We build our information on those things.

Q53 **Douglas Ross:** That was just picking up on a couple of points I had heard during the session. Can I come to the issues I wanted to raise? Can you tell me the level and themes within the complaints you get at BBC Scotland?

Gary Smith: It varies over time. We get complaints about a number of things, some of them within news, some about sport or other kinds of programming we make. The level of complaints varies as well.

Q54 **Douglas Ross:** Looking from a year ago, did you get more complaints from three years ago? Do you get more or fewer complaints? You presumably look at that on a monthly and annual basis. Based on the feedback you are getting, how are you doing in terms of the complaints you receive?

Gary Smith: I do not know if Steve has a concrete answer to that. I am not aware that there are substantially more or fewer than there have been in the past. It has been fairly constant.

Steve Carson: We are happy to write to the Committee with a breakdown of overall complaints. All broadcasters have seen an increase in complaints over the past number of years. There has been a significant increase



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across the BBC. I do not want to venture into the current picture; I do not have a complete handle on it. As I understand it, all broadcasters have seen that.

Social media networks make it easier to make a complaint. At the BBC and BBC Scotland, we assess and process all complaints and reply. We have a detailed, audience feedback-handling process—*[Inaudible]*—complaints on a whole range of issues, from a range of perspectives across the board. Sometimes on the same bit of content, we can have two different—

Douglas Ross: Mr Carson, you are breaking up, so I cannot hear.

Steve Carson: Pardon me. I think it is fair to say that at BBC Scotland, as with the rest of the BBC, we receive complaints—and also positive feedback—on a whole range of issues. You can often find the same piece of content with two streams of complaints, judging it in favour or not in favour of one particular view. I am happy to write to you and the Committee with the actual breakdown of complaints, if that is material that we can disclose.

- Q55 **Douglas Ross:** That would be appreciated by the Committee, including going back a couple of years, maybe three or five, just to see what the trend is. You have indicated that it is across the board. It would be interesting if you could quantify that. Clearly, we only have witnesses from the BBC here. It would be unfair to suggest that other channels have similar feedback, if they cannot respond to that. Could you put it into that context as well?

Finally, I declare an interest as a candidate in the previous election. Can you outline how you felt your coverage was of the Scottish parliamentary elections? Have you reviewed it? Have you looked at how other channels in Scotland approached the election? Were you content, or could you improve your coverage?

Gary Smith: Broadly, I was personally very pleased with the coverage of both the campaign and the results. Obviously, the results were very different from previous results coverage we had done. They were over two days during the day, which was quite a challenge for all sort of reasons. Broadly, our coverage was good on our different platforms.

- Q56 **Douglas Ross:** I get the impression that you were broadly happy and positive. How would you view the editorial decisions you took for news coverage on each day of the campaign? I speak from my party's position, but I think this would be shared by almost every party. Normally, there is a grid, and a party decides that they are going to go on education one day, health on another day and so on. The BBC decided to do its own thing, unlike STV, who took the daily feedback and opportunities to discuss the message of the day from all political parties. You could have all the parties focusing on the NHS, for example, but the BBC deciding to do a story on education. That was very different from what has been done in the past and what was done by STV. Why was that decision taken, and do you think it was a success?



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Gary Smith: I think it was important across the campaign to cover a lot of different issues, and not necessarily the issues that one party or another was advancing on a particular—

- Q57 **Douglas Ross:** My question was very deliberately about, for example, a day when every party focused on education and the BBC covered everything on health—or vice versa. That was quite unique to the BBC and to this campaign. Why was that decision taken, and do you really think it was successful?

Gary Smith: I do. We covered a range of topics. I don't know the specific example that you are talking about. We may possibly have done something on education the previous day so wanted to do a different topic on the day that you are talking about. However, across the weeks of the campaign, we were very fair to each of the parties. Our coverage was balanced in terms of the different parties. We wanted to talk about a lot of issues that mattered to our audiences, which we did.

Steve Carson: In terms of general perceptions of the campaign, if you look at the election results coverage, which for covid reasons happened during the day, over several days, and had significant audiences, you could see how the investment in journalism and resources you saw for "The Nine" fed right through, in terms of the coverage which—

- Q58 **Douglas Ross:** I do not know what the problem is. Sorry, Mr Carson. You have been fine all the way through, but your audio is extremely poor now.

Steve Carson: If you look at our election results programme, you can see that over several days we built on the existing strengths in journalism and existing presenters we had. You can see some new people coming through, and even some of the technology that we were able to use—the augmented reality results with David Wallace Lockhart. Perceptions in the industry generally were that that was very strong coverage.

- Q59 **Chair:** Can I just go back to the daily briefings? Do you have an indication of how many people tune in to watch them? Well, they are not daily briefings—however you want to refer to them.

Gary Smith: They are clearly not daily briefings at the moment. The audiences have varied since last March. At the peak of the pandemic, we had something like 250,000 people watching the live coverage of the briefings. That has dropped off quite a bit now. When a formal announcement is anticipated, the public and audience know that it is due to happen on a particular day and there are going to be changes announced or confirmed to restrictions, more people will tune in. For a briefing like today's, I suspect there will not be as many people actually watching. Audience numbers vary, and they have broadly gone down from where we were during the peak of the pandemic.

- Q60 **Chair:** As you would expect. Do you have any sense of the satisfaction ratings? Douglas Ross asked about complaints. Have there been complaints about the daily briefings, and how do you respond to them?



Gary Smith: Through the past 16 or 17 months, there have been quite a number of complaints, but not all saying the same thing. Some people have complained that we are broadcasting the briefings; some people have complained that we have not broadcast the briefings for long enough. We have had audience interest and complaints in different directions—and a fair bit of it.

Q61 **Chair:** As you said in your introductory comments, the last time you were here the conversation was mainly about the excitement that was generated by the launch of the BBC Scotland channel. I want to give you an opportunity to tell the Committee exactly how you think it has gone and progressed. There has been reference to how many people have watched “The Nine”. We also have some disappointing figures for some of the other output on the BBC Scotland channel. Could you address that in your response? Give us an indication about how you feel it has gone. Has it met your expectations? What do you see as the future for the BBC Scotland channel?

Steve Carson: Initially, it has exceeded the expectations and targets set for it. It is no mean feat, and that is a tribute to the Scottish creative sector as a whole, to have significantly upped the volume and, in many cases, the quality of the offer for audiences in Scotland and beyond, and to go from a standing start to be the largest digital channel. What we mean by that is that there are five so-called terrestrials—BBC One to Channel 5—which are very prominent on the EPG, with long-established titles and large content budgets as well. For digital channels, BBC Scotland is the largest by reach. It reaches more homes in Scotland than any other, including household names such as Sky One, BBC Four and ITV3. In fact, our reach figure in the annual report of 21% is close to Channel 5. That is exceptional. A very successful digital channel would have the reach of maybe about 10% to 12%. We are at 21%. We are tracking across this year and are now the biggest channel by share. ITV2 with “Love Island” used to pip us at the post but this year has been very strong. That is a success.

The other thing is that the channel is not an end in itself. It is a vehicle to help a lot more high-quality portrayal content compared to elsewhere. We talked about the iPlayer figures. Louise will have a figure about how many million people look at our content on iPlayer within Scotland—our key focus—but also representing Scotland across the UK and globally. The creative sector has risen to that occasion, challenge and new investment. Again, investment in the channel then bleeds through to the rest of the schedule. As we talked about with “The Nine”, we can use the news titles and build them on the channel, bring up new talent that can be on BBC One Scotland and beyond. That is, essentially, the strategy.

Q62 **Chair:** I am keen to hear from Louise, but before we do, can I ask how these budgetary constraints will impact on the channel? Can you give reassurance that the quality on the BBC Scotland channel will be continued, and there will be no question that it will go forward and be a feature of BBC Scotland’s output?



Steve Carson: As I say, the overall content budget in the last annual report on accounts has been impacted by covid and ongoing savings made. However, we have remixed the content budget for Scotland and made a commitment to the channel. We also commissioned a key part of the news provision, "Reporting Scotland", which is on BBC One Scotland. Growing investment in Scotland through the Across the UK strategy, directly funded by BBC Scotland, with more network content coming in—that is the BBC's strategy for the remaining part of the charter.

Q63 **Chair:** Ms Thornton, do you want saying anything about the BBC Scotland channel?

Louise Thornton: I echo what Steve said. The channel is doing fantastically well. We are really pleased. One in five people are watching it. When we look at viewing habits, we know that video on demand is an increasing trend so when we are commissioning, we are increasingly thinking about iPlayer. We are encouraged to see 70 million views on iPlayer for our BBC Scotland content—that feels like the right direction of travel. We will continue thinking when we commission what this will look like on iPlayer. That also means we are working with the industry to define how to get good digital assets. The image on iPlayer is so important—it can make or break a show. That is a shift from what we have done previously, but we know how important that is. We know the importance of titles that have talking points as well. We want people in Scotland to be talking about our content and there to be take-away value for them. We want to get around Scotland and represent people's lives.

Building on what Steve said about talent development, a project close to my heart is "The Social". We built that as a talent-development project to connect with young people, hear new and diverse voices and stimulate the sector's content creation. It has been brilliant to bring through some of that talent from places such as "The Social" and "Short Stuff", which is a comedy digital-first strand. We bring that to the channel and expose that talent and those creatives to a wider and linear audience. We are looking to how we build that on iPlayer as well.

I have two other points to make. Live sports are so important to audiences in Scotland. We will continue to focus on that. On the BBC Scotland channel I will be looking at how we invest further in the women's game for football. We are looking at women's rugby. We absolutely want to think about what our portrayal content looks like as well. As I mentioned before, there is a big focus on premium, factual and scripted over the next few years, working with network but also for our own local spend as well.

Chair: Thank you for that. Andrew Bowie has some questions about BBC Radio Scotland.

Q64 **Andrew Bowie:** We have spent a lot of time talking about TV output and iPlayer so far, but we have not really spoken about radio. I am a massive radio fan. It seems that a lot of people [*Inaudible.*] some radio output over the course of a week, which is quite incredible, but Radio Scotland actually falls significantly behind BBC Radio 2 at a national level, at 18%



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reach. I just wondered what you might be doing at BBC Scotland to increase the reach of BBC Radio Scotland across the country, outwith the incredibly successful output that you have around football.

Louise Thornton: I can think of some things. First, we have fantastic programming coming through Radio Scotland. It does get us round the country. We want to actively do more. But what is really exciting is our broadcast first strategy. We are looking at how we commission for BBC Sounds and thinking about how we get that audio content that feels like it is going to reach a bigger audience, but can also play on Radio Scotland as well. We are looking at "Who Killed Emma?" and "The Doorstep Murder". Those series feel really high quality and they should absolutely have a place on Radio Scotland as well.

I am also keen that the commissioning team continue to think about how we work between radio and TV. I think breaking the news is a really good example of where we can do more of that. I also think radio can be a brilliant platform for new comedy development. Gavin Smith, who is our scripted commissioner, works really closely with Gareth Hydes and commissions for Radio Scotland. They just recently had a comedy series called "Saddled", which they both invested in, so we have really got that kind of strategic aim about how these platforms can work together and then get the most out of the content that we make.

It is really interesting when we look at music. I think it is brilliant that Gareth is looking at that. We have got a "BBC Introducing" show, which is high quality with new talent coming through, a big BBC brand. How does that fit with our coverage on television on something like TRNSMT? How can we make the most of those moments where we know they are big audience drivers? We know they are under-served audience drivers. We get a young audience for TRNSMT, so there is an opportunity for Radio Scotland right there to think about how we make sure that coverage feels seamless.

Steve Carson: We are also looking at our news provision across Scotland into Radio Scotland. Gary may want to comment on that.

Gary Smith: On one of the things that we did with news on Radio Scotland just before the pandemic started, we reshaped our three main news programmes across the day and changed them around a bit. We had done some audience research and what we wanted to try and do was increase the sense of engagement for our audiences to feel that these were programmes that were talking directly to them perhaps more than they had done, and I think that that has worked really well. Luckily, we managed to make those changes before the pandemic started, because I think all of our main news programmes across the day have been hugely important to listeners across Scotland during the pandemic for information about how their lives are changing.

So there is that, and I think perhaps of particular interest to you as well as Radio Scotland as a whole is the news opts that you were talking about. Again, during the pandemic they have been hugely valuable in breaking



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down Scotland-wide information about the pandemic to what is the situation in the north-east or the other five areas around the country where we do opts bulletins. Steve mentioned earlier that he visited Shetland recently. The programmes that we do, which are longer in Shetland and Orkney, are a fantastic resource for the communities there and a real model for being close to your listeners. I hope that the opt bulletins do that. They are shorter, obviously, around the rest of the country, but I hope they have been performing that function really successfully during these last 16 months.

Q65 Andrew Bowie: They have, and they are very good. My only question regarding the opts that [*Inaudible.*] is the fact that they are not available on a digital platform. If you are listening to Radio Scotland digitally, as increasing numbers are choosing to do, the opts are not available on that service. Is there a way for the BBC to address that, so that you can continue to listen to Radio Scotland on a digital platform and not have to switch to FM? I had to do that during the election period, when I was at home far more than I am at the moment, to listen to the news from the north-east.

Gary Smith: I do not know if Steve can help with that. One thing I would say on that is that the bulletins in Aberdeen—I think we have been putting three of them each day on to SoundCloud. I do not know if that is something that you or others know about.

Andrew Bowie: I have seen that, yes.

Gary Smith: It is an important point that you make about the availability of them. That is one thing. I am not sure if there is anything we can do around the FM/DAB issue.

Steve Carson: I think you have pulled out something significant there. As we get increasingly into digital distribution models, how does the opts content that we make get more easily discovered? That goes back to some of the earlier points. We are looking at that, and I think it is a good point of focus. We do workarounds, such as SoundCloud and so on, but integrating that within common BBC products, such as Sounds, would be significant. We are looking at it and trying to work out the best way to deliver that aim. I cannot give a promise or a timeline on that, but it is a recognisable point.

Q66 Andrew Bowie: Thank you. You will not be surprised that my last question is also about the north-east. When I was growing up in Aberdeenshire, Northsound Radio was dominant. I was amazed, looking at the figures today, that it remains so. I think 38% of weekly radio listeners in the north-east tune into Northsound. Combined with the Original 106, which is the other independent platform in the north-east that is owned by DC Thomson, the two stations make up 61% of listeners in the north-east. Do you think there are lessons for the BBC to learn from the success of local content providers, such as Northsound and Original, in somewhere such as the north-east? What are the BBC doing to increase production and output in the north? Obviously, we no longer



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have Robbie Shepherd every Saturday night, and I wonder what work might be being done—not to replace Robbie, obviously—to increase north-east voices on the national network of Radio Scotland?

Steve Carson: I think what you point to there is that people want to have access to content that feels, as we would say in the industry, relatable—it feels close to them, with people who sound like them and who look like them, and their stories. With BBC Scotland, clearly we are operating national services for Scotland, then inputting into pan-UK services as well. You pointed to the demand for as much local content as possible, and we will look overall at our overall mix. Again, covid has accentuated that.

Within the annual report, you see very strong growth in the use of BBC online products in Scotland—50-something to over 60-something. A large part of that is people driven by: “What is covid doing in my area?” As I say, we have bases around Scotland. Again, a big piece of work for us is how we maximise that. We already have access, facilities, resources and journalism. How do we make the most of that? How do we make the most impact with it? Louise has talked about the production activity that we have in Aberdeen, and maintaining that in the north-east is important, but how do we make sure that everyone knows we are visible and valuable in these communities? You raise a number of points that we are actively looking at.

Q67 **Andrew Bowie:** There has been huge growth in commercial radio over the past few years. We have seen Times Radio and LBC, among others, and other radio stations are popping up all over the place. Do you regard that at the BBC as a challenge or an opportunity to learn from these start-ups, which are moving into a space that the BBC once dominated?

Steve Carson: Competition is always important in any business and in any creative business. Again, the BBC sets out to serve audiences, not necessarily to dominate every aspect of the market, but you can always learn from what other people are doing. That is the straight answer to that.

Louise Thornton: Another point to make is that it is really beneficial in terms of talent development. What we have seen coming through—for example, we have a show called “A View from the Terrace” on channel, but the talent within that TV show started off with their own podcast. They were doing that really successfully, then we developed it into television. I can see that quite a few people we have brought through “The Social” have run their own podcasts or have come from the world of commercial radio, so that is another aspect to consider.

Steve Carson: One trend in commercial radio, of course, is syndication, where many of the big commercial players are syndicating shows across the UK and, potentially, from some of those local players you are talking about. Then BBC Scotland: there is an opportunity there. If you want to hear Scottish stories and Scottish voices, you would be turning to us. Potentially, the way the commercial market is going gives a strong opportunity for public service broadcasting in Scotland.



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Q68 Chair: Of course, another growing trend is the increasing use of streaming services, such as our friends in Netflix and Amazon. How do you assess the challenge and opportunities that presents and how is BBC Scotland responding to what is becoming a very busy, possibly even congested, marketplace?

Steve Carson: I think there are a number of things on that, Chair. Gary, Louise and I were all programme makers and having more people offering more programme production in the market is broadly a good thing. In terms of how we face into the competition, BBC iPlayer is a very significant streaming service. With the growth figures in the annual report and what we are currently tracking, it is very strongly growing and is a significant player as a streaming service in itself, including for younger audiences dominated by Netflix and YouTube, which is not a broadcaster, but it is in that competition for screen time.

The future of iPlayer is very strong. It is a technical point, but within the last year or so, the iPlayer conditions have moved from having to delete the content after 30 days to be able to have it there for a year or so and that is hugely powerful. Again, this is content the licence fee payer has paid for, they should have access to it and you can see iPlayer becoming much more of a destination and a much richer content mix. If you think about it, Netflix would not delete its best content after 30 days, but those were the terms of trade under which we were working. I think it has been a successful model, working with suppliers, Pact and the independent sector.

We are seeing Amazon making some titles in Scotland, and that is good. The key thing is, in terms of the impact of public service broadcasters in Scotland and the UK—and not just ourselves—on pre-covid figures, admittedly, PSBs based in the UK made 32,000 hours of programming. All streamers combined that year, 2019, made 200. So you can see the economic impacts in the creative sector that properly funded public service media in the UK, including Scotland, can make. People having access to great content is a good thing. We all subscribe to these things. They do different jobs. You won't go to Netflix to find out what is happening with covid in your area, but you will go to your public service broadcaster to do that. So we do slightly different things.

Q69 Chair: It is a fantastic opportunity for the broadcasting infrastructure in Scotland and opportunities for independent producers, for example, and all those associated with all the activities that are undertaken by BBC Scotland. You will possibly be looking at that. Is there any possibility and prospect that there might be partnership arrangements with some of the streaming services?

Steve Carson: One of the early titles for the channel, a large-scale feature documentary, was part-funded by BBC Scotland and Netflix. It was certainly one of the large streamers as well. So again, part of the story over the past few years in Scotland for us was not just the direct investment the BBC was putting in, but we were very actively working with producers very successfully to bring in other sources of funding. So



there are all sorts of collaboration and synergies there. As I say, the more money that is spent and invested in content creation, the better, but of course, a proportion of your subscription to the streamers goes on local content production. A huge proportion of your licence fee—I think 95%—goes on content creation, mostly in the UK. Obviously, we have global bureaux and so on, but that is the difference.

Q70 Chair: Lastly from me and probably for the session, on the growth of social media as a means to transmitting views. I look regularly at the BBC's output and at best it is mixed and possibly ambivalent. I am just wondering how you see the potential of that; whether it is something that you would be looking to utilise further in the future and just your views of that as a means and method to communicate news to the rest of Scotland.

Gary Smith: I think it is very important. We have put a lot of effort in the past few years into Facebook, Twitter and more recently Instagram. On Facebook now, we have more than 1 million followers of the BBC News Scotland account. On Twitter it is half a million. We have come to Instagram much more recently and it is a bit over 100,000. I suppose it goes to the duty of the BBC to have universality. We have got to give something to everyone, and we have got to go to places where people are. Particularly for younger people—I am thinking particularly of Instagram, here; that is something we have got into to try to reach younger people who might not be coming to our own services, to give them clear and accurate news, in a world where there is a lot of misinformation floating around on social media. I think we have an important function there.

Obviously, we want to be pushing people back to our own platforms—for example, the news app, which is well used by younger people as well as older people. We would rather people were getting their news from the BBC news app than on Instagram or Facebook, but we cannot ignore social media and say that we are only going to put our stuff on our own platforms. We have the hope, though, that by putting our content in places where on occasions younger people will see it, it will push them towards things like the news app and towards Sounds and the iPlayer. Louise has mentioned a couple of times the podcast series "Who Killed Emma?". That has done fantastically well on Sounds, but has also done really well on Spotify. I hope that we get that recognition; it is certainly our intention to get recognition for content that is accessed on something like Spotify, so that people are aware it is BBC content and will come back to us on our own platforms.

Chair: Thank you for that. Certainly, since the last time you were here the media landscape has changed significantly.

Q71 Andrew Bowie: Obviously social media is a great platform for news organisations and people involved in politics and current affairs to get our stories and messages out there. But there is a huge rise in the abuse—for want of a better phrase—of the people delivering that message, including of course BBC journalists. What is BBC Scotland doing to protect those journalists who are charged with going out and delivering the news, who



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then become subject to a tirade of abhorrent abuse on some social media platforms? What policies have you got in place to protect those journalists who are simply doing their job?

Gary Smith: That is a really good question and it is a really difficult issue for us. If the abuse gets to a certain level, we will report it to the police. That does not happen too often, but there are some occasions when it is significant enough to go to the police. We will sometimes report the platform that is putting stuff out that should not be going out anywhere. It is quite difficult below that. There things we can do: we can tell our individuals to block or mute people. Some of our journalists will respond, for example on Twitter. That is a good thing to do, if we can set the record straight. "No, this is what we said; we didn't say what you've claimed we said. This is what we said and here is the evidence of how we covered a certain story."

But there are occasions when, if our journalists are just getting abuse, that is actually what the trolls want; they want us to engage, and it is better not to. It is the same in public life of all sorts, isn't it, for MPs and MSPs? One of the stories we did recently, which got the most traction on social media, was an interview with the MP Carol Monaghan, who had a lot of abuse on social media which then became physical abuse as well, and she had to move to a safe house. We interviewed her and when we put her own story, as told by her, on our own website and on Facebook, I think 2.5 million people viewed that. A lot of people share the concerns of all sorts of people in public life, whether they are MPs or journalists, that things can get very unpleasant on social media. We do what we can, but it is quite difficult to combat it.

Q72 **Andrew Bowie:** Sorry, Chair, very quickly—although this might not be a simple answer, so I apologise. Connected to that, what is BBC Scotland doing to combat the rise of fake news? Often connected to the abuse that certain journalists might be getting is the idea that they are putting across their version of events, when the contrary is the case. Some people on social media platforms are presenting an alternative narrative that is false and, certainly in these times of coronavirus, dangerous. What is BBC Scotland doing to counter that trend at the minute?

Gary Smith: I would say a couple of things on that. One is, we try to counter it by what we publish, by being clear, accurate and impartial in our journalism on whatever platform. We also—this has not been possible too much over the covid period—engage a lot with people outside the BBC, with students, with schools. That is one of the key things. For all sorts of people in news, when they go out to meet groups of people, as I hope we will be able to start doing again soon, fake news is one of the key things we talk about. How people can identify it? Where can they go—not just to the BBC, but to other providers—to get fair, accurate and proper news? We engage with our content, and more directly with individuals and groups.

Andrew Bowie: Thank you.



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Chair: The piece with Carol was particularly powerful. I recognise that many people have watched that. All of us in public life—as you quite rightly noted—have all got issues with social media. It is something that we need to work with you guys on to improve the environment a little.

I thank you all for coming along this morning and for answering our questions so wholesomely and, obviously, with what we would expect from BBC values. Don't be strangers to the Committee. I know it has been a couple of years since we asked you last, but maybe we should have an ongoing arrangement to get you to come along to speak to us about a number of these issues that are important to our constituents in Scotland. But for today, thank you all very much for appearing before this Committee.