

Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [BBC Scotland](#), HC 1691

Wednesday 12 December 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 12 December 2018.

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Members present: Pete Wishart (Chair); Deidre Brock; David Duguid; Hugh Gaffney; Kirstene Hair; Christine Jardine; Ged Killen; John Lamont; Danielle Rowley.

Questions 1 - 79

Witnesses

I: Donalda MacKinnon, Director, BBC Scotland, Gary Smith, Head of News, BBC Scotland and Steve Carson, Head of Multiplatform Commissioning, BBC Scotland.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Donalda MacKinnon, Gary Smith and Steve Carson.

Q1 **Chair:** I welcome you all to a one-off session into BBC Scotland's new channel, which we are all very interested in and excited about. Just for the record, could you say who you are and who you represent? We will maybe come to you, Donalda, for that; maybe you can introduce your fellow witnesses with you and say anything by way of a short introductory statement.

Donalda MacKinnon: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Scottish Affairs Committee. I will just introduce myself. I am Donalda MacKinnon. I am Director of BBC Scotland. I am accompanied today by two of my colleagues, Gary Smith, our head of news and current affairs, and Steve Carson, head of all commissioning in BBC Scotland, multi-platform, radio, television and online.

Last year the BBC Director-General, Tony Hall, announced plans for significant growth in the BBC's output in Scotland, including the new channel that will launch next February. This new Scottish channel will create over 900 hours of original content a year on a channel that will be confident and outward-looking and which will seek to reflect modern Scotland. Steve, Gary and their teams are working hard to make sure that our programmes will reflect the whole of Scotland, while providing an opportunity to showcase and nurture new Scottish talent and attract younger audiences to public service content.

The BBC's investment has also delivered an enhanced offer for BBC Alba, with new weekend news, an increase in programming for children and an ambition to create additional hours of original programmes there, too. The growth will bring significant new jobs: 80 extra roles in journalism, over 50 of which have already been appointed; 88 new jobs in design and engineering by the end of March 2019; and additional posts to support the new channel and growth in other parts of the organisation. That will take us to around 270 new posts by the end of March 2019, including 10 trainee journalists and 10 apprentices. That figure also includes the BBC funding of 21 local democracy reporters who work on local newspapers around Scotland. That is the biggest investment in broadcasting and journalism in Scotland in a generation. These changes are also going some way towards increasing the amount of licence fee income that is spent in Scotland relative to what is raised there.

It is undeniably a really exciting time for broadcasting in Scotland. When I talk with colleagues at our 13 BBC Scotland bases around the nation and when meeting with the industry, I am always struck by the importance of our charter responsibility to help to grow the creative industries in the nations and regions. I think that this new investment is a critical part of that story, though of course the BBC cannot act in isolation. We intend to collaborate more closely with Creative Scotland as it strengthens its television and screen content through the new Screen



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Unit, and a new memorandum of understanding between the BBC and Creative Scotland is nearing completion. Indeed, this feels like a pivotal moment for the sector generally in Scotland, as alongside Screen Scotland and the BBC's new channel, the Committee will be aware that Channel 4 is setting up a new hub in Glasgow and that the National Film and Television School in Scotland has been established in Pacific Quay in Glasgow, with support from the BBC and the Scottish Government.

We are counting weeks rather than months now until the new Scotland channel takes its place as part of that evolving Scottish broadcasting landscape and we are really pleased to be able to discuss the preparations for the new service with you here today.

Q2 Chair: We are very grateful. Thank you for that. Just to get things started, you have 24 February as the starting date for this. Can you just explain to the Committee what you still need to do to get that in place? Could you assure us that there will be no further slippage in that particular date?

Donalda MacKinnon: Yes, I can confirm that we are on track to launch on Sunday, 24 February. It is fair to say that it is a pretty busy period, but we are very confident that we will absolutely launch on that date. I do not know if Steve wishes to take that question in terms of what is going on.

Q3 Chair: "Still Game", is that in the launch?

Steve Carson: Yes. As we announced recently, audiences in Scotland are going to get a chance to see the new series—sadly, the final series—of "Still Game" first on the channel. It will be part of our launch night event.

Q4 Chair: Great. There is no doubting your ambition when it comes to this new channel. You see it as, "an ambitious and innovative destination for those seeking to see more of their lives, stories and interests on screen". What does that mean in practice?

Donalda MacKinnon: Unlike the situation as it exists currently with us operating under BBC One and BBC Two, we will for the first time beyond BBC Alba have the real estate, if you like—a platform on which to reflect people's lives in a way that we have not had before. I think that volume of content that we are going to be able to offer audiences in Scotland offers us the opportunity to reflect the length and breadth of Scotland in a way that we have not done. I am confident that this will involve new stories, stories that we have never heard before; new voices, voices that we have never heard before; new talent. But it will also allow us to tell the stories that have always been there and that we have not yet had the opportunity to tell.

Q5 Chair: Why do you think there is this need for a new, dedicated channel in Scotland? What in particular do you think that it will provide and what role will it have within our culture and political life?



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Donalda MacKinnon: I think that it will have a number of roles culturally, politically, economically, but critically the most important role it will have will be to serve audiences better, in my view. We already have a national radio service in English and Gaelic. We already have BBC Alba. We operate on BBC One and BBC Two. We are very active on digital platforms, but for the first time we have a real opportunity now to do something that we have never been able to do before. Culturally, that has to be a good story for Scotland. We will be able to cover the cultural agenda in a way that we have not hitherto been able to do as well or in the volume that I think we should be doing for a nation the size of Scotland.

Equally, for the creative industries this is hugely important. For every pound spent it will deliver £2 in value to the economy, but it will allow new independent production companies to emerge. Steve can cover this off, but the amount of business that we are currently engaged in with independent production companies in Scotland and indeed our own production companies within BBC Scotland and BBC Studios is also something that is a really positive story.

Q6 **Chair:** We know something about the programming that you are going to be putting in place for the new channel to be broadcast from 7 pm to midnight each evening. Is it correct that there will be a dedicated news programme at 9 o'clock and 50% of this will be new programming and new commissioning? Are you able to achieve all of this in the £32 million that has been set aside for this channel? Is this something that is realistic and feasible for the money that you have available to you?

Steve Carson: Yes. We have gone out with the creative sector as a whole and been careful in the channel budget that we have so that it is not a "one size fits all" tariff. We have some tariffs later in the evening, post-11 pm that are very low, which we are working with some existing digital content, but we have other tariffs on the channel that are equivalent to what you would get on BBC One. The sector as a whole has responded really well and we are able to build a schedule that covers all the genres that we have ambitions to do. While we are able to achieve some of the more expensive genres—drama and comedy—those are expensive genres and we have ambitions to do as much of that as possible.

Q7 **Chair:** With the options that are available to the viewer now with the arrival of all the new internet programmes, Netflix and Amazon, are you confident that you are going to get an audience for this new channel? Have you done research that shows that this is what people are wanting? How confident are you that we will have sufficient viewers to sustain this?

Steve Carson: There are two things there. First, the research would show that audiences in Scotland felt that television in Scotland was not reflecting contemporary Scotland enough, not just BBC TV, all TV. There is a market demand there. Existing television services that we do provide, the ops on BBC One and BBC Two, would tend to outperform



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what the equivalent network programme is. It would appear there is a strong demand for Scottish content.

Television as well is resilient. Scots watch a lot of television. The key thing with the channel as well is it sits within a whole portfolio of our services, including digital services, radio and BBC One Scotland. The channel fundamentally is a step change in the amount of original programming for audiences in Scotland—over 900 new hours every year. Audiences will be able to find that on the channel. They will find that on the iPlayer; it will have a dedicated space. They will find it through our social media feeds. BBC Scotland already has some of the biggest and most vibrant social media accounts in online spaces within the BBC.

We are confident that there is a lot more content. We are confident that audiences are looking for the content and there are ways to get it out to them beyond the linear TV channel.

Donalda MacKinnon: We acknowledge that these are challenging sums of money to deliver the ambition that we have, but we also said that we would work closely with colleagues elsewhere in the BBC, and indeed with colleagues beyond the BBC, to enhance that budget where we could.

Chair: We have some questions on co-commissioning that we will come to in due course, but right now Danielle Rowley wants to come in.

Q8

Danielle Rowley: My apologies for being late, and I hope that this has not been covered in your opening statement. I am very excited about the new channel. I worked at STV when STV launched their City apps and then the City TV channels, and I had friends who then worked at STV2 and who now do not have a job. What lessons have you learned from the STV2 model? Is there any learning there about why, if there is a need for it, it did not work with STV?

Donalda MacKinnon: It is sad for us that STV2 did not work. I think that plurality of offering in Scotland has to be a good thing, and a very good thing for us, which is why I said in my opening remarks that the Channel 4 hub locating in Scotland is a really good thing for the industry at large.

Of course there are lessons. Our investment is probably significantly more than what was invested in STV2, and I am also delighted that in some ways some of our investment has created additional opportunity for some of those who might have lost jobs in that particular venture. Yes, we learn lessons. Yes, it will be different. I do think that our emphasis will very much be on marketing. It is a busy environment, the broadcasting environment. We do realise that there is a proliferation of choice for people, so it will be important for us to be telling audiences that it is there and doing that regularly. Marketing and using our other services to point in its direction will be really important.

Gary Smith: Could I add something on the news on STV2 compared with what we are going to be doing? STV2 produced a decent news



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programme at 7 o'clock each night, but they did not have the investment for original journalism there. It was a combination of what had been on the STV programmes and on ITN. I think that they did it very well, but they were not able to offer to audiences something that was new and different. That is the biggest difference between what they were able to produce and what we are going to produce in our news hour.

We have a substantial amount of investment. We have been able to hire additional journalists of various sorts, and we have a decent coverage budget to allow us to bring stories to people and treatments of stories to people at 9 o'clock that they will not have seen anywhere else. That, in combination with the quality of what we are doing, is what we are building our hopes on that we will attract an audience.

Q9 Deidre Brock: I know that there will be an extra 80 journalists employed as a result of these plans for the new channel, which is very welcome news. You mentioned regional coverage and I noticed that you will not be increasing the number of regional journalists. At least we cover east Edinburgh and Lothians, we have north-east, Orkney and Shetland, I think it is. I think there are six different regions, but you will not be increasing those. Does that mean most of those journalists or all of them will be Central Belt based?

Gary Smith: No. We have put a lot of effort into hiring journalists around the country. For example, we currently have a very small presence in Dundee. We have already substantially increased that. We have put an additional correspondent into Dundee in a new role, an innovation correspondent. You might have heard her on the air already. She is called Laura Goodwin and she has been doing stories from that part of the country. We are putting an extra reporter in there in addition to her, an extra camera journalist. We are doing the same in Inverness and Aberdeen. Yes, we have a lot of people in Glasgow and Edinburgh. We have additional correspondents in Edinburgh as well, so we have a spread around the country.

Q10 Deidre Brock: That is good to hear. I was going on the submission that you did in the proposal, which suggested that that would not be happening.

Gary Smith: It is one of our primary aims with the news programme to reflect the whole country. We have been, I think rightly, criticised sometimes in the past for being too Central Belt focused and we are very keen to spread our journalism around the country.

Q11 John Lamont: Even after this investment by the BBC, the proportion of spending in Scotland as a chunk of the licence fee that is raised in Scotland will be less than what is spent in Northern Ireland and Wales. I was wondering if you were planning any further expenditure to try to rebalance that imbalance.

Donalda MacKinnon: Yes. The capturing of the full investment in Scotland probably will not appear in our annual report and accounts until



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this coming year and probably not until the following year, when I think the total spend on the channel will be reported. Equally, there is a commitment to maintaining our network spend and ensuring that the £20 million of new investment that the DG promised when we appeared in front of the Scottish committee will be there. We anticipate that we will be reaching around 80% of licence fee collected by 2021.

- Q12 **John Lamont:** In terms of the balance between local production and local content, clearly I can see the attraction of spending money on jobs and creating activity within Scotland, but is it not better to get more Scottish content as opposed to just spending money on the jobs, if that makes sense?

Donalda MacKinnon: Absolutely. Obviously it takes human resource to create the content and I mentioned the jobs here today. It is very much about creating additional content for Scottish audiences, which we have also said would have read-across into other services, whether radio, digital or indeed Gaelic services. It is very much about creating content, but equally the content that is produced in Scotland by the BBC in Scotland, but also by independent production companies for network channels—BBC One, Two, Three and Four and our network radio services—is also very important. It is very important to the creative ecology, but also very important in terms of serving audiences and ensuring that Scotland is well represented across the UK.

- Q13 **John Lamont:** How much Scottish content do we get just now across the BBC network?

Donalda MacKinnon: I cannot quantify it in absolute hours, but we produce around about—

Steve Carson: It is above 8% of spend and hours that are made in Scotland.

- Q14 **John Lamont:** How does that compare to other parts of the United Kingdom?

Donalda MacKinnon: It is proportionate to the population in Scotland, which is what Ofcom targets us to produce. We tend to have overshot that 8% and I think that we will continue to do so. We can have peaks and troughs based on transmission patterns. Sometimes we can fall below. We fell below what we were projecting that we would spend last year because of a number of high-cost network programmes that did not transmit before the end of the financial year. One drama falling out of the equation or two episodes of "Still Game", for example, can alter the reporting on these figures. What we projected in that is we were predicting that we would transmit them before the end of the financial year. If they do not transmit before the end of the financial year, that affects the figures, but they will be captured in this year's financial report.

- Q15 **Chair:** Why has there always been a historically low spend in Scotland?



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Mr Lamont is absolutely right. Even with this new £30 million included, you will still only be coming to something like 74.5% spend in Scotland. This goes up from 68.8%, but Wales gets 92.3%. I know they have “Doctor Who” and all the facilities in Cardiff, but why has there always been this historic low in Scotland when it comes to spend? Another figure is Ofcom’s from 2015: £320 million from Scottish licence fee payers was raised, but only 54.6% of that revenue was spent in Scotland. Why does that happen?

Donalda MacKinnon: If we go back 10 years to 2008, the network television spend in Scotland was sitting at about 2.3% or 3%, so we have come some distance in the last 10 years on improving that picture. Is it as good as I would like it to be or as you would like it to be? Possibly not, but what we have to take into consideration is that it is the “Doctor Who” effect in a way. There was to have been created at that time in 2008 a drama hub somewhere beyond London, and it just so happened that the executive producer of “Doctor Who”, when they wanted to reinvent “Doctor Who”, happened to live in Wales. The decision was made then that they would create a drama hub in Wales. That is very high cost, potentially low volume, and I suppose what I would say is we have a broad mix. We produce everything from Scotland for network, from drama to comedy, factual, daytime—high-volume, probably low-cost hours, but nevertheless delivering very good services to audiences and also delivering quite a lot into the creative economy.

While it is not quite at the figure that they are at, we also have to consider that they are smaller countries. Northern Ireland and Wales have smaller populations and less of a licence fee collection. Then again, there is the amount of content that comes from Scotland that is never quantified in these Ofcom figures—big events like the big music event that happened in Scone this year. There is a lot of activity happening in Scotland that we would never count. There is also the European championships. Then again there is—

Q16 **Chair:** Just on that, that is not included in this spend in Scotland?

Donalda MacKinnon: No, not qualifying spend, so we cannot report that as our spend, although that does mean an injection into the economy in Scotland when these big events happen.

Q17 **Deidre Brock:** In the Ofcom proposal you talk about the potential for co-commissioning and how that could mean that you help deliver increased content on a limited budget. Could you talk a little bit about that and expand on how you see that working in the future?

Steve Carson: It is working in practice, as I mentioned. The creative sector in Scotland as a whole—the independent producers and the BBC producers—has responded very well to the opportunities that the channel presents, but also the challenges of working in different tariffs.

Co-commissioning has been a part of that. We have a number of productions co-commissioned with the BBC network, for example.



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Producers have been very good at going out and getting distribution funding. Screen Scotland is coming through. We recently had a drama that we have agreed to co-fund with them. In preparation for this, we had a look at a range of about eight titles, and for £3.5 million of our investment another £3.5 million roughly was raised from other sources, including other parts of the BBC. That model is already paying dividends and it is something that we are keen to continue.

Q18 Deidre Brock: Can you give us examples? You mentioned eight different productions, was it?

Steve Carson: Yes. I am just conscious of titles that we have announced and have not announced yet.

Q19 Deidre Brock: I am enjoying "Rise of the Clans" by the way. I note that that is a BBC Studios production. I have seen the first episode of that; it is very good.

Steve Carson: Yes, it is for BBC One Scotland, our channel, but that is an example that is co-funded between BBC Scotland, BBC Four, and I think BBC Worldwide as a distributor put money into that. It is a production model that we are keen to explore.

Q20 Deidre Brock: Got you, okay—so, feeding in from that. Could I ask about the opportunities for co-commissioning with BBC Alba? I remember when the Director-General announced the new channel he also spoke about an enhanced BBC Alba, the extra hours for "An Là" of course on the weekend and an ambition to create an additional 100 hours of original programmes. I just wondered what examples there are of those new programmes and what kind of funding you would expect the BBC to be putting into them. Can we have an assurance that those programmes will not simply be English language programmes with Gaelic subtitles and that that will not be part of those original 100 hours?

Donalda MacKinnon: We want to take as creative an approach to that arrangement as we possibly can. It is hugely important to me, as I think it is to audiences in Scotland generally, that the two services complement one another and that the distinctiveness that BBC Alba commands is not removed. It is important that we do engage in co-commissioning around big music events, but also sporting events. We are already seeing economies of scale happening in terms of what we secure around sports rights. We are also very keen to look at co-commissioning big factual pieces. We are co-commissioning a documentary about the Islay disaster, which will transmit shortly.

There is also the collaborations that we can achieve not just within Scotland but across the BBC. Collaboration with children's, for example, has created new brands for Gaelic, new CBBC Gaelic and new CBeebies Gaelic. It has allowed us to build a new studio in Glasgow, where we are making new children's programmes, originations and versions, which is delivering around about 60 hours of additional children's content.



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It is hugely important to us to work in concert with BBC Alba to achieve their ambitions, but also to achieve ours. That ambition to have the read-across of an additional 100 hours remains firmly on the table. I am confident that we can achieve that. We should understand that however that happens—and there will be different approaches involved in that—it does release money for them then to commission or for us to commission new Gaelic content as well for Gaelic services.

Q21 Deidre Brock: Are you saying that 100 hours, then, is including that 60 hours of children's programming?

Donalda MacKinnon: Not necessarily, but I think that it has to be taken into the equation, what we can deliver together for Gaelic audiences. I think that it has to be acknowledged that that is important. The value of the BBC to BBC Alba is hugely important.

Q22 Deidre Brock: Okay. I was wondering about BBC-funded drama on BBC Alba, because as I understand it there has been no new drama funded for 10 years. Last year the BBC contributed 84 hours to S4C, which is the Welsh language channel. It is a fairly stark contrast and I just wondered what your ambitions are there for drama. As I understand it, there is only about three hours per year of originated MG Alba drama at the moment.

Donalda MacKinnon: I understand that it has been a long-term ambition. I think that it is right that it should be there. It is difficult. Funding is tight. We have to find new ways of delivering that because it is an audience expectation that we should be able to.

Q23 Deidre Brock: Doesn't the BBC have a responsibility towards minority languages? I notice that that is quite a contrast in amounts, isn't it, in terms of the support that they give S4C and the support they give BBC Alba. Is there anything that you can do as the head of BBC Scotland to perhaps encourage central BBC to think a little bit more about that?

Donalda MacKinnon: I am in constant dialogue about that and if anybody imagines that I am not, then they are mistaken. There are different pressures on the BBC. I think that the S4C/BBC licence fee funding context is very different. The histories are different. The legal position of the languages is different. What I can say is that policies are all very well and it is important to have them, but I would far rather see a translation of a real commitment to Gaelic in terms of broadcasting it every day, which is what we do, that commitment having been there for a long time, and indeed the investment having increased over time by the BBC. What I certainly try to do in BBC Scotland is ensure that every penny that is invested in Scotland can have a benefit to the entire community, not just BBC Alba and Radio nan Gàidheal, but all of our other services as well.

Q24 Deidre Brock: Lastly, could I ask about the potential for cannibalising, if you like, some of BBC Alba's programming, such as "Eòrpa", which has been a huge success for the channel, and the football matches, which again have been very successful? You talked about co-commissioning in



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sport. Does that mean that you might start putting some of the football matches on to the new channel? How do you envisage that working?

Donalda MacKinnon: Again, I think that it is about working complementarily together to ensure that we are not cannibalising. Any new kid on the block is going to possibly—potentially—take some eyes away from one service to another, but as I said, it is ensuring that the distinctiveness is there. The commissioning teams are working very closely together. I know that Steve cares as passionately as I do that BBC Alba continues to be the success that it has been.

Q25 **Christine Jardine:** It is nice to see you again. PACT is worried. It has some concerns that Ofcom's new rules about what counts as out-of-London programming might act as a disincentive in some way. Do you share those concerns?

Donalda MacKinnon: A disincentive, sorry, in what?

Christine Jardine: In terms of commissioning.

Donalda MacKinnon: I have been given every assurance that that cannot happen. We have some clear targets imposed and regulated by Ofcom that we take very seriously. I am absolutely assured by my network colleagues that that will not be the case, and certainly there have been no signals to date that that is the case. Would you say that, Steve?

Steve Carson: Yes. We are currently engaging with Ofcom. To give the Committee some background on it, Ofcom has set both targets for network spend, the cash involved in the production, and the hours, how many hours are generated as well, so there are two separate targets there. In the consultation process, they have indicated—and I know PACT has responded to it, as have we—that they are minded to define the network hour by the service it first plays on. Potentially that could mean that if they are investing in a co-commission with BBC Scotland we obviously would like to run it first on the Scotland channel, partly to add value for audiences in Scotland, but also because we are trying to have an origination hours target.

Under one definition, that potentially would not count as a network hour and they would not get any credit for it, which could inhibit them from co-investing. If it was the other way around, if it went on network first, then essentially we are counting it as a repeat, so then it might be an inhibitor for us to co-invest. We engaged with Ofcom and it is in the middle of a consultation, and I know Pact has been raising that issue.

Q26 **Christine Jardine:** Can I just ask for a clarification on an earlier point that was raised about Wales and the amount of money that is spent in Wales? You talked about "Doctor Who". There is a huge imbalance in television production, isn't there, between drama and news and current affairs and other departments. If you look at it in money, in financial terms, you will get one percentage, but if we were to compare them in



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terms of hours and time and jobs in the productions in Scotland as opposed to Wales, how does that balance out?

Donalda MacKinnon: There are more jobs and there are more hours coming out of Scotland, for sure. However, Ofcom has also recently introduced hours targets, so that is an ongoing issue for both Wales and Northern Ireland to increase the volume of content coming from these nations.

Q27 **Christine Jardine:** If you look at the money, it might give you a slightly misleading figure and we are actually doing quite well in terms of the number of hours of TV coming out of Scotland.

Donalda MacKinnon: I do think that we are. We could always have more. Equally, when we take into account the investment for a new channel, a new news hour, I would say that in activity terms we are doing quite well.

Q28 **Chair:** The arrangement with DCMS for the out-of-London production still stands at 8%, is that correct? BBC Scotland is currently meeting that, would that be correct too?

Donalda MacKinnon: Scotland is 8%, but yes, 50% out of London.

Q29 **Chair:** There are the three criteria, aren't there, which counts as out of London?

Donalda MacKinnon: That is right.

Q30 **Chair:** There must be a substantive business and production base outside the M25, curiously. At least 70% of production budget must be spent in the UK outside the M25 and at least 50% of the production talent by cost must have their usual place of employment outside the M25. The M25 is pretty critical when it comes to these related issues. Does "Question Time" still count therefore as a Scottish production?

Donalda MacKinnon: It does.

Q31 **Chair:** Does it meet all these particular criteria?

Donalda MacKinnon: You only have to meet two out of the three criteria, and the most important is the substantive base. That trumps the other two. There is a substantive base for *Mentorn* in Scotland, who make "Question Time".

Q32 **Chair:** I think that a lot of people found it quite curious that "Question Time" does count as a Scottish production.

Donalda MacKinnon: I understand.

Q33 **Chair:** There is nothing about the programme that is distinctively Scottish, other than perhaps the fact that some of these criteria—beyond the M25—seem to apply. Is it possible for some of these commissioners to tweak the rules a little bit in order to try to badge it up as an out-of-London production?



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Donalda MacKinnon: I genuinely do not think there is. I understand why that perception perhaps exists, but no, we are very tightly regulated and we have to prove, say in the case of “Question Time”, that there is a substantive base in Scotland held by the most senior editorial figure, and “Question Time” is based in Scotland, but also that 50% of the staff—there is a team in Scotland that makes “Question Time”. Seventy per cent of the spend might not meet it, so as long as two of the three criteria are fulfilled, but would we want to be making something like “Question Time”? Would we want to be making something about Chinese art from Scotland? Yes, I would say we would. We want to be as outward-looking as we are inward-looking, and “Question Time” is a very important brand for us to be creating and looking after.

Chair: There are some news-related aspects of the new programming that I might touch on, but I know Christine wants to come in.

Q34 **Christine Jardine:** No, it has just been answered, because I was going to say surely, if my memory serves me correctly, the announcement that “Question Time” was going to be done by Mentorn out of Scotland was a huge feather in BBC Scotland’s cap.

Donalda MacKinnon: Yes, it was and it continues to be.

Q35 **Chair:** Could I ask about the security of the funding, particularly with the plans for the licence for over-75s? Can you make sure that we are confident that this will happen, given the hit that the BBC might take if it has to pay for the licence fees for the over-75s?

Donalda MacKinnon: Chairman, you rightly refer to what is currently under consultation—the policy of assuming responsibility for over-75s’ licence fee from 2020. We have embarked on a consultation with audiences, underpinned by a report that outlines various options that the BBC might have at its disposal. The amount of money that we are talking about here poses some serious challenges for the BBC, in the region of £745 million, roughly a fifth of the BBC’s budget, as the Director-General has pointed out, equivalent to all that is spent today on all of BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, BBC News channel, CBBC and CBeebies. That is not to say that any of these services would necessarily be directly affected, but that is the nature of the challenge for the BBC.

Whatever the situation is, there is no doubt that there will be an impact on services. We cannot rule that out if it is the case that following the consultation, which ends in February, the BBC board decision—which will happen in the summer of 2019—is indeed to take on the full responsibility. There are a number of options, obviously, as part of the report that underpins the consultation, and we are hoping that many people and organisations across the UK participate in that consultation to inform that decision, which will be a decision for the BBC board in 2019. As with all BBC services, yes, we will just form part of that portfolio and any decisions that will be taken at that time.

Q36 **Kirstene Hair:** Following on from that point, as part of the consultation I



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think that you could either abolish it entirely, have a 50% reduction, have particular age variants or means-test it. I wondered how deeply you have looked into social isolation and loneliness within particularly more vulnerable older people over the age of 75.

Donalda MacKinnon: We absolutely do acknowledge and accept that and understand as well just how much of a companion the BBC services are to old people and over-75s. We also recognise the vulnerability of some of that over-75 cohort, being among the poorest in society. This is something that we take very seriously, but as I said, we await the results of the consultation before the BBC board is equipped to make a decision on it. It is very challenging.

Q37 **Kirstene Hair:** But that will come into your decision making?

Donalda MacKinnon: Absolutely.

Q38 **Hugh Gaffney:** If you are very successful, and Scottish dramas have been successful over the years—"Still Game", "Taggart", dramas and all the rest of it—and all the people are wanting to buy your product, will that money be reinvested to let you go beyond 2020? Is that a trial for 2020? Are you able to sell that as a profit to put money back in?

Steve Carson: It depends who makes it. If production companies come to us and it is their IP, the BBC gets some return on it, but quite rightly the rest is returned to them. A big part of what we are doing on the channel is looking at programming, whether it is scripted programming and comedy/drama that could have a life elsewhere, first and foremost for audiences in Scotland, but we are also looking at types of programming such as formats, whether that is the next "Bake Off", the next "MasterChef". Those can be very valuable intellectual properties, and if we can get a Scottish supplier and the channel is a space to try things out, we can do the pilots with them, as we have all year, we can go to series 1, and that is something they can go to the international markets with. We have our version for our audiences, but they have something they can then sell. There is real value in that business and we would be very hopeful that we can bring money into the creative sector that way.

Q39 **Chair:** Lastly, on the over-75s, would the impact be felt across every sector and feature within the BBC and would it be applied equally? Everybody mentions the cost of CBeebies and BBC Four all put together. Obviously that is not going to happen; they will still be there. Are there any plans from the BBC about how, if this is to be met by the BBC and this hit has to be taken, the costs of this will be deducted from your programming schedule?

Donalda MacKinnon: We are not committing to any of that at this stage, Chairman, simply because we are in the process of a consultation and we want to take on board every view that is submitted to us. Depending on what the BBC board decides, there are implications



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potentially for all services, potentially for one service more than another. I could not really answer that question.

Q40 **Chair:** There is no view yet about how this would be deducted from current services?

Donalda MacKinnon: No, absolutely not.

Q41 **Chair:** It is a little bit unfortunate that you are just getting up and running, where this might be a feature of some of the spend that you would otherwise expect from a new programme. Have you made any provisions for that at all or are you still planning your programming schedule on the basis that all the money allocated will be delivered?

Donalda MacKinnon: I think that we all have to plan with a view to there being a future. Certainly in launching a new service I would not be advocating that we do anything other than that. The BBC will have to look across all its services and ours would potentially be part of that landscape.

Q42 **David Duguid:** News and current affairs programming looks likely to form a large part of the new channel's offer. How will the news programming differentiate itself from other BBC news programmes, which also cover Scotland?

Gary Smith: The main news programme at 9 o'clock for an hour each weeknight has a different agenda, so that is the place I would start on that. This is a programme that will cover international, UK and Scottish news, whereas, as you all know, "Reporting Scotland" we describe as a national news programme for Scotland. We do not do foreign news on there and we do not do much from outside Scotland, so there is a clear difference in that.

The other important thing that I would say is "Reporting Scotland" is half an hour, like most TV bulletins, like the 6 o'clock network news or the 10 o'clock, and there is a limited amount you can do in a programme like that. You have to report the news of the day. We have an hour each night, so it gives us much more opportunity to get into more depth in stories, to get into more analysis, to be able to conduct live interviews off the back of stories, which is a real advantage. It is something that in the research we did when we were thinking about this programme came back to us from audiences, that they wanted more analysis. They sometimes feel they do not get enough analysis. Brexit is perhaps a good example, in that it is a very complicated subject and in a fairly short treatment on a news bulletin it is quite difficult sometimes for anyone to follow exactly what is going on. When we have more time to explain and analyse and interview people about it, I think that you will see a very different programme from what we do on TV news at the minute.

We have obviously on our radio news in Scotland, on BBC Scotland, had an international, UK and Scottish agenda for many, many years on "Good



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Morning Scotland" and our other radio programmes, but we have not had the opportunity to do that on the television in Scotland before.

The other thing that I would mention now is that you probably know that we are commissioning a political debate programme for the new channel as well. Steve and I are in the process of doing that just now, which will start when the channel goes on the air at the end of February. This is something that I have wanted to do for a long time, since I have been in Scotland, and it is fantastic to have the opportunity to do this now. I think that that will be a significant addition to what we can offer on TV as a proper, in-depth political debate programme. We have not quite worked out the format yet, but there will clearly be some kind of panel and some kind of audience and a presenter, and we will be able to look at all the issues of the day, but from a Scottish perspective.

Q43 David Duguid: More like a "Question Time" format than "Politics Scotland"?

Gary Smith: Yes, in shorthand terms, it is our own BBC Scotland version of a "Question Time" format, that is right.

Q44 David Duguid: I look forward to receiving more media bids all around the table probably. Obviously the so-called "Scottish Six" was proposed and rejected, apparently on the grounds that there was not much of a gap in terms of appreciation for the UK-wide "News at Six". Have you found such a gap for the news at 10 pm? It seems reasonable that, for all but the most avid news viewers, a "Scottish Nine" would have an effect here. Is there something different about the 9 o'clock version from the previously proposed 6 o'clock version?

Gary Smith: As you would know only too well, we thought long and hard about what is known as the "Scottish Six". We have thought about it for probably 20 years. One of the issues with that was that what we do in the BBC at 6 o'clock, the news hour, is currently quite popular with a lot of audiences. That style of half an hour of network news and then half an hour of news in Scotland a lot of people do like. What we are doing at 9 o'clock is clearly very different.

We were doing some pilot programmes for the 9 o'clock news last week and one of the big stories was about protests in Paris. On our pilots we were able to dedicate quite a lot of that hour-long programme to one subject there, which is a very different proposition from what you get with the two half-hours. Because what we do at 6 o'clock and 10 o'clock as well is popular with a lot of viewers, what we are doing is offering something in addition to that. It will be a different kind of programme. We would hope that people will still watch other programmes on BBC One as well, but what they get is a different perspective on the news, wherever it is coming from, on this new programme we are making.

Q45 Deidre Brock: I wanted to raise the trust issue, because the BBC's own research has shown that you do have a problem with trust up in



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Scotland, in fairly stark contrast again to other parts of the UK. I am sure there will be action being taken to address that. Could you tell us exactly what those steps are and how the corporation thinks it is doing so far on that?

Gary Smith: Are you talking about in the news?

Deidre Brock: Yes, news and current affairs.

Gary Smith: In terms of trust, there have been different reports and different surveys on that. One I came across quite recently just a few months ago was an Ofcom report, which said that getting on for 80% of viewers in Scotland of news thought that the news produced in Scotland was of high quality. I know some reports have said different things.

My basic answer is that it is down to the quality of what we produce: what we produce already and what we are going to produce in addition to that. Impartiality is very important to everything that we do. In my three years in BBC Scotland I have found a group of journalists who are, in my view, impartial to a tee. I have never found any cause for worry about bias or lack of impartiality there.

When we are producing a new programme on top of what we do, we have the airtime to get some really good journalism on the air, which will be judged by the audience. We are out to make an impartial, quality programme. Because we can do more in this programme, I think that is one of the ways we can address the trust issue that you talk about. Rather like Donalda was saying earlier about the aim of the channel as a whole to represent and reflect Scotland back to itself, we want to be able to do that in the news, more perhaps than we have the opportunity to do with the more limited airtime we have just now.

Q46 **Deidre Brock:** Are we going to see an extra "Politics Scotland" programme as part of your plans for the new channel as well? I know you are talking about the panel show. I think there is a general feeling that people would appreciate more political coverage than there is at the moment. Some programmes have been removed from the schedule, and I think people would like to see that increased. I do not think I am just speaking in a political bubble on that.

Gary Smith: Overall, obviously we are doing an entirely new, additional hour-long news and current affairs programme each night, so that is an extra hour. Politics will play an important part in that.

Q47 **Deidre Brock:** Is this going to be a part-news, part-"Newsnight" approach? Would you see it as that?

Gary Smith: In the news hour.

Q48 **Deidre Brock:** As in the news hour. You are talking about longer segments?



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Gary Smith: It will be a news and current affairs programme. Some of the pieces and some of the reports in it will be relatively short. Others we will expand on. We will take probably a couple of stories on a day and do much more on them, which as you said earlier perhaps will look more like “Newsnight”. They will be more in-depth in terms of the way we package the story up, but then we will either be able to talk to someone involved in the story off the back of it or have a group discussion with various people with different points of view off the back of it. We do get much more into the territory of being able to do the kinds of things you would see on “Newsnight” or on “Channel 4 News”, which we do not really have the capacity to do at the minute.

Steve Carson: More broadly, the channel will have a number of opportunities for discussion and debate—it is something we are keen to open up—and to be more topical. There are various different ways of approaching that, reflecting what is happening in Scotland right now. There are a number of programmes outside the core news and current affairs offer. Society is changing; the world is changing around us. We want the channel to be at the heart of that conversation across different formats.

Q49 **Chair:** I know we have had this discussion before, Gary. It was about the failure of “Scotland 2014” or 2015, whatever it was. Maybe you could explain to this Committee why you felt it was not a success. It has always been up against “Scotland Tonight” and “Newsnight” and whatever. We know all that. Was there something about the format of that programme that did not quite chime with the Scottish political viewing public?

Gary Smith: You and I have talked about that. I think there were some issues with the programme. STV got on to that slot earlier than we did and set up a very good and successful programme. When we launched “Scotland 2014” we were up against STV. We were up against as well our own news bulletin across on BBC One, which did get extended as well, which is a positive thing. We have longer at 10.30 pm than we used to have. That was very challenging for “Scotland 2014”, 2015 and 2016 against that competition.

We always have to review what we do and try out new formats. We launched a programme, “Timeline”, after that. We have recently launched—I do not know if people have picked up on this—a political podcast recently called “Podlitical”, which takes a correspondent down in Westminster, one in Holyrood and a couple of other people. We constantly have to be looking at what is going to appeal to audiences. In particular with the podcast I am talking about, how do we reach this big challenge across the whole of the BBC for reaching younger audiences? Podcasts are very popular with younger people, which is why we have experimented with that now.

We do not want to get stuck just doing the same thing if it does not seem to be working for audiences, which is why we changed and dropped



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"Scotland 2016" and why we will constantly review and analyse successes and failures and try out new things.

Q50 **Ged Killen:** Gary, you spoke just a moment ago about reflecting Scotland back to itself, and I am sure you will agree it is also important to reflect different parts of the UK to one another. Will we see in the main UK-wide news now with this investment more Scottish stories or more perspective from Scotland on national stories?

Gary Smith: That is absolutely one of our ambitions and it is something I have been talking to my colleagues about in Broadcasting House in London. Already there was one small example last week. We were making pilot programmes here in Scotland and they were clearly not on the air, but some of the material from these programmes, some of the original stories in them, got on to network news last week. There were a couple of stories. We have hired a new social affairs correspondent called Chris Clements and he was doing a story last week on universal credit, which we used on the pilot, but it was on the 1 o'clock news the next day.

I have had a lot of conversations with the editor of the 10 o'clock news. Steve and Donalda were talking about co-commissions away from news and current affairs. I have been talking to the editor of the 10 o'clock news about co-commissions for stories we can do on our 9 o'clock news here, which would also run on the 10 o'clock news. They would be original stories for the audience watching the 9 o'clock news here, but they would also be available to the wider audience across the UK.

Yes, it is absolutely an ambition to do that. I think we do not badly at the minute, but we could do better, and with more journalistic firepower there is every opportunity that we can do exactly as you say and reflect some important themes and stories in Scotland to the UK audience.

Q51 **Hugh Gaffney:** It is this concept about who is going to win the programme and what the detail is, because you already have 9 o'clock. There is a lot of competition. That is when everybody decides to settle down, "Let's watch the news". You have got Sky on 24/7, you are going to have your BBC channels and all the rest of it. This is the prospect for Scotland. Are we going to start including local councils? Because a lot of councils are face-to-face with the public. Is it going to be political? Are we going to include this Scottish Affairs Committee in some of your stuff? We do a lot of work here for Scotland, but it is never ever reported, unless it is a big story, but people are interested in stories every week, so there might be a slot for us every week—there may be a Westminster slot every week.

More importantly, local councils are under attack all the time for cuts, and people do not understand why their grass is not getting cut and all that. There are always good stories coming from councils. We have 32 councils in Scotland. There are a lot of good political stories here, but they are not getting tapped into, because we have a five-minute slot on



national TV? If you are going to have an hour, is that hour going to be spent in Scotland?

Gary Smith: One thing I would highlight in answer to that is our local democracy reporter scheme, which is something that the BBC set up in partnership with local newspapers around the whole of the UK just last year. I do not know if you are familiar with this, but there are going to be a total of 21 reporters who are covering councils around Scotland jointly for newspapers and for the BBC, for all the partners we have beyond the BBC who sign up for this service. We already have 16 of these reporters in place. A couple of others are being appointed before Christmas, so that will be nearly up to the total.

We have seen quite a lot of stories that would not have been available to any media before get on in local newspapers and make it on to some of our outlets as well.

We recently had a review meeting with the newspaper groups who are involved in this and they all reported that it had been going very well for them. They have seen a lot of these reporters getting stories for which there was just not the capacity in the media industry in Scotland to cover before. That has been a really important initiative. It has worked elsewhere in the UK as well. I can see the benefits of that to BBC audiences and newspaper audiences as well.

You are right, it is an area that for largely economic reasons has fallen away over the past years as the media has contracted a bit. We do now have an opportunity with this initiative to cover some of those stories you are talking about.

Hugh Gaffney: I hope it works.

Q52 **Kirstene Hair:** We touched on trust a few moments ago and I wanted to look at bias or perceived bias within the BBC coverage. I just wondered how you intended to ensure that the BBC remains genuinely impartial in the news coverage and does not simply bend to the will of whoever shouts the loudest in terms of complaining about a particular bias one way or the other.

Gary Smith: Complaints about bias are not new to us in BBC Scotland and not new to the whole of the BBC. We have had to deal with a lot of complaints like that through the years.

The most important thing is what I was saying earlier about the impartiality of our journalists, who ensure that, in all the plethora of output we have, impartiality is key to everything that any of our journalists do. That has been quite challenging around social media. Social media is a very different kind of platform from traditional TV or radio or the website. Things can get quite heated, as I am sure everyone knows, on social media.



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It is really important to us and it is something we are doing a lot of work on—certainly within News, but that will spread out beyond News in the BBC—in News in Scotland and here in London as well, that reinforcing the impartiality must apply across all the platforms that all our people operate on. We do pretty well on it. I do not think we have as much of a problem as a small number of people think we do have, but we have to be robust in our journalism. We have to tell stories accurately and clearly and impartially. There might be people who do not like hearing those stories, but it is really important for us to do proper journalism, covering stories on the day, proper investigative journalism. Some people will not like it, but we have to be confident that we are doing what we are tasked with doing in BBC News.

Q53 Kirstene Hair: What is the procedure if you have a whole swathe of complaints about a political bias in one way or the other? What kind of procedure would then take place?

Gary Smith: It depends in what form these complaints come. We obviously deal with complaints as quickly as we can and we have a process that I am sure people are familiar with within the BBC. It depends where the complaints come in to, but we make sure we deal with them.

There are sometimes things we get just factually wrong, and if something is pointed out to us and we check it, we will correct that. That is really important that—

Donalda MacKinnon: And apologise.

Gary Smith: And apologise if we have something wrong. It does not happen that often, but it is very important, if we have something wrong, to own up to it and put it right. It does not happen that often, but we do take complaints seriously and we look into them. If we are confident we are right, we do not change what we have broadcast or written, even though there might be quite a lot of complaints about it.

Q54 Kirstene Hair: Say there was one complaint about a particular issue or there were 300 complaints about a particular issue, you would still look at it with the same level of detail?

Gary Smith: Yes. Clearly if there are 300 complaints about something, we might give that quite a lot of attention, but we take any complaint seriously. If there are 300 people complaining about something, I suspect quite a few of us would have a look at it, but we would still go through the same process. If there is something wrong in our coverage, we would do something about that.

Q55 Kirstene Hair: What if that complaint is part of some sort of mass organised campaign or something to complain about a particular issue or something that was done in your programming? That is not the same as 300 individual complaints. Would that then be treated differently?



Gary Smith: There is sometimes an element of that—that there is a campaign against something we are doing—but the fundamental principle remains the same. We have to look at whatever it is we have broadcast and make a judgment internally on what people are saying about it and be robust in our response if we are confident that we have told the story correctly.

Q56 **Deidre Brock:** With all the extra journalists you have—this has been raised with me—will people now be able to put comments on articles on the BBC website? I know that for many of the articles in Scotland that is not an option. As I understand it, and you can set me right on this, it is the case that elsewhere in the UK that is not the problem it appears to be in Scotland. As I understand it also, it was that there simply was not the people power to be able to cope with that.

Gary Smith: I am not sure I fully know the answer to that, but what I do know about that is that when you are inviting comments on pieces on the website, the BBC has to be able to moderate them, because we clearly have to be careful about what is being published on our real estate there. That is quite a big operation. I know there are some areas of the BBC website where comments are possible, but only when there is that moderation service set up. It is not set up, certainly, for most of the news website either in the network, front page of the website or for us in Scotland. We do not currently have a plan that I am aware of to change that.

Q57 **Deidre Brock:** Is there a particular contrast between Scotland and BBC Wales and BBC Northern Ireland in terms of the amount of comment that is allowed?

Gary Smith: I do not know the answer to that question. I do not think so. We could come back on that. I do not think there is a difference.

Q58 **Deidre Brock:** That would be helpful, thank you.

Ms Hair raised the issue of trust again. There have been concerns raised, most recently at a parliamentary committee at the Scottish Parliament, about the background of some of the guests selected on political shows, in particular four political shows, who represent lobbying groups that have quite clear—either small “p” or very large “P”—political leanings. I wondered if, in a way to provide some assurance about your belief in absolute impartiality for BBC Scotland, that might be a route you could go down, revealing that, so that people can listen in an informed way to what they are hearing in any discussion. At the moment that is very often not revealed and it may well colour the conversation that is being had.

Gary Smith: It is a really important point and it is something that we have talked about a lot recently around particular guests, how much we need to tell the audience so that they understand the background, where somebody is coming from with their views. There have been some examples of that with, for example, the TaxPayers’ Alliance, which you will probably be familiar with. It is something we have put a lot of effort



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into trying to work out—and sometimes this is difficult—a shorthand way of explaining enough about a guest on a programme to make it clear perhaps why they have some of the views they are expressing. It is something we do give a lot of attention to. I think it is very important.

It can be tricky sometimes. Just how much background can you realistically get into about a particular organisation or the background of a particular organisation? We do make big efforts and we will, in what we are doing with BBC Scotland, be making big efforts to be transparent about why our guests are appearing and what bodies they might represent.

Deidre Brock: That would be very helpful. Thank you, Mr Smith.

Q59 Chair: I know a lot of this is directed at you, Gary, but I just want to stay on this for probably one last question. This is a great opportunity to reset some of the trust relationship issues in your new news programme at 9 o'clock. I know you have a massive challenge. You have five major political parties who are competing for attention, who always want their agendas promoted. If it is not promoted on the BBC, there are always going to be issues and complaints to you.

What we have in Scotland, which are quite peculiar, are the constitutional divides. In the last opinion poll, 47% of Scottish people said that they favoured independence as an option for our nation. If you get politicians together, for example, and this is going to be discussed, is this something that you are aware of and conscious of as a feature in our political life? How do you go around therefore constructing panels or guests on your programme to discuss some of these things?

Gary Smith: It is a very current issue, obviously. I mentioned earlier that we are commissioning this new debate programme, which will be executive-edited within News and BBC Scotland. It is one of the things I have been having conversations about already, these issues around choosing panels.

As a programme based in Scotland and representing political life in Scotland, there will be a lot of prisms. We have to look at the composition of the panel. There are the different political parties. There are different views on the key constitutional issues around independence and around Brexit. As you will appreciate, sometimes these slightly conflict with each other. For example, most of the political parties in Scotland have a particular view on Brexit. How do we compose a panel that gets a proper balance on that issue? It is an issue that "Question Time" as it exists at the minute has and there are often challenges around that. We will have perhaps slightly different challenges, making sure we represent the full panoply of views.

Q60 Chair: I do not want to unduly burden you with these questions, but the BBC did concede that it had got the last Scottish independence wrong in terms of its reporting. It was quite generous and acknowledged that there were issues. Are you absolutely confident with what you are doing



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with this new channel that you will get the ongoing debate about independence correct and you will be able to satisfy everybody with an interest in this question?

Gary Smith: I am very confident that we have the resources, the investment and some really good people that we can cover whatever comes our way successfully.

- Q61 **Deidre Brock:** My father reminisces sometimes, when we allow him to, about his time in the ABC in Australia, because he worked there in the 1970s and I think early 1980s and 1960s, in fact. He remembers a time when basically producers and directors were given money and a camera and told to go out and bring them back something. It was a very free, very creative time. I noticed that change of course, and things have tightened up considerably in that area—one of the reasons why my father left the ABC. Ofcom has called on the BBC to be more innovative and take more risks in its programming. Can you tell us how this new channel will help you meet that particular challenge?

Donalda MacKinnon: As I said earlier, I think we have an opportunity like none other hitherto to do just some of that. Particularly in English language, when you are opting from BBC One and BBC Two, there is a limited amount of airtime and possibly we have played quite safe in that regard. What we have now is a real opportunity to take some of these creative risks to look at how we address some of the audience deficits that we have at the moment, particularly in terms of appealing to the young. I know that Steve has a very talented team around him who are looking at all of that. I do not know if many of you have been catching some of the comedies that have been going out late night at BBC Two. They are pilots on a Friday night. I have to say I am seeing some really high-quality stuff there. Some of it is testing.

- Q62 **Deidre Brock:** The content is very good, I think, the online stuff.

Steve Carson: We have to be innovative because we are starting from scratch. There is no established schedule. There are very few established programmes. That is a great place to be. There is a real buzz within the sector, Channel 4 and Screen Scotland. It is not just the BBC investment.

The channel is fully committed to being innovative. At one end we have people who have never made a broadcast piece before. We have commissioned pieces from them. We have a strand called Next Big Thing, which is for first-time programme makers, which will go across documentary. We have some digital drama within that as well. Bear in mind the channel sits within our iPlayer, our social platforms as well.

Arts and culture are going to be very important parts of the channel. We are going to be doing everything from capturing live performances, filming in theatres, which is a very important part of the arts scene in Scotland, but also again through Loop, our arts brand, which sits digitally and on channel. That is an opportunity for people to create new work and



do new things. As I say, we have to be innovative because we do not have any tried-and-tested warhorses there. It is all new.

Q63 Danielle Rowley: What impact do you think the new channel will have on the creative industries scene in Scotland? We have talked a lot about the different opportunities that there are. As a graduate of a journalism school, how are you engaging with different universities, colleges and places where people already are creating good content?

Gary Smith: One of the things I would mention on that is when we have been talking about a substantial number of new jobs in journalism, one of the things we did—because I have not had the opportunity to recruit so many people before, which has been great—is we staged the events around the country and called them discovery events, where we invited people from journalism colleges and from anywhere to come along and hear a bit about what we were going to be doing on the new channel, particularly in news. We got really impressive turnout at these events. We held them in Aberdeen and Dundee and Glasgow, and I think Edinburgh and Inverness as well. A lot of people came and some of these people have gone on to get jobs on our new programmes. People who perhaps might not have gone through our recruitment processes before have jobs.

The diversity of our workforce is really important to us. Through these events and other recruitment methods, we have managed to pull together a range of voices within the newsroom that we did not have before. That is diversity of age and of gender and all sorts of other things, disability, BAME, LGBT. We have certain targets there and we are exceeding targets. I hope that will reflect itself in what we are putting on the air because we have a broader range of ideas and voices within our own operation to help us meet this goal of reflecting the country back to itself. That is my perspective from News.

Steve Carson: Even in terms of recruiting voices for the channel who do the live continuity, it is a technical job—you are driving a transmission studio—but, as Gary said, using the same techniques, it got the message out there way beyond a normal recruitment campaign. One of the people we hired is currently a student. He is currently working in a film shop. He is technically very skilled, he has a great voice—he has all the qualities you need—but I do not think he would have been on the radar before.

I went to see graduation films from the master's courses at Sterling University. We have picked up one of those documentaries for the channel for our documentary strand. We definitely see ourselves as a pipeline, not just at new entry level, at all levels.

One of the commissioners on my team works also for network entertainment and daytime. Again, for producers, there is a way that we can co-invest. Again, you can try a pilot, you can try a series with us and you have a door then into a network commission, which ultimately is inward investment into Scotland as well.



Q64 Danielle Rowley: What about when the Channel 4 announcement happened? A lot of different creative hubs all around the country, recording studios, potential film studio bids in my constituency and various places got quite excited about opportunities that might bring. Will this channel bring a similar outlook of opportunities?

Steve Carson: We are working with a wide range of suppliers. It is over 75 if you include BBC One, but it is a very broadly-based supply base and that is full of people at all levels of the business. There is a very good creative sector in Scotland. A lot of people are used to working internationally on network television. The great thing is what we are able to do is offer them opportunities to work with us to get programmes away that they might not otherwise have got away.

Q65 Danielle Rowley: The network part is important as well. There is a worry that a lot of people might get great opportunities, but then almost have their talents just within Scotland and might not be able to then get it out wider. Is that something that you do not think would be a worry?

Donalda MacKinnon: Absolutely, yes. We would want to see that happen. As much as we want people to stay and make content for our audiences in Scotland, we are also keen that people are able to develop their careers if they want to do so. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: This session will be suspended for 15 minutes.

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: I will resume the session. These Divisions, as I understand it, will be no more, so hopefully we will be able to get through the session without further interruption. We were just about to get a question from Mr Ged Killen.

Q66 Ged Killen: Thank you for your patience. We have received evidence that smaller production companies feel that the money available per hour for non-news content is too low to allow them to bid for commissions. How will you ensure that companies of all sizes are able to benefit from this new investment?

Steve Carson: We are working with a range of companies, large and small. As I say, with the tariffs that are published on our commissioning website, there are a range of tariffs for different types of content. We are very conscious that all producers and all suppliers are having to work in different ways, partly bringing in other money sometimes, but also we are commissioning longer runs on some occasions to help with economies of scale. It is challenging, but we are working with companies, big and small.

Q67 Danielle Rowley: You want to bring more young people into the BBC and particularly to BBC News. I was very pleased to hear about the podcast because I am a big podcast fan, but what other ways are you going to be reaching out to young people, bringing in younger audiences



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and crucially keeping them and making sure that they stick with BBC News and BBC Scotland?

Gary Smith: In terms of BBC News, we have been talking mostly today about the new channel and the 9 o'clock news on the new channel. One of the important things for the whole team that is making that programme is what we do with a lot of our stories digitally, what we do with them on the BBC News website, but also on social media. We are obviously aware that younger people sometimes do not have the habit of watching TV or TV news.

What we intend to do is not just be creating these news stories for the TV news programme, but doing digital versions of them as well, where they can either stand alone for younger audiences if they are creating our content, our news stories say on Facebook or on Instagram. That is good in itself. We would hope that would bring them towards the TV news programme itself as well. If they see something on a platform that they spend time on and they think, "I could see more of that," or, "I like that, I am going to watch the programme it comes from," that will bring a younger audience to the TV programme as well. That is one thing we are very conscious of that we have to go to. We have to go to our audience of all sorts on the platforms that they spend most time on.

Donalda MacKinnon: With what Gary and his team have done in terms of recruitment and targeting different demographics, including the younger demographic, the feel of that 9 o'clock news hour will be significantly different. It will feel fresh. It will look younger. That is not about excluding older audiences, because clearly they are very important to us too.

We have already begun in a quite pioneering way in BBC Scotland with the creation of BBC The Social. We have basically extended that platform to practitioners and creators from across the length and breadth of Scotland—young people whose voices have not much been heard, who are able to create their own content. That is now translating into, again, new talent emerging and making longer form potentially for the channel. It is Steve's plan to reserve perhaps the later hours of the schedule to allowing a bit more experimentation and that expression from younger people.

Steve Carson: As I said, there are all sorts of pipelines we are building. Our digital and youth commissioner, Louise, who is one of the founders of The Social, is commissioning digital content, but she is also commissioning on channel. There are some people who come through The Social who now have television programmes on the channel.

The channel itself is a modern, mainstream channel. It is not a youth channel. It is trying to appeal to all audiences in Scotland, but with an emphasis on audiences under 55, which is young for TV. We are trying to offer a range of content to people who maybe would not consume our services as much.



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In terms of the younger end of that spectrum, 16 to 24 to 34, there is a range of content they will like, particularly after 11 pm, as Donalda says. Louise has a good number of slots there to try things out we would never have done before, again building in the strength of some of the digital work we have already been doing.

Q68 Danielle Rowley: In terms of Parliament I might be young, but in the wider world not so much. I really enjoy on Radio Scotland, for example, "The Quay Sessions". I think Mr Gaffney made a point before about reflecting local areas more and local democracy, which is happening through the democracy reports. Will the new channel and platforms be promoting local talent and having musicians and creative people from all across Scotland being showcased through that more and to audiences they might not have reached before?

Steve Carson: Absolutely. In terms of providing a space for new talent to come through, that is exactly what we are about, not just on channel, but on all our services. As Donalda said, we have some comedy pilots running at the minute on BBC Two Scotland, "The Comedy Underground".

Again, getting back to the tariff model, what we try to do is not overcomplicate that. "The Comedy Underground" is up-and-coming, mainly young Scottish comedians, filmed in a performance venue without a lot of whistles and bells. That was their first time on television. We are working with them in different ways. We have a whole series of ways we want to work with people.

We put a very strong emphasis on moving outside Glasgow in particular in our coverage. As an example, we were pitched an idea about a children's hospital based in the Central Belt, and one of our conversations was, "Are there other hospitals we could look at?" We are making that in another hospital outside the Central Belt. There is a very strong emphasis on that.

Even when we are looking at our sport portfolio, we are in the final stages of concluding a deal to do Championship football. Part of what that does for us is it helps us cover all parts of Scotland. That is what that league does very well.

Q69 Danielle Rowley: Thank you. You are very welcome in Midlothian if you want to cover anything there.

Steve Carson: We have a podcast from guys from Midlothian just uploaded to "Sounds".

Q70 Deidre Brock: Is there a formal commitment to an out-of-Glasgow policy in the same way that the BBC has committed to an out-of-London policy? It would be lovely to hear a patchwork of accents and experiences from across Scotland. At the moment, vox pops largely seem to be popping out of Pacific Quay and going on to Sauchiehall Street and you do hear a pretty clear concentration of Glasgow accents a lot of the time. I am interested to hear.



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Donalda MacKinnon: It has very much been part of the underpinning of all our developments. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: It is not a Division. It just means we are in a Legislative Grand Committee. That is why the bell is ringing. Lots of bells today. It always goes on longer when you are waiting for them to end.

Donalda MacKinnon: When we were planning how we would use the investment, there were a number of opportunities that we were presented with that we needed to exploit as much as we possibly could. We created a number of workstreams around that. Also, for me it was about setting a slightly different dial in terms of culture for BBC Scotland.

One of the workstreams around that was looking at what we do beyond our headquarters. Our headquarters are in Glasgow, so inevitably the bulk of our activity will happen there, but there are absolutely proactive efforts to recruit beyond Glasgow to ensure that we have activity beyond Glasgow and to ensure that in all our centres where we have bases we use their talent, their skills and their expertise where we can. Critically also, we need to reflect people's lives, where they live, and we are better able to do that if we concentrate on doing that.

Q71 **Deidre Brock:** Are you intending to relocate staff out of Glasgow to areas around Scotland? How will that work? Will there be help with relocation costs?

Donalda MacKinnon: Our relocation policies in the BBC have changed quite considerably over the last few years just in terms of the efficiencies and trying to make efficiencies. We do not have the kind of generous relocation packages that we might have had at one time.

What we definitely are doing is trying, wherever possible, to ensure that any new recruitment is location-neutral. Indeed, as part of a separate piece of work that I undertook last year just in terms of career progression for women and culture across the BBC, not just in Scotland, one of the main themes that cut across some of the other underrepresented workstreams—we are looking at under-representation of other groups beyond gender—was about how flexible we are as an employer, in terms of not just reduced hours of working, but location-friendly working. That has very much fed into some of the thinking that we have had in Scotland in terms of making sure that if people can do their jobs in a different location and they want to, there should be no reason why they cannot.

Q72 **Deidre Brock:** Just a couple of very quick ones, slightly random. You did mention creative content and creating that across a range of BBC channels and services, which is great news for people based in Scotland. It gives them a chance to get their work viewed more widely. Will all that content be available to the new channel and to Radio Scotland? I know that we produce a lot of radio drama, for example, in BBC Scotland, which is only heard on Radio 4 and other channels, other parts of the BBC



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stable. I would be interested to hear whether that is going to be the case. A lot of folk miss out on it.

Also, what is happening about the second radio channel that was for a while being talked about? I thought that sounded like a really exciting possibility and would allow that content to be displayed more recently in Scotland.

Donalda MacKinnon: We do want to be able to exploit our content wherever we can and ensure that as many people as possible can access it. In terms of using it in other services or reversioning or repurposing, we would obviously want to do that, rights permitting. The problem with our Radio 4 drama has always been that very business of rights and we need to overcome that.

On a second radio station, that ambition has not fallen off the table, but we do have to concentrate our efforts and minds on getting the channel launched successfully. We are still looking into what we do with Radio Scotland. We have just undertaken a fairly major piece of research, which we are still chewing over, and hopefully throughout next year, once we have got the channel up and running, we will be able to concentrate on what we are doing in the radio space.

Q73 **Deidre Brock:** Your intention is that that content will be easily available to everyone in Scotland so that they can—

Steve Carson: Rights permitting, the great thing about the new world is that content can exist in two places at the same time. The reorganisation that Donalda has put through BBC Scotland means that for the first time radio, TV and digital services are all together. “The Quay Sessions”, for example, is primarily generated by a radio team and has a TV life and it will have a life on channel. “Breaking the News” is a quiz column on radio; it will have a life on the channel. Those are again being able to combine budgets and efficiencies. We are much more joined up. We have one commissioning team. Everyone is working across different genres, different platforms. A good idea can come from anywhere. We will work to make sure it gets to the audience wherever they want it.

Chair: I know Mr Carson has to leave to catch a plane. We only have a couple of questions. If you feel you need to go, Mr Carson, please do.

Steve Carson: No, I am fine.

Q74 **Hugh Gaffney:** Just taking it back to talking about Scottish talent, Ms Rowley was talking to you about young talent, but with the—I will not say old talent—experienced talent, do we have a figurehead who is going to be the name or the personality behind the channel launch? Is Brian Taylor going to be the political officer? Who is going to be the political journalist? Do we have personalities as well as new talent?

Danielle Rowley: Is this you applying, Hugh?



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Steve Carson: You are absolutely right, new talent does not have to be young talent, and that is something we have said. Again, when we were recruiting for channel announcers we said, "We would love someone who has gone and had a life and maybe wants to try something different". John Sullivan, who wrote "Only Fools and Horses", I think wrote that script in his early 40s. We are constantly trying to say that we want to be as open—and we are—to people with good ideas from anywhere that we can help get them through.

Q75 **Hugh Gaffney:** Is there a name tied to the channel?

Steve Carson: Big faces for the channel are obviously the news presenters, who are going to be front and centre every night.

Gary Smith: In terms of news, we have recruited established talent and new talent. We have a mix there and that is not just about age. We have recruited a lot of people who have not broadcast on TV or radio sometimes before.

One of our main presenters is Martin Geissler, who is probably one of the best-known journalists in Scotland, along with Rebecca Curran, who is a fantastic journalist who has been at the BBC for a couple of years and was at STV before. We have asked John Beattie to present the Friday programme. He has established at all sorts of things, from rugby to accountancy to journalism. He is going to present on Friday nights. I think you will see a mix. We are bringing a correspondent, James Cook, who people probably remember from BBC Scotland a few years ago. He is coming back to be our chief news correspondent. What we are trying to do is have a mix of new people to news and people that you will not have seen or heard before.

Hugh Gaffney: Good. I do encourage new talent, but also you will need a bit of experience.

Q76 **Chair:** I think that is all we have for you. We are also grateful for your forbearance with the various Divisions that we have had.

One last question from me. All these new services you have created and this new channel, could you assure this Committee it will not have any impact on what you are going to be doing on BBC One Scotland and the shows that we do have on BBC Two? Will there be any consequence or impact for your current programming at all?

Donalda MacKinnon: There are consequences in that we will not be operating BBC Two anymore and that was one of the trade-offs. However, it is still incumbent for BBC Two to serve audiences in Scotland with Scottish content, so we will be looking to our network colleagues to ensure that that happens. Indeed, I am sure they will want to collaborate with us in ensuring that BBC Two Scotland still has relevance for audiences in Scotland. We will continue to offer BBC One Scotland, as we always have done. Series like "Rise of the Clans"— BBC One Scotland will be the place for that.



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Q77 Chair: There will still be a full schedule of new programming available on BBC One Scotland.

Probably the last thing from me: you are much more distinctively Scottish in terms of particularly your non-new programming. What do you mean by that and who is going to decide and define what “distinctively Scottish” is?

Steve Carson: I do not think we say “distinctively Scottish”. It is a channel about modern Scotland and it is for audiences in Scotland. One of the things we have often said is that it is not a channel about Scotland; it is a channel of interest to audiences in Scotland. The Scottishness will come through in the people, in the contributors and their stories. Every evening has a range of content and it should feel relatable. In some of the research people felt they did not see enough people like themselves on screen. That will give it the Scottish content.

We looked at the sort of content that Scottish audiences like. Comedy is very strong. Drama, as much as we can, is very strong. There is a very strong interest in documentary and there will be two distinct documentary strands within the channel. There is a strong interest in news and a strong interest in the world about Scotland. All those things are reflected within the channel.

Q78 Chair: One of the things that I have heard, particularly from our creative community, is about opportunities for musicians, writers and authors across a whole range of our cultural output in Scotland, which is quite impressive. Have you designed anything that will feature new artists, writers and musicians?

Steve Carson: Yes. There are different stages again. There is a digital brand at the minute called Tune, which again is going to have a life on the channel. That is going to be very focused on first-time and new artists. “The Quay Sessions” is probably the next step up for people who are slightly more established. Again, there are pathways through there. “Celtic Connections” we will cover. We are going to expand with colleagues in BBC Alba into some other festivals we have not done before. Music within arts and culture is a hugely important part of our portfolio.

Q79 Chair: As long as you do not forget established artists and those that might be just about at the end of their careers too.

Steve Carson: You are absolutely right. This is a modern mainstream channel. It is one of the reasons why you are having “Still Game”, it is fantastic. We want to reflect programmes that people already love, as well as having a huge pipeline there of new things.

Chair: Great. We have ended almost spot on 4 pm, so I think we can be relieved and happy there. Thank you ever so much for this one-off session. It has really helped this Committee understand what you are trying to do with this new channel. I think you have heard by the positive



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response you have had here that we all wish you the best success. We may just ask you to follow up once you get up and running and see how things go. Thank you for your evidence today.