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Scottish Affairs Committee

Public broadcasting in Scotland

Fifth Report of Session 2022–23

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Scottish Affairs Committee

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Introduction

1. Under the Scotland Act 1998, broadcasting is a reserved matter, and the UK Government makes policy decisions in this area on a UK-wide basis. Scotland shares many interests in this area with other parts of the UK—for example, the importance of maintaining a strong independent television production sector. At the same time, its population is older than the UK as a whole,¹ it continues to face challenges around digital connectivity,² and it has a distinct cultural identity which audiences rightly expect to be reflected in the programmes they watch and listen to. Audiences in Scotland also receive a bespoke broadcast offer, for example via TV channels like STV, BBC Scotland, and BBC ALBA.

2. A number of other parliamentary committees have recently examined issues around broadcasting, including the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee,³ the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee,⁴ and the Welsh Affairs Committee.⁵ Their work has provided valuable information for our own work on this matter and covers in greater depth many of the issues touched on in this report.

3. We held five public evidence sessions, at which we heard from representatives of public service television broadcasters operating in Scotland, global streaming and subscription TV services, independent TV production companies, and the UK Government. We would like to thank all of our witnesses and others who corresponded with our Committee for their contributions to our work on this topic.

1 Office for National Statistics, [Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2021](#), 21 December 2022, Table 1

2 For example, in 2022, only 54% of TV users in Scotland, compared to a UK average of 64%, had an internet-connected TV (for example, a ‘smart’ TV that connects directly to the internet, or through a set-top box provided by providers like Sky, Virgin or BT). See Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p6

3 Communications and Digital Committee, First Report of Session 2019, [Public service broadcasting: as vital as ever](#), HL Paper 16

4 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2019–2021, [The future of public service broadcasting](#), HC 156

5 Welsh Affairs Committee, [Broadcasting in Wales](#). See also: Evidence taken before the Welsh Affairs Committee, 13 July 2022, [HC 594](#) (Free to air sports broadcasting)

1 The broadcasting landscape in Scotland

Public service broadcasting

4. Historically, television broadcasting in Scotland (as in the rest of the UK) has been dominated by public service broadcasters (PSBs). As the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee put it in their 2019 report,

Twenty years ago most people relied on five free-to-air terrestrial channels provided by PSBs with a statutory public service remit. The output of commercial broadcasters was available to only a minority of viewers who subscribed to Sky or cable services.⁶

Box 1: Public service broadcasting in Scotland

Public service television broadcasting is provided in Scotland by the BBC, Channel 4, STV, ITV,⁷ and Channel 5. All BBC TV services, and the main channels of other broadcasters, are PSB channels. BBC TV channels (including BBC Scotland and BBC ALBA) are available across the country, while STV and ITV provide bespoke news programmes for people living in the north of Scotland, central Scotland and the south of Scotland. Channel 4 and Channel 5 broadcast on a UK-wide basis.

Source: Ofcom, *Media Nations: Scotland 2022*, p23

5. Today, public service broadcasters—with their statutory duties of universality, impartiality, and quotas for regional, independent and original production and programming⁸—remain central to the broadcasting landscape in Scotland. In 2021, the main five PSB channels⁹ accounted for a combined 54.9% share of Scotland’s total broadcast TV audience.¹⁰ The BBC and STV/ITV jointly spent £71.3 million on first-run content¹¹ made specifically for viewers in Scotland,¹² with the BBC showing 1473 hours of such content across its channels, STV showing 449 hours, and ITV showing 75 hours for the Border Scotland region.¹³ This included bespoke Scottish news content, programmes shown on Scottish TV channels such as the BBC thriller series *Guilt*, and Gaelic language content shown on BBC ALBA.

6 Communications and Digital Committee, First Report of Session 2019, [Public service broadcasting: as vital as ever](#), HL Paper 16, para 1

7 Whilst STV serves the majority of Scotland, ITV Border serves the south of Scotland and Cumbria, splitting its output to provide programming focusing on issues relevant in the south of Scotland and in the north of England. As well as providing services to some parts of Scotland, ITV is also STV’s largest supplier of content: a significant proportion of the broadcast schedule is produced or procured by ITV and made available to STV through long term agreements.

8 Communications and Digital Committee, First Report of Session 2019, [Public service broadcasting: as vital as ever](#), HL Paper 16, box 1

9 BBC One Scotland, BBC Scotland, STV, Channel 4 and Channel 5

10 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p23

11 First-run content is defined as programmes commissioned by or for a public service channel which are first shown on television in the UK in the reference year

12 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p30

13 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, pp35–36

6. Research by Ofcom in 2022 found that, among viewers in Scotland who had watched a public service broadcasting channel in the last six months, 65% were satisfied with the service; only 9% were dissatisfied. This was broadly consistent with viewers across the UK.¹⁴ PSBs’ video-on-demand services also have good levels of reach: BBC iPlayer was the most popular streaming service in Scotland in 2021 and was used by 75% of online adults and teenagers.¹⁵

Streaming

7. The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Committee’s 2021 report into the future of public service broadcasting found that while PSBs retain a strong position in terms of broadcast viewing, the uptake of streaming services had led to “a dramatic fragmentation of viewer behaviour”.¹⁶ In the first quarter of 2022, 69% of households in Scotland subscribed to at least one subscription video-on-demand (SVoD) service from companies like Netflix or Amazon.¹⁷

8. However, while these services have had an impact on PSBs’ audience share, witnesses who gave evidence to us argued streaming services complemented PSBs’ activity in Scotland and the wider UK in a number of ways:

- Steve Carson, Director of BBC Scotland, said PSBs and streaming services “do different jobs”, pointing to the much higher hours of content (in particular local news coverage) made by PSBs, but welcoming opportunities for a wider choice of content for viewers.¹⁸
- Simon Pitts and Bobby Hain from STV argued STV had successfully differentiated itself from streaming services because of its emphasis on creating “homegrown” content, focused on the UK and Scotland in particular, that viewers see as reflecting themselves—as opposed to the popular but largely US-originated content on streaming platforms.¹⁹
- Chris Bird, Managing Director of Amazon Prime Video UK, pointed to its role as a licensor of the back catalogue of PSBs’ original content, including internationally.²⁰ Benjamin King from Netflix emphasised this benefits PSBs in terms of both revenue and global interest in their programmes.²¹
- Regarding the UK screen industry more widely, Anne Mensah from Netflix highlighted a joint BBC-Netflix initiative to promote content from disabled creators,²² while Georgia Brown from Amazon Studios argued the investments streaming services are making alongside PSBs in traineeship programmes would collectively help to “future proof the industry”.²³

14 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p24

15 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p3

16 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2019–21, [The future of public service broadcasting](#), HC 156, 25 March 2021, para 9

17 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p3

18 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 July 2021, Q68

19 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 15 November 2021, Qq196–197

20 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Q274

21 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Q275

22 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Q275

23 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Q277

TV production in Scotland

Sectoral overview

9. Across all public service broadcasters in 2021, 7% of spending and 8.1% of broadcast hours was allocated to programmes produced in Scotland. This was the highest proportion of hours made in Scotland since 2017, and the highest proportion of spending in Scotland in over a decade.²⁴ In 2021:

- 8.6% of the BBC’s first-run content production spending took place in Scotland, and it spent £61.9 million on content made specifically for audiences in Scotland.²⁵
- Spend by STV/ITV on first-run content for Scotland was £9.4 million.²⁶
- 5.8% of Channel 4’s total spending on first-run programmes shown on its main channel was spent in Scotland.²⁷

Examples of high-profile Scottish shows produced by or with the support of public service broadcasters include the BBC’s *Guilt*²⁸ and *Shetland*,²⁹ and *Screw*³⁰ (produced by STV Studios and broadcast on Channel 4).

10. There are also notable Scotland-based commissions and original productions from streaming services. Georgia Brown from Amazon Studios cited three of the company’s productions (*The Rig*, *Good Omens*, and *Anansi Boys*), as well as *Outlander* (formerly hosted on Amazon Prime Video in the UK) which had been filmed in Scotland.³¹ *The Rig* is also Amazon Studios’ first programme to be produced entirely in Scotland.³² PSBs and streaming services also collaborate on co-productions: for example, Steve Carson from BBC Scotland noted one of the channel’s early titles was a feature documentary part-funded by Netflix.³³

11. Many independent production companies are also based in Scotland. Nicole Kleeman from Firecrest Films observed that the launch of the BBC Scotland channel in 2019 had encouraged new production companies to set up in Scotland and that this had contributed to an overall picture where the prospects for independent producers in Scotland “are better than they have ever been”.³⁴ Likewise, Alan Clements from Two Rivers Media said that independent producers in Scotland had benefitted from efforts by the BBC and Channel 4 to spread their commissioning activity across more of the UK,³⁵ while Jane Muirhead from Raise the Roof Productions noted the existence of whole career pathways in Scotland for people starting in the industry today.³⁶

24 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p38

25 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p40 and p31

26 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p31

27 Channel 4, [Altogether Different: Channel Four Television Corporation Report and Financial Statements 2021](#), 4 May 2022, p111

28 Screen Scotland, [Guilt Series 2](#)

29 Screen Scotland, [Shetland Series 6](#)

30 Screen Scotland, [Screw](#)

31 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Qq266–267

32 BBC News, [The Rig: Inside the Scottish studio behind new Prime Video series](#), 11 January 2023

33 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 July 2021, Q69

34 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q126

35 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Qq133–134

36 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q139

Performance and future prospects

12. Julia Lopez MP, Minister of State for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, described Scotland as “a very important creative hub” for UK broadcasting.³⁷ Broadcasting is also economically important to Scotland: the screen sector was worth an estimated £567.6 million to Scotland’s economy in 2019,³⁸ and the UK Government has argued that TV and film production “have a critical role to play in levelling up”.³⁹ The Minister said the UK Government’s forthcoming Creative Sector Vision would set out how it plans to maximise the creative industries’ economic impact “in every corner” of the UK.⁴⁰

13. Public service broadcasters are making further commitments and investments in television production capacity outside of London, including in Scotland:

- The BBC’s Across the UK strategy commits it to increasing the proportion of its TV production budget spent outside of London to 60% by 2027,⁴¹ an increase of around £80 million in out-of-London spending per year.⁴² Specifically for Scotland, the strategy also said the BBC would expand its production studios operations in Glasgow.⁴³
- Simon Pitts from STV told the Committee that its production arm, STV Studios, already makes “a wide range of shows across the genres for a number of big broadcasters” in Scotland, and outlined STV’s ambition for STV Studios to become a “world-class” content producer for global networks and streaming services.⁴⁴

14. One area which may restrict the future growth of TV and film production in Scotland is a shortage of people with the necessary technical skills. We note that a joint BBC-Screen Scotland Memorandum of Understanding in December 2021 argued that “there is an urgent need to address skills shortages at every level within the screen industry and across every genre”.⁴⁵ However, action is being taken by stakeholders to address this challenge:

- The BBC’s Across the UK strategy included a commitment to partnering “with local communities, councils and education providers” to develop the skills base needed for its expanded production studios in Glasgow.⁴⁶
- Channel 4’s skills and development programme, 4Skills, offers paid training and placement roles to young people. It has a particular focus on “addressing skills gaps across the Nations and Regions”.⁴⁷

37 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q309

38 Screen Scotland, [Scotland’s screen sector sustains over 10,000 jobs & delivers £567.6million to Scottish economy](#), 23 June 2022

39 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), 2 February 2022

40 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Qq309–310

41 BBC, [The BBC Across the UK: The BBC 2022–2027](#), March 2021

42 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 July 2021, Q12

43 BBC Studioworks’ new Kelvin Hall production studio in Glasgow opened in September 2022. See: Screen Scotland, [BBC Studioworks launches new TV Studio in Glasgow’s Kelvin Hall](#), 29 September 2022

44 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 15 November 2021, Q210

45 Screen Scotland, [BBC and Screen Scotland Memorandum of Understanding](#), 15 December 2021

46 BBC, [The BBC Across the UK: The BBC 2022–2027](#), March 2021

47 Channel 4, [Statement from Channel 4 in response to a decision and statement by the Government](#), 5 January 2023

- Amazon Studios has partnered with the National Film & Television School (NFTS) to offer technical training roles on its UK productions.⁴⁸ Georgia Brown from Amazon Studios told us they were hoping to attract many Scottish applicants to the programme and that the NFTS site in Glasgow had made NFTS an attractive partner for that reason.⁴⁹
- Minister Julia Lopez MP noted the UK Government is working with the British Film Institute and ScreenSkills to identify specific skills challenges facing the industry, but argued that many of the government interventions which could support the response to these challenges—for example, apprenticeships—fell within devolved competencies.⁵⁰

15. The broadcasting landscape in Scotland is diverse and vibrant, with viewers able to choose from an increasingly wide range of content, much of which is made specifically for viewers in Scotland. Many domestically successful and internationally renowned TV shows continue to be filmed in Scotland and some are produced there in their entirety. While there are challenges around skills shortages, we are encouraged by public service broadcasters' and streaming services' commitments to develop the Scottish screen industry and lay the foundations for future production activity there.

48 Television Business International, [Amazon pledges \\$13m to support UK TV & film training and development](#), 2 March 2022

49 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Q301

50 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q375

2 Recent and ongoing developments

The BBC in Scotland

Investment in content for Scotland

16. In September 2020, it was announced that the BBC would be cutting 900 jobs from its News and Nations & Regions divisions,⁵¹ leading to concerns about its ability to continue providing bespoke news coverage and other content made specifically for Scottish audiences.⁵² We note that there are also more recent and ongoing examples of the BBC reducing its provision of distinctive Scottish content made for Scottish audiences—for example, BBC Radio Scotland’s decision to stop broadcasting some jazz, classical and piping programmes.⁵³

17. However, other developments paint a more positive picture. In 2021 the BBC showed 1,473 hours of first-run content made for Scotland, including 814 hours of news.⁵⁴ This is almost double the figure for 2018,⁵⁵ the year before the launch of the BBC Scotland channel,⁵⁶ and Steve Carson (Director of BBC Scotland) stated the channel had 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”.⁵⁷ Gary Smith, Head of News and Current Affairs at BBC Scotland, also said that the BBC’s Across the UK strategy included plans to bolster the BBC’s capacity to make news for Scottish audiences by moving “a considerable number” of news jobs from London to Scotland.⁵⁸

Representation

18. Ofcom has “consistently” found that audiences in Scotland are less satisfied with the BBC than viewers in other parts of the UK. It has linked this to a number of factors, including a sense among Scottish audiences that they “feel less visible” on BBC TV.⁵⁹ In 2020/21, audiences in Scotland rated the BBC below the UK average for “content that reflects the life and culture of communities throughout the UK”.⁶⁰ However, the BBC’s 2021/22 Annual Report showed an improvement in perceptions of the BBC’s performance

51 [Deadline, BBC To Cut 900 Jobs As New DG Tim Davie Warns “The Future Of A Universal BBC Can No Longer Be Taken For Granted”](#), 3 September 2020

52 For example, the DCMS Select Committee cited these cuts as part of its evidence for its warning in March 2021 that action was needed to support the quality and relevance of “programming for the Nations and Regions”, and particularly “regional news programming”, across all public service broadcasters. Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2019–21, [The future of public service broadcasting](#), HC156, 25 March 2021, para 37 and 40

53 BBC Scotland has said this decision was taken in response to the licence fee freeze and to help refocus from broadcast to digital output, and that it would continue to broadcast a range of music. See: The Scotsman, [BBC Scotland comes under fire over plans to axe music programmes](#), 10 January 2023

54 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p35

55 In 2018, the BBC showed 740 hours of first-run content made for Scotland. See: Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p35

56 The channel was launched in February 2019, replacing the BBC Two Scotland opt-out of BBC Scotland.

57 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 July 2021, Q7

58 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 July 2021, Q8

59 Ofcom, [Ofcom Annual Report on the BBC 2020–21](#), 25 November 2021, p3 and p7

60 Ofcom, [Ofcom Annual Report on the BBC 2021–22](#), 30 November 2022, pp40–41

on representation and portrayal: it found that the proportion of adults in Scotland who felt the BBC was “effective” at representing people like them was broadly in line with the UK as a whole.⁶¹

19. The launch of the BBC Scotland TV channel may have played a role in this improvement. In both 2020/21 and 2021/22, Ofcom found evidence that audiences in Scotland who watch the BBC Scotland channel are more likely to have a positive perception of the BBC.⁶² Representatives of BBC Scotland pointed to the BBC’s Across the UK strategy⁶³ as an important next step in building on this progress: Steve Carson and Louise Thornton said the strategy would promote spending on programme commissions which portray Scotland and are “authentic for Scottish audiences”,⁶⁴ while Gary Smith argued the strategy’s commitment to moving news jobs to Scotland would support a less London-centric point of view.⁶⁵

20. Minister Julia Lopez MP told us that the UK Government “wants the BBC to be perceived as being reflective of the nations that it represents” to help ensure public support for the BBC as an institution.⁶⁶ In May 2022, the UK Government launched the BBC Mid-Term Review,⁶⁷ the terms of reference for which include “diversity” as a focus—defining this as “evaluating how well the BBC’s governance arrangements deliver on the duty for the BBC and its output to reflect the entirety of the whole United Kingdom”.⁶⁸ Minister Lopez told us the Review would be completed by the end of 2024.⁶⁹

21. We also heard there are commercial, as well as regulatory and institutional, incentives for public service broadcasters like the BBC to ensure they are portraying distinctively Scottish perspectives on-screen: Anne Mensah from Netflix argued that there was global demand for “specificity” and “stories that are truthful from the place that they are”, which PSBs’ local nature made them well-placed to tap into.⁷⁰

22. The favourable reception of the BBC Scotland channel shows that, despite longstanding concerns about how Scotland is represented and portrayed on BBC services, Scottish audiences respond positively to BBC content that reflects them and their lives. In a world of continuing budget constraints as well as increasing co-commissions with global as well as UK partners, the BBC must continue to produce output that is relevant to Scottish audiences, and ensure its internal resourcing decisions enable this. We welcome the Mid-Term Review and the BBC’s own Across the UK strategy as important opportunities to make further progress on this.

61 BBC, [BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2021/22](#), 17 August 2022, p39 and p36

62 Ofcom, [Ofcom Annual Report on the BBC 2021–22](#), 30 November 2022, p40

63 BBC, [The BBC Across the UK: The BBC 2022–2027](#), March 2021

64 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 July 2021, Q7

65 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 July 2021, Q8

66 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q332

67 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [BBC review to focus on impartiality and ‘levelling up’ job opportunities](#), 26 May 2022

68 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [BBC Mid-Term Review: Terms of Reference](#), 26 May 2022

69 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q326

70 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Q276

Channel 4

Scottish activity and representation

23. Unlike the BBC and STV/ITV, Channel 4 has no obligation to provide dedicated programming for the UK’s nations and regions.⁷¹ In 2021, shows commissioned in Scotland accounted for 5.4% of total hours of first-run content on its main channel—lower than Scotland’s proportional share of the UK population.⁷² It directly employs only a small number of staff in Scotland, but this includes members of its daytime and features team which commissions around 50% of Channel 4’s programming hours.⁷³ Alex Mahon, Chief Executive of Channel 4, told us that she hoped more of its employees would be based in Scotland, and that it would “continue to spend more and more” there, over time.⁷⁴

24. Alex Mahon told us that representing Scotland well was “very important” for Channel 4. She cited its work via its “4 All the UK” strategy to spread its people across the UK, encourage diverse creative perspectives, spend more of its commissioning budget outside of London, and ensure its news coverage is decided and sourced from across the UK.⁷⁵ Deborah Dunnett, Commissioning Editor at Channel 4, also argued the opening of Channel 4’s Glasgow hub in 2019 had helped to drive commissioning of “authentic” content depicting a wide range of locations and communities in Scotland—as she put it, “filming real people doing real jobs or things that they are passionate about”.⁷⁶

25. Deborah Dunnett acknowledged Channel 4 occasionally received viewer feedback about a “lack of Scottish representation on some of our biggest shows”, including *Gogglebox*.⁷⁷ Following our session with Channel 4, we were pleased to hear from Alex Mahon that a dedicated casting team had been tasked with finding a Scottish family to appear on *Gogglebox*,⁷⁸ leading to a Glasgow-based couple appearing on the show from February 2022.⁷⁹

26. Channel 4’s publisher-broadcaster model means it does not produce its own content but commissions it from external producers and suppliers, and so plays an especially important role in driving commissions from independent production companies, including in Scotland. Nicole Kleeman, Managing Director of Firecrest Films, stated that Channel 4 had been “instrumental” to the growth of independent TV production in Scotland. She pointed to investments Channel 4 had made to help Firecrest Films grow, and argued that “Channel 4, more than any other company, looks at emerging talent in Scotland and in the other nations and regions of the UK and invests in it.”⁸⁰

71 Ofcom, [Channel 4 Corporation’s regulatory framework: Information note](#), 20 September 2021

72 Channel 4, [Altogether Different: Channel Four Television Corporation Report and Financial Statements 2021](#), 4 May 2022, p111

73 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q86

74 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q87 and Q85

75 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q74

76 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q76

77 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q103 and Qq106–110

78 [Correspondence from Alex Mahon](#), dated 28 October 2021 [published 17 November 2021]

79 The Scotsman, [Gogglebox: Who are the first Scottish couple to join the Channel 4 programme in six years?](#), 25 February 2022

80 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q123

Ownership

27. The UK Government’s April 2022 Broadcasting White Paper set out plans to change the ownership of Channel 4, from public into private ownership.⁸¹ Alex Mahon, Chief Executive of Channel 4, told us that “privatisation is a question for the Government and they are entitled to ask that question”, but raised doubts over whether Channel 4 would continue to focus on supporting smaller producers or ensuring diverse programming under private ownership, describing these objectives as “not highly profitable activities”.⁸²

28. The independent producers we heard from argued privatisation would negatively impact Channel 4’s work in Scotland and the prospects for their own companies and others like them. Jane Muirhead from Raise the Roof Productions said privatisation would be “devastating”; she suggested a private sector owner was likely to seek to increase in-house production and reduce the number of sites where the company was operating, meaning the majority of production “would probably be pulled back within the M25”.⁸³ Alan Clements from Two Rivers Media also raised concerns a private owner may weaken independent producers’ intellectual property rights to the shows they make.⁸⁴

29. In January 2023, the UK Government announced that, following a business case review commissioned by the then Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Michelle Donelan MP, Channel 4 would remain publicly owned.⁸⁵ Minister Julia Lopez MP explained the then Secretary of State’s thinking that led to the UK Government’s change of position:

She took the view that, yes, there are sustainability challenges, but she would rather try to solve those within public ownership and look to give freedom in relation to the publisher-broadcaster restriction, give [Channel 4] more flexible access to borrowing, and introduce the prominence reforms⁸⁶ and other things that will help the [public service broadcasting] sector.⁸⁷

30. As part of the announcement that it would remain in public ownership, Channel 4 also committed to doubling its target for roles based outside London from 300 to 600 by 2025 (potentially including roles in its hub in Glasgow).⁸⁸ Minister Julia Lopez MP confirmed that the UK Government had asked Channel 4 to make this commitment on jobs to try to “get some broader positive outcomes by spreading [Channel 4’s] footprint across the UK in a deeper way”.⁸⁹ Channel 4 has also committed to increase its annual investment in its training programme 4Skills from £5 million to £10 million by 2025.⁹⁰

81 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Up next - the government’s vision for the broadcasting sector](#), 29 April 2022

82 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Qq78–79

83 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q121 and Qq152–153

84 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Q121

85 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Channel 4 to remain publicly owned with reforms to boost its sustainability and commercial freedom](#), 5 January 2023

86 See Chapter 4 for detail on the UK Government’s proposed reforms to prominence requirements

87 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q316

88 Written statement (HCWS476), [The Future of Channel 4](#), 9 January 2023

89 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q317

90 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Channel 4 to remain publicly owned with reforms to boost its sustainability and commercial freedom](#), 5 January 2023

31. We welcome the decision to keep Channel 4 in public ownership, and the commitments it has agreed with the UK Government on investment in skills and jobs outside of London as part of that decision. The evidence we took suggests this decision will help to support the continued growth of TV production in Scotland—especially among independent producers—with both cultural and economic benefits for Scotland.

The future of Freeview

32. Almost a third (31%) of households in Scotland only used Digital Terrestrial Television services (DTT—better known as Freeview, and delivered via aerial) to watch television in the first quarter of 2022.⁹¹ These ‘Freeview-only’ households tend to be older and from lower socio-economic backgrounds than the rest of the UK population.⁹² Their reliance on DTT services means they cannot access content from broadcasters online, despite the increasing emphasis broadcasters (including public service broadcasters) are placing on video on demand as a platform to distribute their output.⁹³

33. In correspondence to us in December 2022, Laurie Patten, Director of Strategy and Regulation at Arqiva,⁹⁴ argued that “Scotland’s greater rurality than the UK average, its island communities, and its comparatively older population” make terrestrial TV services especially important in Scotland.⁹⁵ For its part, the UK Government has set out an expectation that DTT “will continue to be an important content distribution channel for at least the remainder of the 2020s and likely into the early 2030s”.⁹⁶ Minister Julia Lopez MP told us that the UK Government had made a commitment to Freeview “up to 2034 and beyond”, but that “what happens after 2034 is a live question”.⁹⁷

34. The UK Government’s April 2022 Broadcasting White Paper set out that the UK Government would “ask Ofcom to continue to track changes to DTT viewing and undertake an early review on market changes that may affect the future of content distribution before the end of 2025”.⁹⁸ The Minister told us that this review had begun, but was “in the fairly early stages”, and suggested that policy choices—in particular, signalling the future of DTT beyond 2034, to allow for investment to maintain DTT infrastructure if required—would begin to be drawn out “over the next few years”.⁹⁹

91 Ofcom, [Media Nations: Scotland 2022](#), 17 August 2022, p5

92 GOV.UK, [Consultation on the renewal of Digital Terrestrial Television \(DTT\) multiplex licences expiring in 2022 and 2026](#), 17 August 2021 [updated]

93 Indeed, the Director-General of the BBC Tim Davie has recently spoken about a possible future move by the BBC to “internet-only distribution” and the switch-off of broadcast TV. See The Times, [BBC TV to go online-only by 2030, says Tim Davie](#), 9 December 2022

94 Arqiva owns and operates Great Britain’s broadcast infrastructure – the network of transmitters providing broadcast radio and Freeview TV to homes and businesses through an aerial.

95 [Correspondence from Laurie Patten](#), dated 16 December 2022 [published 10 January 2023]

96 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Up next - the government’s vision for the broadcasting sector](#), 29 April 2022

97 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q340

98 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Up next - the government’s vision for the broadcasting sector](#), 29 April 2022

99 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q341

35. While we acknowledge the UK Government has made a commitment to maintain Freeview for a significant number of years yet, we see no reason why the forthcoming Ofcom review should prevent the UK Government from giving certainty of continued coverage beyond 2034 to households in Scotland reliant on Freeview at the earliest opportunity. *We recommend that the UK Government signal that it will maintain Freeview beyond 2034. To support this, the UK Government should fully capitalise on the upcoming World Radiocommunication Conference in November and place Freeview high up the agenda to help address this uncertainty as soon as possible.*

3 Broadcast of sporting events

Context

36. A recurring theme in the evidence we heard was the increasing difficulty faced by public service broadcasters (PSBs) in purchasing the rights to live sports events for broadcast on free-to-air TV. Simon Pitts and Bobby Hain from STV told us that these rights are highly sought after—resulting in costs that are “prohibitive” for PSBs, and a trend of sport increasingly going to pay-per-view or subscription platforms like Sky which can offer higher prices and purchase rights to multiple events as a package.¹⁰⁰ Simon Pitts further explained that, for Scottish international football and other sporting events where the likely TV audience is Scotland only, although the rights are usually sold on a UK-wide basis, “there is very little prospect of a larger commercial return UK-wide, which in turn determines the level of bid that we would be able to support”.¹⁰¹

37. Ali Law, Director of Policy at Sky, stressed the benefits of Sky’s subscription model to UK sports in terms of both the investment and the showcase it offers.¹⁰² He also noted Sky had taken steps to expand access to sports events to which it owns the rights without requiring people to take out a full subscription, such as offering day passes to watch individual events, and making clips and highlights available on social media on the day.¹⁰³

38. We heard from the Minister, Julia Lopez MP, that the UK Government “do[es] not take a view on how best to make sure” that individual Scottish sporting events are available to TV audiences. She argued it was up to Scottish rights holders to determine the best balance between ensuring events can be seen by the widest possible audience and securing money to reinvest in grassroots sport, and suggested the UK Government was focused on ensuring PSBs “are financially viable and therefore can make bids for these kinds of events”.¹⁰⁴

39. The UK Government maintains a list of events of national interest¹⁰⁵ which the Minister told us is drawn up “on a UK-wide basis”. However, we note that the list already includes the Scottish FA Cup Final as a Scotland-specific event,¹⁰⁶ and that S4C have called for a specific list of Welsh sporting events that must be available for free-to-air broadcast in the Welsh language.¹⁰⁷

International football

40. One example of a nationally significant sports event for Scotland not shown on free-to-air TV was the men’s international football team’s qualification semi-final for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in June 2022, which was only available on Sky. Ali Law told us that

100 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 15 November 2021, Qq162–163 and Q173

101 [Correspondence from Simon Pitts](#), dated 22 November 2021 [published 6 December 2021]

102 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Q246

103 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Q248

104 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q338 and Q345

105 The listed events regime consists of a list of sporting events of “national interest”, drawn up by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the broadcast rights to which must be offered to the main free-to-air terrestrial broadcasters on “fair and reasonable terms”. See: House of Commons Library, [Research Briefing: Broadcasting: listed sporting events](#), 3 May 2022

106 House of Commons Library, [Research Briefing: Broadcasting: listed sporting events](#), 3 May 2022, p6

107 Evidence taken before the Welsh Affairs Committee, 13 July 2022, [HC 594](#), Q7

Sky took a “responsible” approach to sharing broadcast rights to “decisive moments of national importance”,¹⁰⁸ and we note that STV reached an agreement with Sky to sub-license the necessary rights to show the subsequent qualifying play-off final.¹⁰⁹ However, while this example demonstrates the potential for collaboration and workarounds within the existing rights framework, it must also be seen in a wider context where, as Simon Pitts argued, these deals cannot be guaranteed since rights owners like Sky have “no obvious commercial incentive” to relinquish exclusivity.¹¹⁰

41. We note that in other parts of the UK, international football not on the UK Government’s listed events regime is available to watch free-to-air. In Wales, S4C showed (via sub-license from Sky, and with Welsh language commentary) the men’s national team’s qualifying matches for the 2022 FIFA World Cup,¹¹¹ and will show their UEFA Nations League games and UEFA EURO 2024 qualifiers through to 2024.¹¹² In England, Channel 4 has bought the rights to show all men’s international matches until 2024.¹¹³

42. However, S4C told the Welsh Affairs Committee in July 2022 that the sale of rights to Wales games between 2024–2028 to the subscription service Viaplay had caused uncertainty over whether Wales matches would continue to be broadcast free-to-air and with Welsh commentary.¹¹⁴ Viaplay has also purchased the rights to broadcast Scotland men’s international football matches from 2024,¹¹⁵ as well as separately acquiring Premier Sports,¹¹⁶ which had held the rights to show the team’s games between 2022–24 with a commitment to show three matches free-to-air over this period.¹¹⁷

43. We are firmly of the view that the current lack of opportunities to watch Scottish international football on free-to-air broadcast is letting down fans in Scotland, who are at a disadvantage compared to fans in England and (for now) Wales. The UK Government must be more proactive in acknowledging and responding to the frustration this situation is causing in Scotland. We also wish to see more examples of public service broadcasters and subscription services making deals to share rights to international football and other major sporting events.

44. *The UK Government should communicate a clear expectation to public service broadcasters in Scotland that they should be regularly and proactively approaching subscription services which have purchased the rights to broadcast major Scottish sporting events, to explore options for sharing those rights. It should also clearly communicate to subscription services and the national sporting bodies that act as rights holders that it expects them to carefully consider the public interest benefits of public service broadcasters having a share in these rights in this way.*

108 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Qq247–248

109 [Correspondence from Simon Pitts](#), dated 27 May 2022 [published 14 June 2022]

110 [Correspondence from Simon Pitts](#), dated 22 November 2021 [published 6 December 2021]

111 S4C, [Watch Wales’ World Cup qualifying campaign live on S4C](#), 18 February 2021

112 S4C, [S4C to continue coverage of Welsh national football team](#), 25 May 2022

113 Channel 4, [Channel 4 wins rights to England’s European Qualifiers and UEFA Nations League matches](#), 29 April 2022

114 Evidence taken before the Welsh Affairs Committee, 13 July 2022, [HC 594](#), Qq5–6 and Q27

115 The Scotsman, [Scotland games to move from Sky Sports to new platform from 2024 in UEFA broadcast deal](#), 27 April 2022

116 The Scotsman, [Scottish football TV shake-up as Premier Sports sold for £30m](#), 21 July 2022

117 The Scottish Football Association, [Premier Sports to broadcast Scotland Men’s National Team matches until 2024](#), 19 May 2022

45. *The UK Government should also establish a review to consider options to improve free-to-air access to Scottish international football. This should involve representatives from Viaplay and Sky as the current and former purchasers of the rights to broadcast Scottish international football, the Scottish Football Association as the rights holder, and public service broadcasters. If the review is unable to come up with effective solutions within the existing commercial rights framework, it should recommend interventions the UK Government should make to ensure more Scottish international football is available to watch free-to-air, potentially including expanding the specific Scottish events covered under the listed events regime to include not just the Scottish FA Cup final but also Scotland's World Cup and European Championship qualifiers.*

4 Broadcasting policy reform

Media Bill

46. We heard from the Minister, Julia Lopez MP, that the UK Government intends to bring forward reforms to broadcasting regulations in a Media Bill. This Bill was included among the list of Bills the UK Government plans to introduce during the 2022–23 parliamentary session set out in the 2022 Queen’s Speech.¹¹⁸ The Minister argued that the measures due to be included in the Bill are necessary to ensure the future sustainability of public service broadcasting:

Our fundamental approach in relation to public service broadcasting is to ensure public service broadcasters can withstand some of the dynamics, challenges and market changes that are coming at us very rapidly [...] In the Media Bill, which we hope to bring forward as soon as possible, we have a series of reforms that will universally benefit the public service broadcasters [...] In sustaining the public service broadcasters, we then believe that they will continue to be able to fulfil their remit obligations on things like news, content production, and local and regional representation.¹¹⁹

47. The key proposals due to be brought forward in the Media Bill were set out in the UK Government’s April 2022 Broadcasting White Paper.¹²⁰ They include the reforms to prominence discussed in the following section, and introducing statutory protection for programmes broadcast in UK minority languages, including Gaelic language programming for Scottish audiences.¹²¹

48. It was reported in December 2022 that ITV was considering abandoning its public service broadcaster status because of a lack of progress on the reforms due to be included in the Media Bill, in particular updating the prominence regime that benefits public service broadcasters.¹²² In response to our questioning about when the Bill was likely to be introduced, the Minister said that her Department had drawn up the necessary legislation and “is pushing for the Media Bill as soon as possible”, but that scheduling time for the Bill was proving difficult owing to the UK Government’s other priorities.¹²³

49. We agree that reforms to the existing legislative framework are necessary to help to secure the future sustainability and quality of public service broadcasting in the UK. However, we are concerned at the lack of a clear timetable to debate the UK Government’s planned reforms in Parliament. The UK Government should remain committed to legislating for these reforms before the end of this parliamentary session. We recommend that the UK Government schedule parliamentary time to begin considering the Media Bill within the next two months.

118 GOV.UK, [Background Briefing Notes to the Queen’s Speech of 10 May 2022](#), 10 May 2022

119 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q315

120 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Up next - the government’s vision for the broadcasting sector](#), 29 April 2022

121 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q346 and Q350

122 The Guardian, [ITV could drop news pledge unless ministers offer help against streamers](#), 6 December 2022

123 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q368 and Qq353–354

Prominence

50. Broadcasting legislation sets out that public service broadcasters' (PSBs') main channels should appear prominently in electronic TV programme guides. However, this requirement doesn't cover PSBs' on-demand services accessed via devices like smart TVs, set-top boxes or streaming sticks, potentially making PSB content harder to find on these new digital platforms. Ofcom has previously said there is an "urgent" need for new legislation to address this.¹²⁴

51. Extending the prominence regime to cover these new platforms was one of the most commonly cited reforms to broadcasting regulation in the UK we heard witnesses call for. Ali Law, Director of Policy at Sky, argued that audience expectations and the popularity of PSB content meant there were already strong market incentives for new platforms like Sky Glass to feature PSBs' on-demand services prominently.¹²⁵ However, most witnesses from PSBs felt a regulatory approach nonetheless remained vital:

- Steve Carson (Director, BBC Scotland) argued the ability for audiences to find public service content remained "really important" and that "it should not be a matter of prominence on those platforms being sold to the highest bidder". He suggested this was especially important in helping to ensure Gaelic language content can reach viewers through BBC ALBA.¹²⁶
- Alex Mahon (Chief Executive, Channel 4) indicated that since UK PSBs "generally do not pay as much as some other big global commercial companies", a market-based approach cannot guarantee they will be prominent on platforms run by global companies like Amazon or Apple.¹²⁷
- Simon Pitts (Chief Executive, STV) said that "without government intervention we have seen that platforms don't provide the kind of prominence that PSBs receive currently" on electronic programme guides, and that this was limiting PSBs' ability to reach younger viewers in particular.¹²⁸

52. Simon Pitts also observed that:

For a nations-based PSB like STV, it is often not just about securing prominence for our streaming service on those platforms; it is about accessing those platforms in the first place, as often those global players are not regionalised.¹²⁹

53. The UK Government's April 2022 Broadcasting White Paper set out plans to extend the prominence regime to designated internet-enabled TV platforms in the way PSBs and Ofcom have called for. It also stated the UK Government's intention that the new regime would include "appropriate recognition for the unique relevance of the public service content produced by STV and S4C in particular areas of the UK".¹³⁰ Minister Julia Lopez

124 Ofcom, [Recommendations to Government on the future of Public Service Media](#), 15 July 2021

125 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 14 March 2022, Qq255–258

126 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 July 2021, Qq28–29

127 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 20 September 2021, Qq113–114

128 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 15 November 2021, Q205

129 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 574), 15 November 2021, Q205

130 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Up next - the government's vision for the broadcasting sector](#), 29 April 2022

MP told us in January 2023 that the UK Government would introduce this measure in its forthcoming Media Bill, saying: “we think that will be a massive boost to the business cases [PSBs] can make and their sustainability as broadcasters”.¹³¹

54. We support the UK Government’s proposal to extend the prominence regime for public service broadcasters to cover on-demand PSB content hosted on designated internet-enabled TV platforms. The technological developments driving the need for this change make this a time-sensitive reform, and representatives of public service broadcasters we heard from were unanimous in their assessment of its importance. The UK Government should bring forward this reform within the next two months, in line with our recommendation on the timing of debate on the wider Media Bill.

55. While content from BBC Scotland and BBC ALBA is available on BBC iPlayer, the high-profile status of which makes this content more easily discoverable, content from STV will be harder for Scottish viewers to find if STV Player is seen by new global TV platforms as a less important ‘regional’ on-demand service. It is unacceptable that STV’s content should be less accessible to viewers in Scotland due to a lack of regionalisation by internet-enabled TV platforms. The UK Government’s prominence reforms should specifically require that TV platforms being used in Scottish households must carry STV’s on-demand services and feature them prominently.

Intergovernmental relations

56. While broadcasting policy is reserved to the UK Government under the terms of the Scotland Act 1998, Minister Julia Lopez MP told us that her Department had “ongoing conversations” with the devolved administrations on relevant topics, such as digital infrastructure.¹³² The review of intergovernmental relations jointly undertaken by the UK Government and the devolved administrations and published in January 2022 argued such meetings “provide an important locus for discussion of the impacts upon each other of policy change in different governments, [and] for learning and cooperation between governments”.¹³³

57. Following the 2022 review, a number of inter-ministerial groups (IMGs) have been set up across different policy areas to formalise portfolio-level conversations of this kind. However, no such group yet exists for issues relating to culture or media,¹³⁴ despite the review identifying an IMG on Culture as part of the draft list of IMGs it suggested should initially be established under the new intergovernmental relations structures.¹³⁵

58. We were pleased to hear from the Minister that the possibility of setting up an IMG on culture and media was discussed at a meeting between the then-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Michelle Donelan MP, and the Scottish Government’s Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson MSP, in December 2022.¹³⁶ As noted in paragraph 14 above, skills shortages have been

131 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q315 and Q366

132 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q304

133 Cabinet Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, [Review of intergovernmental relations](#), 13 January 2022

134 For a list of currently extant IMGs, see: GOV.UK, [Intergovernmental relations](#)

135 Cabinet Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, [Review of intergovernmental relations](#) (Annex B: Draft terms of reference for the council, IMSC and ICs, and draft list of IMGs), 13 January 2022

136 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Qq305–306

suggested as a potential limiting factor in the future growth of the screen industry both in Scotland and the wider UK, and the Minister suggested an IMG could help to ensure UK Government-led policy responses to this challenge are as effective as possible by linking them to devolved education policy in Scotland.¹³⁷

59. Setting up an inter-ministerial group on media and culture would be a welcome and sensible step to help formalise conversations between the UK and devolved Governments on broadcasting-related issues, not least facilitating a joined-up approach to ensuring the continued growth of Scotland’s screen sector. *We recommend that such a group should be established this year, and that its terms of reference should include skills in the UK screen industry. We also call on the Scottish Government to further prioritise its work on screen industry skills in Scotland, to work in tandem with the inter-ministerial group.*

137 Oral evidence: [Public broadcasting in Scotland](#) (HC 1048), 23 January 2023, Q308

Conclusions and recommendations

The Broadcasting landscape in Scotland

1. **The broadcasting landscape in Scotland is diverse and vibrant, with viewers able to choose from an increasingly wide range of content, much of which is made specifically for viewers in Scotland. Many domestically successful and internationally renowned TV shows continue to be filmed in Scotland and some are produced there in their entirety. While there are challenges around skills shortages, we are encouraged by public service broadcasters' and streaming services' commitments to develop the Scottish screen industry and lay the foundations for future production activity there. (Paragraph 15)**

Recent and ongoing developments

2. **The favourable reception of the BBC Scotland channel shows that, despite longstanding concerns about how Scotland is represented and portrayed on BBC services, Scottish audiences respond positively to BBC content that reflects them and their lives. In a world of continuing budget constraints as well as increasing co-commissions with global as well as UK partners, the BBC must continue to produce output that is relevant to Scottish audiences, and ensure its internal resourcing decisions enable this. We welcome the Mid-Term Review and the BBC's own Across the UK strategy as important opportunities to make further progress on this. (Paragraph 22)**
3. **We welcome the decision to keep Channel 4 in public ownership, and the commitments it has agreed with the UK Government on investment in skills and jobs outside of London as part of that decision. The evidence we took suggests this decision will help to support the continued growth of TV production in Scotland—especially among independent producers—with both cultural and economic benefits for Scotland. (Paragraph 31)**
4. **While we acknowledge the UK Government has made a commitment to maintain Freeview for a significant number of years yet, we see no reason why the forthcoming Ofcom review should prevent the UK Government from giving certainty of continued coverage beyond 2034 to households in Scotland reliant on Freeview at the earliest opportunity. *We recommend that the UK Government signal that it will maintain Freeview beyond 2034. To support this, the UK Government should fully capitalise on the upcoming World Radiocommunication Conference in November and place Freeview high up the agenda to help address this uncertainty as soon as possible.* (Paragraph 35)**

Broadcast of sporting events

5. **We are firmly of the view that the current lack of opportunities to watch Scottish international football on free-to-air broadcast is letting down fans in Scotland, who are at a disadvantage compared to fans in England and (for now) Wales. The UK Government must be more proactive in acknowledging and responding**

to the frustration this situation is causing in Scotland. We also wish to see more examples of public service broadcasters and subscription services making deals to share rights to international football and other major sporting events. (Paragraph 43)

6. *The UK Government should communicate a clear expectation to public service broadcasters in Scotland that they should be regularly and proactively approaching subscription services which have purchased the rights to broadcast major Scottish sporting events, to explore options for sharing those rights. It should also clearly communicate to subscription services and the national sporting bodies that act as rights holders that it expects them to carefully consider the public interest benefits of public service broadcasters having a share in these rights in this way.* (Paragraph 44)
7. *The UK Government should also establish a review to consider options to improve free-to-air access to Scottish international football. This should involve representatives from Viaplay and Sky as the current and former purchasers of the rights to broadcast Scottish international football, the Scottish Football Association as the rights holder, and public service broadcasters. If the review is unable to come up with effective solutions within the existing commercial rights framework, it should recommend interventions the UK Government should make to ensure more Scottish international football is available to watch free-to-air, potentially including expanding the specific Scottish events covered under the listed events regime to include not just the Scottish FA Cup final but also Scotland's World Cup and European Championship qualifiers.* (Paragraph 45)

Broadcasting policy reform

8. *We agree that reforms to the existing legislative framework are necessary to help to secure the future sustainability and quality of public service broadcasting in the UK. However, we are concerned at the lack of a clear timetable to debate the UK Government's planned reforms in Parliament. The UK Government should remain committed to legislating for these reforms before the end of this parliamentary session. We recommend that the UK Government schedule parliamentary time to begin considering the Media Bill within the next two months.* (Paragraph 49)
9. *We support the UK Government's proposal to extend the prominence regime for public service broadcasters to cover on-demand PSB content hosted on designated internet-enabled TV platforms. The technological developments driving the need for this change make this a time-sensitive reform, and representatives of public service broadcasters we heard from were unanimous in their assessment of its importance. The UK Government should bring forward this reform within the next two months, in line with our recommendation on the timing of debate on the wider Media Bill.* (Paragraph 54)
10. *While content from BBC Scotland and BBC ALBA is available on BBC iPlayer, the high-profile status of which makes this content more easily discoverable, content from STV will be harder for Scottish viewers to find if STV Player is seen by new global TV platforms as a less important 'regional' on-demand*

service. It is unacceptable that STV's content should be less accessible to viewers in Scotland due to a lack of regionalisation by internet-enabled TV platforms. *The UK Government's prominence reforms should specifically require that TV platforms being used in Scottish households must carry STV's on-demand services and feature them prominently.* (Paragraph 55)

11. **Setting up an inter-ministerial group on media and culture would be a welcome and sensible step to help formalise conversations between the UK and devolved Governments on broadcasting-related issues, not least facilitating a joined-up approach to ensuring the continued growth of Scotland's screen sector. We recommend that such a group should be established this year, and that its terms of reference should include skills in the UK screen industry. We also call on the Scottish Government to further prioritise its work on screen industry skills in Scotland, to work in tandem with the inter-ministerial group.** (Paragraph 59)

Formal minutes

Monday 27 February 2023

Members present

Pete Wishart, in the Chair

Deidre Brock

Wendy Chamberlain

David Duguid

Sally-Ann Hart

Christine Jardine

Douglas Ross

Dr Philippa Whitford

Draft Report (*Public broadcasting in Scotland*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 59 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Monday 6 March at 2.30 p.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 20 July 2021

Steve Carson, Director, BBC Scotland; **Gary Smith**, Head of News and Current Affairs, BBC Scotland; **Louise Thornton**, Head of Multiplatform Commissioning, BBC Scotland

[Q1–72](#)

Monday 20 September 2021

Alex Mahon, Chief Executive, Channel 4; **Deborah Dunnett**, Commissioning Editor, Channel 4

[Q73–119](#)

Alan Clements, Managing Director, Two Rivers Media; **Jane Muirhead**, Managing Director, Raise the Roof Productions; **Nicole Kleeman**, Managing Director, Firecrest Films

[Q120–156](#)

Monday 15 November 2021

Simon Pitts, Chief Executive, STV Group plc; **Bobby Hain**, Managing Director of Broadcasting, STV Group plc

[Q157–211](#)

Monday 14 March 2022

Ali Law, Director of Policy, Sky; **Jonathan Levy**, Director of Newsgathering and Operations for Sky News, Sky

[Q212–265](#)

Chris Bird, Managing Director, Prime Video UK, Amazon; **Georgia Brown**, Director of European Prime Original Series, Amazon Studios; **Benjamin King**, Director, Public Policy UK, Netflix; **Anne Mensah**, Vice President, Original Series, Netflix

[Q266–302](#)

Monday 23 January 2023

Julia Lopez MP, Minister of State for Media, Data, and Digital Infrastructure, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; **Robert Specterman-Green**, Director, Media and Creative Industries, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

[Q303–377](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Defence in Scotland: military landscape	HC 82
2nd	Access to cash in Scotland	HC 80
3rd	Firearms licensing regulations in Scotland	HC 710
4th	Defence in Scotland: military shipbuilding	HC 1096
1st Special	Immigration and Scotland: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 84
2nd Special	Airports in Scotland: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 303
3rd Special	Defence in Scotland: military landscape: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 674
4th Special	Access to cash in Scotland: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 695

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Universities and Scotland	HC 54
2nd	Welfare policy in Scotland	HC 55
3rd	The UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Scotland	HC 52
4th	Renewable energy in Scotland	HC 51
5th	Airports in Scotland	HC 601
1st Special	Welfare policy in Scotland: UK and Scottish Government Responses to the Committee's Second Report	HC 790
2nd Special	The UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Scotland: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 791
3rd Special	Renewable energy in Scotland: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 901
4th Special	Universities and Scotland: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 1252

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Coronavirus and Scotland: Interim Report on Intergovernmental Working	HC 314
2nd	Coronavirus and Scotland	HC 895
1st Special	Problem drug use in Scotland: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019	HC 698
2nd Special	Coronavirus and Scotland: Government Response to the Committee's First and Second Reports	HC 1118