

Alistair Law, Director of Policy, Sky—supplementary written evidence (BFF0072)

House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee inquiry into BBC future funding

Thank you for inviting Sky to provide evidence to the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee last month. I welcomed the opportunity to update members on Sky's contribution to broadcasting and comment on the BBC's future funding.

Sky is an integral part of the UK content sector and makes a substantial contribution to the UK's cultural economy. We are committed to serving our customers, providing high-quality content and supporting Public Service Broadcasters as much as we can.

At Sky's evidence session on the 26th of April, there were a two of questions raised by the Committee that I promised to address and expand on:

Diversity

During the committee session I was asked how effectively Sky reaches minority sectors of the population and whether or not we hold a positive reputation amongst minority groups. As I highlighted in the committee evidence session, while Sky has a strong track record on issues of diversity and inclusion, it is also an area we have committed to do much more in.

Our first set of on-screen diversity targets were launched back in 2014. In June of 2020, we announced a series of commitments to improve our approach to diversity and inclusion. Sky committed to invest £10million a year across its markets for each of the next three years to improve representation and progression of minority groups, make a difference in communities impacted by racism, and use the power of Sky's voice and platform to highlight racial injustice. The commitments included an ambition to create new targets to improve ethnic diversity and representation throughout the organisation.

Following these commitments, Sky undertook research into the demographics of the local areas the business operates in. This research forms the basis of new 2025 targets, announced last year, that 20% of the roles in the UK & Ireland workforce should be filled by those from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background, and 5% of the roles in Sky's UK & Ireland workforce should be filled by Black employees. Sky is also introducing the same target for the top circa 300 leaders across the UK and Ireland's leadership team. By 2025, Sky's leadership team will be 5% Black, and 20% Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic overall.

At Sky we also believe that calling out racial injustices and tackling structural racism in society is paramount. We know that Black Caribbean children are more than twice as likely to be permanently excluded from school than their white peers. As a result, we have committed £1.2 million to a partnership with Lewis Hamilton's charitable foundation, Mission 44, which aims to keep children in school, transforming their lives for the better. Furthermore, we have pledged £3

million over three years to Kick It Out to fight racism in sport and funded a new programme to sponsor Black, Asian and ethnic minority students to gain MBAs and take more leadership roles in the football industry, to drive more change. We are advocating for representation in elite sports amongst the South Asian community in various ways, including mentoring promising young South Asian athletes and supporting them on their journey to make it in the Premier League and WSL. We recognise there is far more work to do and will continue to champion and support minorities.

From a viewing perspective, the share of our audience with diverse backgrounds is broadly in line with the profile of the UK population overall. We have 96 channels and 10 radio channels on Sky Q that cater for particular special interests, including a wide range of communities and minority groups. These channels make up around a quarter of our channels available on the Sky platform covering entertainment, religion and news.

Sky Arts

The second question I was asked to provide further detail on during the session was on how we commission and acquire performing arts content. As I mentioned in my response during the committee session, there are areas of the performing arts which we can bring a spotlight to, such as our sponsorship of the National Theatre's 'NT Live' and our production of 'Romeo & Juliet' and 'Death of England' with them. Additionally, we also support small music venues through The Live Revival.

Sky Arts commissions and acquires content that amplifies the brilliant work that artists and leaders in the arts are doing to help keep the nation dancing, singing, painting and creating. Some of our recent commissions include 'Gods of the Game' – a 90-minute opera about football, with four young up-and-coming composers providing the score; a landmark series on the evolution of the orchestra with Charles Hazlewood and his Paraorchestra, consisting of able-bodied and disabled players; and a one-off special entitled 'Backstage: Ralph Fiennes in Straight Line Crazy', a David Hare drama at London's Bridge Theatre. Coming up soon is our series 'Lost and Found' which explores the archives of the likes of Spike Milligan, Nina Simone, Laurie Lee, Cleo Laine and many others. We also use Sky Arts to shine a spotlight on work through our acquisitions, such as '512 Hours with Marina Abramovic' which sat alongside Marina Abramovic's five-hour takeover of the Sky Arts channel for a performance art extravaganza.

Sky Arts takes great pride in championing the arts outside of our programming. Our 'Access All Arts' week, launching on June 6th, will provide one million primary-school children with access to five arts modules, giving teachers the tools to teach arts subjects. Furthermore, Sky Arts run a bursary scheme which awards a grant of £30k apiece to artists at entry level Dance, Theatre, Visual Arts, Music and Literature. Last year, along with Coventry City of Culture we donated a significant work of public art via our programme 'Landmark', short films and an exhibition of Portraits to Compton Verney.

In 2020, Sky made the decision to make Sky Arts a free-to-air channel. As the UK's only channel dedicated to arts and culture, Sky Arts has an incredible track record for bringing the arts alive for all. This move underlines our commitment to the arts and ensuring that everyone has access to arts content. Sky Arts

viewing numbers subsequently show the value the public places on accessing culture, with more than 15 million people tuning in to watch Sky Arts in Q1 2021. Our audience has increased by 236%, which is the equivalent of +3.1m viewers reached each week. We invest a significant amount of money in Sky Arts and will continue to do so. More broadly, this year we will invest over half a billion pounds on first-run UK originated content (excluding sports rights) and over 200 new Sky Originals will be aired in 2022 – three times as many as in 2019.

I hope you found our participation and response to your queries informative and beneficial. Please don't hesitate to get back in touch with any additional questions.

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