

Written evidence submitted by Libraries NI

Submission to the DCMS Select Committee Enquiry into the Future of Public Service Broadcasting

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Library Authority, more commonly known as Libraries NI, is the regional body responsible for the provision and delivery of a public library service in Northern Ireland. Libraries NI is the largest single library authority in the UK. Our primary duty, as set down in the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, is to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service for persons living, working or studying in Northern Ireland.
- 1.2 Our Vision is 'a visible, accessible and inclusive library service at the heart of communities, enhancing lives and valued by all'.
- 1.3 Our Mission is 'Connecting people with information, ideas and experiences to foster lifelong learning, inspire curiosity, provide enjoyment and strengthen communities'.
- 1.4 Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) has enabled Libraries NI to extend its reach and to connect with communities in a way that would not have otherwise been possible. This has occurred as a result of initiatives at both a Northern Ireland and UK level but primarily through Libraries NI's partnership with BBC Northern Ireland, the region's largest public service broadcaster. This is described below.

2. Partnership

- 2.1 Libraries NI works in partnership with other regional, local and UK-wide organisations with similar aims. As stated above BBC Northern Ireland is the region's largest public service broadcaster. The BBC's mission to 'provide impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain', alongside the Libraries NI mission 'to connect people with information, ideas and experiences to foster lifelong learning, inspire curiosity, provide enjoyment and strengthen communities' provided the basis for a shared public service ethos and laid the foundation for the formal partnership agreement that is in place between the two organisations.
- 2.2 The agreement which was renewed for a further three years in 2019 refers to the BBC's wider commitment to working collaboratively with other organisations in ways that reflect its Charter role/responsibilities and to the remit of Libraries NI. Its purpose is to provide an enabling framework for joint projects and activities between both organisations, seeking to provide benefits for communities across the region and to engage a broad cross-section of BBC audiences and library users.

- 2.3 It is intended to maximise the public value inherent in the work of Libraries NI and the BBC. It gives priority to learning (in all its different aspects), digital access and inclusion, reading and engagement.
- 2.4 The agreement also recognises the benefits of taking a strategic approach to joint working between both organisations and seeks to encourage longer-term planning and projects, creativity and innovation, and a diverse mix of activities that engage, and provide benefits for, people in different ways and places.

3. Value and Impact

- 3.1 This section of the response describes a number of partnership activities where partnership work has delivered more than either organisation could have delivered alone.
- 3.2 **Book Week NI** is a celebration of books, reading and libraries on the airwaves, on social media and in libraries, now in its fifth year. It focuses on promoting books and libraries, celebrating the many benefits of reading and how books and writing can connect people of all ages with information and learning.
- 3.3 It normally comprises a combination of media interviews, outside broadcasts, library events and accompanying social media campaigns, supported by dedicated pages on Libraries NI's and BBC NI's websites with content including reading lists, book suggestions, BBC interviews with authors including archive material, competitions and BBC presenters talking about books.
- 3.4 The following information about Book Week NI in October 2019 gives an indication of the scale, reach and impact of this initiative, all of which are significant in a Northern Ireland context:
- October 2019 saw the largest number of new library members since Libraries NI was created in 2009
 - the 20 Book Week NI features, discussions and reports across Radio Ulster/Foyle reached 320k listeners (21% of the adult population of Northern Ireland) and had 41K downloads on BBC Sounds
 - the combined social media campaign achieved an exposure of almost one million.
- 3.5 **BBC Rewind** is an archive with more than 1,600 pieces of footage from newsreels of the 1950's and 1960's relating to Northern Ireland. This was initially made available as a pilot on the Public Access Terminals in 13 libraries and, following enhancements to its functionality, was then made available in all 98 libraries.
- 3.6 This popular resource has been used for reminiscence sessions, work with people affected by dementia, school class visits and creative writing as well of course as proving popular for browsing and research.

- 3.7 The BBC **virtual reality experience**, using Oculus headsets, has toured local libraries across Northern Ireland on several occasions. At these events members of the public called in to try out the technology thus making it accessible to a wide range of people who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to experience it.
- 3.8 In October 2016 Libraries NI, in partnership with BBC Northern Ireland, launched the '**Biggest Book Club in the Country**'. The Nolan Show announced the book of the month and listeners then had a month to read the book, which they could find at their local library, before the programme discussed the book and announced the next book to read.
- 3.9. The size of the Nolan Show audience and its broad demographic reach, combined with the presenter's strong personal following, has enabled Libraries NI to attract a significant number of new members. Titles featured on the show routinely become the most borrowed adult book during the month in question.

4. Other Initiatives

- 4.1 Libraries NI has also engaged with other PSB initiatives such as the BBC's '100 Novels that Shaped Our World' and services such as 'BBC Bitesize' to the benefit of our customers

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Libraries NI has gained significant benefit from PSB. It has been particularly beneficial to have a local, well respected PSB broadcaster operating across the same geographic area as Libraries NI. PSB has enabled us to increase the number and demographic spread of members and to provide an enhanced range of services in libraries and online.
- 5.2 This in turn has enhanced the economic, cultural and societal impact of the work of Libraries NI and its reach within communities across Northern Ireland.

Chief Executive
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