

Written evidence submitted by Drama Republic

Future of PSB Call for Evidence

Q1) Introduction to the organisation and reason for submitting evidence.

Drama Republic is an independent television drama production company. Prior to establishing Drama Republic in 2013, its founders Greg Brenman and Roanna Benn were responsible for producing over 500 hours of high-end drama, including the feature film *Billy Elliot*.

Since its inception, Drama Republic (DR) has produced a further 66 hours of high-end television drama – including *DOCTOR FOSTER* (BBC), *THE HONOURABLE WOMAN* (BBC) and *PURE* (Channel 4). Its forthcoming projects include an adaptation of David Nicholls' novel, *US*, for the BBC, and a Netflix Original series, *THE IRREGULARS*.

Having amassed a wealth of experience in British television production, DR has seen first-hand how PSBs forge and sustain the careers of homegrown talent and how they are in a unique position to provide a launchpad for both the creative community and the content it produces; content that is both regionally-specific and editorially exceptional.

As such, our submitted evidence is rooted in a knowledge of the crucial role that PSBs play in the British broadcasting landscape – both creatively and economically.

Q2) Evidence submission.

Our evidence relates primarily to the question of **impact**, and also speaks to **representation**.

- **Impact:** *What value, if any, do PSBs bring to the UK in terms of economic (local and national), cultural and societal impact?*
- **Representation:** *How would representation be protected if changes were made to the PSB model? How would the nations and regions be affected by changes to the PSB model?*
- **Sustainable investment in both new and established writing talent:** The sustainable funding system of PSBs enables widespread and thorough support for writers across all stages of their careers. A key example of this are the BBC's grassroots schemes, such as its national and regional Writersrooms. These programmes include the annual Drama Writersroom, which identifies twelve emerging writers through open submission and ongoing talent tracking, and nurtures them through a six-month talent development scheme. In addition to this national search for new voices, localised groups including BBC Scottish Voices and BBC Northern Voices are also run annually to foster the work of talented writers from underrepresented areas of the UK. The BBC also has a strong track record of supporting newer writers in stepping from theatre into television; a process which both transforms writers' careers, and makes theatre nationally accessible (rather than available only to a small, live audience). Alongside this unparalleled commitment to more emerging voices, the broad reach of the BBC also enables it to support some of the most established and nationally-beloved writers. Where would we be as a nation without the likes of Sally Wainwright (*HAPPY VALLEY*, *GENTLEMAN JACK*) or Russell T Davies (*QUEER AS FOLK*, *YEARS AND YEARS*, *DR*).

WHO) or Michaela Coel (CHEWING GUM, I MAY DESTROY YOU). If they or their peers chose to work exclusively for the global SVoDs, there would be an erosion of the culturally-specific content that they produce. We need to keep their voices unique and grounded in authenticity.

- **UK-specific originals:** While 210 hours of UK-produced content were made available on Netflix and Amazon Prime in 2019, PSBs contributed 32,000 hours of original content in the same timeframe. As such, though the global streamers may offer a selection of original, UK-produced programmes, it is the PSBs who continue to be the primary producers of a diverse array of truly UK-angled content. In translating drama onto a global platform, culturally- and regionally-specific elements can often become diluted for a pan-national audience. A comparison here could be the BBC's exceptional adaptation of Sally Rooney's NORMAL PEOPLE, which follows the rites of passage of two teenagers as they journey through very specific circumstances - compared to SEX EDUCATION, which was made for Netflix with an international audience in mind. Though SEX EDUCATION also depicts teenage experience, and was produced in the UK, it blends many location identities together to create an imagined, culturally non-specific backdrop.
- **Societal representation:** The idea of cultural specificity also has links with the question of true representation. The localised presence of PSBs allows them direct access to the voices and stories that globalised organisations are not able to identify and represent in the same way. The BBC encourages locally-specific programmes through its ongoing commissioning briefings, and has committed to a 50% production spend outside of London (the Ofcom minimum is 35%). The BBC also takes further action through regional campaigns such as its Portrayal Fund, and through financing pilots and short-form content from across the nations and regions. Even domestic commercial broadcasters are unable to commit to such specific, particular work, as there is an onus on them to guarantee viewing figures for financial return. This leads to less commissioning of truly bold or experimental editorial content, and therefore fewer opportunities for writers and other artists with specific experiences and voices. As such, PSBs are the natural home for these exciting, distinctive voices – and, indeed, it is often these programmes (DERRY GIRLS, THIS COUNTRY) that truly find their audience and connect with them. These programmes also provide a natural opportunity to ‘discover’ actors with local ties or connections, and thereby transform their careers – such as the experience of actor Paul Mescal, having performed in iPlayer's most-ever requested show, NORMAL PEOPLE. The commitment to homegrown talent, voices and stories differs in both tone and scale between PSBs, commercial broadcasters and SVoDs – with PSBs occupying a unique position in being able to reflect and amplify the voices and experiences of UK-based viewers.
- **Inclusion:** Making diversity a priority both on- and off-screen is paramount for creating a television landscape where all people see themselves on screen, and therefore feel seen and heard. In acknowledging this – and in addition to the aforementioned nations and regions work – the BBC has ring-fenced £2.1million for its Diversity & Inclusion Development Fund. This is designed to encourage and support work from under-represented groups across many areas of production. In June 2020, Channel 4 released its manifesto as an anti-racist organization, citing its corporate and editorial steps towards inclusive practice. Many of the PSBs (including the BBC and Channel 4) also work with the Diamond Diversity Network to obtain and analyse data relating to the demographics of its suppliers. This is a highly prescient time for clear, ongoing, financial commitment to create work which represents UK citizens from all demographics – and, as accountable organisations with localised knowledge, PSBs

are well-placed to swiftly and appropriately respond to demands for more inclusive programming.

- **Set the standard and generate competition:** While the introduction of global streaming services catalysed extraordinary expansion in the television industry, PSBs have survived this heightened competition by remaining trusted brands - and benchmarks for quality. The ever-increasing standards of PSB programmes fuel competition among PSBs themselves, as well as across commercial broadcasters and SVoDs. But PSBs must remain the foundation of our national television; as SVoDs continue to commission their content in response to global demand and the pursuit of profit, it is our UK-based PSBs who remain a beacon of UK-centric excellence.
- **Training and career development:** The BBC's portfolio of established continuing drama series (including EASTENDERS, HOLBY CITY) has long provided a training ground for early-career artists to learn in a safe, disciplined space. Each year, talent programmes such as BBC Continuing Drama Writers and the BBC Directors Scheme provide new writers and directors with their first opportunity in television; an experience which relies on utilising the well-oiled machine of long-running, returning shows - and which would be incredibly difficult to replicate in another production environment. Many of today's top talent (such as film director, Tom Hooper) began their professional lives on these programmes, and there would be a significant loss of new talent coming through if these opportunities were lost.
- **Recognisable organisations which connect and reassure:** Throughout the most uncertain moments for the nation during the coronavirus pandemic, the BBC remained a consistent, uniting force. Its vast, multifaceted reach was seen through the breaking of several viewing records – including both Boris Johnson's lockdown briefing on the news side, and for iPlayer demands on the entertainment side. PSBs play a societal and cultural role which reaches beyond specific viewing habits and becomes a connecting, uniting force among UK residents.