



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Steve Carson
Director
BBC Scotland
(by e-mail)

The Scottish Parliament
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9 March 2023

Dear Mr Carson

Impact of the Digital-first agenda on broadcasting in Scotland

Further to our discussion with a panel of musicians and academics on [23 February](#) and the meeting with yourself and Louise Thornton on [2 March](#), I am writing to highlight several matters that remain of concern to the Committee.

We acknowledge the challenging financial context, with the BBC's income reduced in real terms over recent years, and the changing habits of listeners, with more people listening to on-demand audio and less tuning into live or linear programming.

The fundamental issue as we see it, from a Scottish audience perspective, is that public service broadcasting risks being undermined in respect of the quality and the quantity of BBC Radio Scotland's programming for these specialist genres (jazz, classical and piping).

Let me begin though by referencing the BBC Charter, which has provided our focus for these evidence sessions, in particular the 4th purpose as set out in the Charter—

“To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom's nations and regions and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the United Kingdom.”

That support for the creative economy across the UK is, as you will be aware, described more fully under article 14 of the Charter—

“The BBC must ensure that its output and services overall provide a duly accurate and authentic portrayal and representation of the diverse communities of the whole of the

United Kingdom...In complying with this article, the BBC must have particular regard to the need to reflect underrepresented communities."

You told us last week that you were confident that recent scheduling decisions *"go well beyond our charter obligations"* and that you *"remain absolutely committed to broadcasting the best of Scottish culture"* and *"it is important in Scotland that we offer distinctive output that really celebrates the talent that we have"*.

We invite you to reflect on those views in light of the evidence that we took on 23 February and the concerns we further highlight below.

Jazz

We recognise that BBC Scotland is committed to nurturing talent, but we asked where the career progression would be – given there will be less airtime for jazz – if you were a young and emerging Scottish jazz artist. This is a matter of significant concern to those working with the next generation of players and performers.

It is welcome news that you are launching two new national competitions, one for classical and one for jazz, to supplement the BBC Radio Scotland young traditional musician of the year competition. We look forward to learning more as you develop these initiatives

We asked how the "living archive" could be grown and preserved, so that this incredible resource of past performance and creativity was not lost or forgotten. We also asked about whether content can be reused – in podcasts, on live radio, and via BBC Sounds – and if there was a financial cut-across.

We would be grateful if you can explain for us in financial terms these scheduling decisions that have been taken for jazz, classical and piping music programmes.

A disconnect

Members described a "disconnect" between BBC Scotland's approach and what the people who have signed petitions appear to be looking for. You talked about the BBC's Director General having set out a strategy "which means that we are pivoting to digital and investing in high-impact content".

Further to the evidence that we have heard, what can you say to address the concerns of those who believe that the music they care so passionately about, whether as an audience or as artists, may end up diminished and further marginalised as a consequence of this strategy?

Value for all

The connection of the Pipeline radio programme with the Highlands and Islands is such that a petition to keep it has attracted more than 10,000 signatures. We highlighted the educational and development aspect of the changes being proposed and the Deputy Convener described the future of young musicians in Scotland as looking *"bleak"*.

We asked about the idea of *"value for all"* and you suggested that *"part of our role as a public service broadcaster is in finding, identifying, nurturing and promoting Scottish*

talent. We are doubling down on that in the strategy. That is not without change—we accept that—but that is at the heart of it". How can you reassure young and emerging talent that their opportunities are not constrained by the scheduling changes?

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clare Adamson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Clare Adamson MSP, Convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee