

# National Union of Journalists

## Scottish Broadcasting

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is the voice for journalism and journalists in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1907 and has more than 22,000 members working in newspapers, news agencies, digital media, magazines, book publishing, public relations, photography, videography and broadcasting.

The NUJ represents numerous journalists working in broadcasting in Scotland, and is one of the recognised unions at both BBC Scotland and STV. We have a close working relationship with both employers, as well as representing members employed by other broadcasters and freelances.

The provision of quality and trusted news is a cornerstone of a democracy.

At a time of polarisation, social media disinformation, AI-supercharged fake news, and corporate consolidation of media ownership, independent quality journalism is vital in maintaining dialogue, democracy and truth.

Scottish broadcasting news is dominated by two key players, BBC Scotland and STV. Both currently provide varied, diverse news coverage and quality local information to Scotland's communities. Both also face challenges in terms of shifting patterns of news consumption and future funding.

### BBC and BBC Scotland

Despite concerted political attacks, the BBC remains the most trusted source of news in the UK according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report.

In an Ipsos survey for the DCMS, published in December 2025, the majority (60%) of UK adults were satisfied with BBC News, with even more finding it valuable to them personally (72%) and to UK society as a whole (77%). Those who said they do not trust the news in general were more dissatisfied (44%) than satisfied (20%) with the quality of BBC News. The survey found that most people (around 3 in 4) used at least one BBC News service, and about half said BBC News was their most used news source.

The same survey found that across news in general, the level of trust among consumers was roughly the same in Scotland (68%) as in England (67%), but lower than Wales (70%) or Northern Ireland (80%). The same survey showed that satisfaction levels with BBC News varied similarly, with 59% in England and Scotland, 66% in Wales and 75% in Northern Ireland. BBC News users were more satisfied than average with the quality of BBC News content and more likely than average to feel BBC News is valuable. The satisfaction rate among BBC News consumers was 83% for both BBC Scotland and BBC ALBA.

BBC ALBA, launched in 2008, provides regular programming for Scotland's Gaelic-speaking population of approximately 60,000. Those are predominately in the Highlands and Islands.

The NUJ's News Recovery Plan sets out various interventions – from sustainable funding to worker representation and protection from political interference – that represent journalists' vision for their workplace and an impartial, universally available and funded BBC.

The government should meaningfully engage with the trade unions at the BBC throughout the Charter Renewal process. There should also be greater public consultation to capture what licence fee payers value and want from our public service broadcaster. Consultation on the Charter Renewal or the BBC's future funding - whether carried out by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Ofcom or the BBC - should be widely promoted to the public via the BBC's on air and online channels.

The recent resignations of director general Tim Davie and head of news Deborah Turness have caused uncertainty and concern among many NUJ members at the BBC. The misediting by Panorama of a speech made by President Trump in 2021 has been exploited by politicians at home and abroad who seek to undermine the principle of public service broadcasting.

President Trump's threat to sue the BBC for between \$1 billion and \$5 billion demonstrates the need to protect our public broadcaster from commercial and political interference. The NUJ believes the defamation claim – which is tantamount to a mega SLAPP and represents an attack on UK democracy - is wholly disproportionate and reflects the Trump administration's track record of attempting to defund, cow and censor domestic and foreign media.

The BBC must back its staff and resist politically motivated attacks that do a disservice to the thousands of journalists striving to meet high editorial standards while conducting themselves professionally under immense scrutiny.

AI-generated news is another significant threat to public trust in journalism. The BBC must be an industry-leading employer in the ethical use of AI within its journalism, adopting a cautious, transparent approach by only deploying new technology with proper safeguards and after consultation with the union representatives.

Mistakes are more likely where journalists are overworked and journalism is under-resourced. In 2024 Tim Davie stated that 14 years of successive cuts had resulted in a 30% real terms reduction in the BBC's budget. This has undermined and weakened the BBC's radio, television and digital output, as well as its core news provision – locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Freezes and reductions to the licence fee, decided in closed-door negotiations with ministers since 2010, have also resulted in a real term pay cut for staff, the loss of many experienced journalists and a decline in the quality of training.

The BBC's primary source of funding is the licence fee. The UK government could and should reverse decisions that have diverted licence fee income away from the BBC's core work, for example the direct funding free licences for the over 75s. The NUJ has also argued that the Local Democracy Reporter scheme, where the BBC pays other media employers for specific journalist roles covering local government, should be reformed so that no public money goes to companies cutting frontline journalistic roles, taking executive bonuses or blocking trade unions.

The BBC's funding model must protect the principle of universality, and its funding settlement must be sufficient to deliver quality public service broadcasting throughout the nations and regions. Content and programming should not be moved to the commercially-run BBC Studios, which operates as a competitor within the wider broadcasting landscape rather than an enabler of the creative sector.

The NUJ supports the license fee model and opposes decriminalisation of nonpayment, which remains an effective deterrent against evasion. There must be meaningful, sustained increases to the licence fee that ends salami slicing cuts, protects against political interference, and prioritises quality local, regional, national and international news provision.

The BBC charter is the only one in the UK that requires regular renewal. The NUJ believes a safer, fairer funding arrangement could be adopted.

Since around 70% of BBC Scotland's cost base is in staffing, any cuts to funding almost inevitably mean cuts to jobs.

In 2024 BBC Scotland carried out a restructuring programme involving redundancies across news in all nations and regions. In Scotland there were no compulsory redundancies, but there were around 30 role closures in editorial, which were entirely achieved through voluntary redundancies.

While any reduction in headcount and news coverage is opposed by the NUJ, it is notable that BBC Scotland achieved this without compulsory redundancies, and that it took greater care than other employers in its analysis of where work would be reduced or redistributed. BBC Scotland engaged with the unions in this process from an early stage.

In 2024 BBC Scotland sought, and were granted, permission from Ofcom to change its Operating Licence to reduce the number of peak-time broadcast hours for news programming on the BBC Scotland. This saw the closure of The Nine on BBC Scotland, with a replacement extended Reporting Scotland at 7pm, extending Debate Night from 24 to 30 episodes, and investing online. There were no role closures associated with these changes.

The NUJ believes that providing sustainable funding for quality journalism will strengthen public trust and better serve under-represented communities.

The NUJ acknowledges that the BBC's universal funding is a privilege and comes with

a responsibility to serve all audiences. While the BBC reaches 95% of the UK adult population each month, nations and regions have been underserved and underrepresented for years.

The BBC should improve on- and off-screen diversity initiatives, offering training programmes and apprenticeships to people from diverse, working-class backgrounds who are traditionally denied entry to journalism.

The BBC could also participate in a UK-wide media literacy initiative, equipping children and adults with the necessary skills to navigate an era of disinformation and deep fakes. This would be complimented by investment in news resources – like BBC Verify – that help the public assess and interrogate the veracity of sources and information.

The BBC aims to spend £700m extra outside London by 2027/28, resulting in expanding operations in Glasgow.

NUJ members at the BBC have demanded governance reform. There should be proper worker representation on the BBC board with at least 25% of board seats filled by employees from non-management roles to champion public interest journalism. To change the culture of an institution, workers must have a say on its most important oversight and decision-making body.

In addition to worker representation, the NUJ believes the BBC board and its chair should be chosen by an arms-length body to protect the BBC from political interference and ensure greater independence. The NUJ opposes any political appointees to the BBC board.

NUJ members have called for whistle-blowing procedures for staff to be established, so serious breaches of editorial standards can be addressed at the earliest opportunity. There should also be greater safeguards and support for BBC journalists, some of whom regularly experience harassment and abuse – which no one should have to tolerate at work.

There must also be improved pay, conditions and training to retain staff, maintain impartiality, and uphold journalists' right to report freely - without fear or interference.

The UK government has an opportunity to demonstrate that it has the courage, vision, ambition and determination needed to protect one of the UK's most treasured national assets, putting the BBC on secure and sustainable footing for generations to come.

This can be achieved by sustained increases to the licence fee to deliver quality public service broadcasting and local, regional, national and international news provision and increased investment in both digital and linear news, including genuinely live and local radio news bulletins.

## **STV and ITV Border**

STV plc owns the two channel 3 licence areas for STV Central (covering the central belt) and STV North, previously known as Grampian Television (covering the north of Scotland, north-east, Angus and Dundee). These are the only two licences which lie

outside of the ITV network and provide a distinct, independent, Scottish identity to news coverage. STV is a major Scottish brand and STV News is a key part of the public face of that brand.

STV North (previously known as Grampian Television before 2009) covers 1.3m viewers, of whom approximately 800k are in the Aberdeen sub-region, and around 500k are in the Dundee sub-region. STV Central covers 3.7m viewers, of whom 2.5m are in the Glasgow sub-area, and 1.2m are in the Edinburgh sub-area. The remaining viewers in the south of Scotland are served by ITV Border. It has bases in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Inverness, Holyrood and Westminster.

In January 2025 STV renewed its two licences with Ofcom for a ten year period. Those licence renewals, which were renegotiated over several years, and officially announced in March 2024, require STV to produce a specified amount of local news coverage for each of the two licence areas.

STV provide substantial news coverage both on linear, video on demand, and digital. In Ofcom's "Media Nations" research, 73% of viewers were satisfied with STV for high-quality regional news provision.

That news coverage is centred around the two flagship News at 6 programmes, one of which is anchored in Glasgow, covering the central belt, and the other which is anchored in Aberdeen. The two programmes go out live (with pre-recorded segments such as weather), each have a single presenter (alternating between two main presenters for each programme), and set their own running order – although they share some content across the two programmes.

Each of the two main News at 6 programmes currently has a five minutes "opt" for each of the two sub-regions within each licence area. In practice this means that for STV North viewers closer to Dundee see five minutes of dedicated Dundee news (although this timing can include weather), and STV Central has a similar opt for Edinburgh. In total currently, they currently produce 70 minutes of television to cover the two 30 minutes News at Six, and the two five-minutes 'opts'. There are additional news programmes through the day, including regional bulletins during Good Morning Britain, and Scotland Tonight, a current affairs programme which airs four nights a week.

The News at 6 programmes are a Scottish media success story, regularly outperforming BBC Scotland's 1830 Reporting Scotland, and are frequently one of the top two most watched programmes in the evening. They have a combined viewership in the region of 300,000-350,000 and STV's internal figures have said that STV North is the most successful of the two, with audience share in the region of 40%.

STV plc currently faces a significant financial crisis, and in the first 12 months under Chief Executive Rufus Radcliffe has seen a halving of the value of the company. (Share price 1st December 2024: 226p, compared with 107.0p in 21st November 2025). A third of the value of the company was removed on the day of the profits warning. At the time of writing the share price is 108.p. The last time the share price was this low was in 2013.

STV plc makes money principally from two main sources: advertising on linear television or VOD and making television programmes for other broadcasters through

its production arm STV Studios. Television advertising is seasonal, hard to predict, can change quickly, and is strongly linked to consumer and business confidence in the economy, as well as other events, such as the World Cup or Christmas advertising. Income from productions can be predicted on a more long-term basis – typically a year or 18 months ahead.

In 2024 STV made an adjusted operating profit of £20.6m on turnover of £188m. Of that £188m, £84.4m came from its broadcast division, another £84.4 came from Studios, with £19.5m from Digital. It currently spends £8.5m on STV News.

In July 2025, STV issued a profits warning, blaming a fall in advertising and a slump in studio productions, causing an immediate and severe collapse in the share price. The company announced it had made a £200,000 half-year loss before tax (2024: profit of £4.8m) as total advertising revenue fell 10% to £45.6m (2024: £50.7m), driven by a 16% fall in national linear advertising.

The fall in advertising reflects both a lack of business confidence and consumer spending, as well as greater competition for advertising across streaming services and digital.

In September 2025 it announced it was to cut 60 jobs across the business, of which 30 would be in news, and its intention to produce a single news programme across both licence areas.

On October 29th 2025, the day after STV's appearance in front of the Scottish Affairs Committee in Westminster, STV plc filed accounts for (among others) subsidiary companies STV North Ltd and STV Central Ltd. The accounts show that in 2024 STV North Ltd made an increased profit of £9.2m (up from £7.4m in 2023) on an increased turnover of £22.3m (2023: £19.9m).

The NUJ has written to the Scottish Affairs Committee on November 5th stating our belief that the reason for the late filing of these financial returns was so that they did not face scrutiny on the contents of those accounts when they appeared before the committee.

On September 25th 2025 STV plc announced plans to cut the STV North edition of the News at 6 programme, as well as cutting up to 30 jobs in its newsrooms, as well as a further 30 jobs in other parts of the business. This move has generated a huge amount of public, business, political and trade union opposition.

A survey commissioned by True North Advisors in November 2025 over 3,000 adults in the north and north-east of Scotland showed 83% opposition to the proposed cuts, with only 4% in favour.

STV have described their restructuring plans as part of a plan a “pivot to digital”. We do not believe them. We believe the planned restructuring is forced by a financial crisis of their making, rather a well thought through strategy to engage with audiences. For example, the move to digital has been talked about in the newsroom for over a decade. Secondly, under the current plans three of the five digital team roles are to be made redundant.

At the time of writing NUJ members at STV are scheduled to hold a day of strike action on 7th January 2026 over compulsory redundancies and the proposed axing of the STV North edition of the News at 6.

STV requires permission from the regulator Ofcom to change the terms in its channel 3 licences. It initially wanted to produce a single programme for the News at 6 across both licence areas, and drop the five minute regional opts. At a late stage, in December 2025, it changed those proposals in the face of widespread opposition to the plans, and after Ofcom indicated it was not inclined to support those proposals.

The revised plans, which Ofcom says it is minded to accept, ask for there to be a single News at 6 programme across the two licence areas anchored from Glasgow but with a minimum of 30% coverage specific to each of the two licence areas. The consultation on the plans closes on 9th February.

The NUJ will be making a submission to Ofcom opposing the revised plans on the grounds that it will adversely affect news coverage in the two licence areas. For example, a 30% coverage of news within STV North could, by our calculations, simply amount to local weather, local sport, and one news item per programme. This is a significant difference from the current quality journalism for the north that viewers have come to expect.

STV say that regardless of the outcome from Ofcom, it intends to move production and presentation from Aberdeen to Glasgow, and to seek to make alternative savings through headcount. That alternative plan would see the Aberdeen edition of the News at 6 anchored from Glasgow and prerecorded in mid to late afternoon, making it difficult or impossible to cover stories which were likely to change or break later in the day. These would include, among other things, court cases or political stories.

There is significant danger in that by agreeing to these changes Ofcom create a dangerous precedent to allow other channel 3 licences to also reduce their news coverage. Channel 3 public sector media obligations represent a cost to commercial companies. Those companies will always seek to maximise profits, and where possible to reduce those costs. This is always a downwards ratchet: in years when STV and ITV face financial difficulties, they will seek to reduce their costs associated with news production, but in years when they make profits, those profits are returned to shareholders, executives and other areas – but rarely to increase their public service broadcasting provisions.

Ofcom's decision to announce it provisionally approves the revised plans from STV have caused significant dismay with journalists at STV. It creates the impression that Ofcom has already made a decision before the public consultation has begun, and that the decision has been made in closed meetings to which STV has access, but to which viewers, politicians, business leaders and the trade unions were not invited to participate.

To put this in context, the Ofcom public consultation is open for 55 days – which included the eleven-day Christmas break. By contrast, there were over 80 days between the announcement of the cuts and the opening of the consultation, in which

STV and Ofcom were privately discussing the plans, and we believe STV and Ofcom were discussing the proposals far earlier than that. This has potential to undermine public faith in the independence of Ofcom, and how it balances the opinions of broadcasters with those of other stakeholders.

Finally, it is notable that Ofcom does not permit renegotiation of channel 3 licence terms at the time of renewal. Linear broadcasting has high barriers to entry for new entrants, meaning there are at any time fewer potential competitors for licences. If licence changes can only be made after a ten-year term has been agreed, this puts significant power in the hands of the licence holder, as at that point, it faces little competition.

In May 2025 STV announced the launch of STV Radio, a new commercial radio station venture aimed at an audience between 35-55. It is not news-led, does not form part of their Ofcom commitment, will not generate jobs for journalists, is expected to cost £1m before making a profit in 2027. It is scheduled to launch on 6th January, with the launch date moved after the NUJ announced a strike date on the initial launch date of 7th January. The NUJ's view is this is a luxury which STV cannot afford at the moment, and they can only afford it by cutting the jobs of journalists to pay for it.

STV argue that audiences are changing in the way they consume news, and that linear broadcasts – those which are broadcast on channels at specific times – have a declining viewership. They are seeking to move resources to engage audiences across many channels – including digital and social media.

There is some merit in this argument, but there are three key points to make arising from it. The first is that it is important to note this is not a new argument or a sudden change. It is an issue with which the entire media industry – including legacy print newspapers and digital-only operations – have been facing for some time, and regulator Ofcom has been discussing for over a decade.

The second is that while linear news broadcasts such as the News at 6 have increasingly an older viewer demographic, this is a viewer group which is more resistant to switching to consuming news consumption to digital media. Cuts to the News at 6 will disproportionately affect the elderly and the digitally disenfranchised.

The third point is that while there are undoubtedly changes in viewing, the NUJ believes the real impetus for having to make severe financial cuts is not changing viewing habits, but the company's own financial mismanagement.

A wider, but potentially more worrying issue is the announcement in November 2025 that ITV, which owns 13 of the 15 channel 3 licences, was in talks with Sky/Comcast to sell its television division for £1.6bn. This would be the biggest consolidation in UK broadcasting in more than 20 years.

One interpretation of this is to reflect the current commercial pressures that STV face are not unique, but are shared by ITV, in facing challenges from massive streaming services.

However, in the event of such an approved takeover one outcome could be that Sky/Comcast also look to secure the remaining two licences with a takeover of STV,

especially at the reduced price of (currently) £55m. While the ITV talks have been described as 'preliminary', we believe that the talks are far more advanced than have been publicised, and a takeover, subject to regulatory approval, could happen as soon as Q2 2026. Such a move would see an iconic Scottish broadcaster now owned by a US giant.