

# Professor Catherine Happer and Catriona Forrest, Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG)

## Scottish Broadcasting

**About:** [The Glasgow University Media Group](#) is a research network which has been based in the Sociology department at the University for over 50 years. It has an international reputation for innovative methods of media analysis, and, in particular, its development of a holistic approach to understanding the role of media in shaping outcomes in society. Empirical studies on, for example, media and climate change, refugees, and the criminal justice system have integrated a combination of methods including interviews with journalists, content analysis and focus groups with audiences. The following insights and recommendations are drawn primarily from: a) [a series of focus groups](#) conducted over 15 years which have charted changing models of media trust with research conducted in Scotland and the UK (reported in full in [Happer, 2024](#)) and b) a research and consultation exercise conducted in 2022 which involved a series of stakeholder workshops with representatives from BBC Scotland, STV, Ofcom and a range of professional and independent news outlets, academics and experts to examine the sustainability of Scotland's media sector ([see final report here](#)) and c) expertise in journalism and broadcast skills and methods education via delivery of teaching programmes. The work of the GUMG is concerned with news provision and reception and the role of journalism in society and so this submission shares this focus.

Catherine Happer is the Director of the GUMG and Lead of the Culture, Media and Society subject group in the School of Social and Political Sciences, and is also a board member of the new government-supported organisation, Scottish Institute of Public Interest Journalism (SPIJI).

Catriona Forrest leads the Masters in Media, Communications and International Journalism at the University of Glasgow and is Director of the University's Journalism and Factual Storytelling Education Network. She is a member of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and a committee member of Women in Journalism Scotland (WiJS), for whom she leads a mentoring programme.

Both Catherine and Catriona have previously worked as journalists and factual programme makers, including at the BBC and as freelancers.

### **1) Broadcasting market in Scotland and the impacts of new technologies and changing market environment.**

Scotland's broadcasting market faces significant structural issues which are the product of an increasingly globalised media system in which Scottish content competes with content from all over the world. In particular, the emergence of global

streaming platforms such as Netflix, which produce programming on massive budgets with significant cross-media advertising campaigns, and YouTube, which shares content from all over the world, pose challenges in respect of capturing and holding audiences, especially young audiences. STV, for example, have responded to this threat in 2025 by announcing [a new business strategy](#) aimed at building the brand as a 'globally recognised content powerhouse'.

In this context where the role, relevance and status of domestically produced broadcasting is increasingly questioned, not all genres are impacted to the same degree or in the same way - for example, in entertainment and drama, increasing competition poses a major threat in respect of dwindling audiences for local content. In news and current affairs, whilst there are issues of trust which we will discuss, broadcast news content continues to reach significant audiences, albeit much reduced if viewed historically.

[Evidence from Ofcom's 2025 survey of Scottish news consumption](#) indicates that broadcast TV remains a highly popular way of accessing news and the BBC is the most popular news provider. More than 80% of Scottish adults are interested in 'news about Scotland' which is higher than the figure for the other nations. However, this must be seen in what is perhaps the most significant finding from the survey which is that social media platforms have, for the first time, emerged as the most popular way of accessing news. As Facebook, YouTube and so on do not actually produce news content, what these figures represent is the increasing cannibalisation of broadcast content produced and paid for by the BBC, STV and other providers. Many people simply do not know the origins of the content they consume. Currently these platforms are subject to limited regulation in respect of these practices due to the weak implementation of copyright legislation, and [news providers are only compensated where there is a contractual relationship in place which guarantees it](#).

## Findings

Through our research, we identify the following issues:

**Decline in trust:** Broadcast news from BBC Scotland and other professional news providers has seen a decline in trust in recent years, again this is a wider issue impacting on all forms of traditional news (also newspapers now delivered largely online). For many audience groups, this is due to what is perceived as the political agenda of professional news which serves those in power and does not speak to the interests and priorities of normal people. Political reporting of the economy, in particular, is perceived to be remote from everyday lives. There is a perceived lack of diversity both in industry personnel and what makes its way onto screen: key issues are the class backgrounds of journalists, and the dominance of news from London and the Central Belt. Many people seek out alternatives to counter what they perceive as 'mainstream media bias'.

**Fragmented audiences:** This decline in trust is experienced particularly by those in the lower income groups and young people. There is also a correlation between those most disaffected with the political system and the likelihood of investing trust in alternative information sources. Here our findings are also supported by survey work at the [Reuters Institute at Oxford University](#) which evidences that moves away from

broadcast news are highly differentiated along socio-economic lines. The longer term risk is that we see the emergence of a two tier model for broadcast news: where those who are in the higher income groups and/or more highly educated are well served, and the under-privileged go elsewhere for news and often to places where disinformation thrives.

**Increase in popularity of social media news influencers:** In recent years, we have seen the emergence of social media influencers who have moved into the provision of information or what we might call 'news alternatives'. These are highly popular and influential with audiences again in particular with young audiences. Our research shows the way in which audiences often regard influencers as more relatable and authentic than traditional news providers. The mode of presentation can create the impression of proximity and relevance to everyday issues which has played a role in driving audiences away from local news, and to which Scottish news providers have responded by reducing regional content.

**Lack of regulation of 'news alternatives':** There is currently no regulation in respect of the funding or practices of information gathering which influencers and other content producers engage in to report 'news'. [Some influencers are funded by political parties and/or politically motivated lobby groups](#), for example, but this is an area that is very under-researched. Evidence suggests that influencers often have no professional standards such as corroboration of evidence or protections in place for those they report on such as would be demanded of conventional news providers. As noted above, in addition, often professionally produced news content is reproduced without authorisation or consent.

**AI generated content:** The most recent challenge – the full impacts of which are not yet known – is the emergence of generative AI. Generative AI is a general term for a whole range of mechanisms, practices and impacts: the circulation and influence of AI generated audio and visual content which is highly authentic (such as 'deep fakes'); AI 'fact-checkers' in social media apps and news organisations' websites; and the use of AI in media production. The latter most directly impacts broadcasting as it may lead to jobs cuts and a reduced skills base in the industry however the other practices have more complex implications which intensify these questions of the authority and status of professional media services.

## **2) Public service broadcasting and the Scottish Government's role in this.**

By public service broadcasting, we refer to BBC Scotland primarily but public service rules also apply to different degrees across the terrestrial channels such as STV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. Public service broadcasting in Scotland has been under attack for some time coming under pressure both from Conservative voices in Westminster and pro-independence commentators, as well as disaffection from segments of the audience as above. Questions around funding, independence from government, and competitiveness within a globalised media system are particularly acute in discussions of the sustainability and future of public service broadcasting. Progressively undermined in its negotiations with successive governments, the BBC is currently operating at a reduced capacity to provide services. This limits its ability to provide the sort of independent critique and impartiality the public needs and

expect. It also strains its capacity to generate high-end content that can compete with the highest quality offers of the streamers.

## Findings and recommendations

**Models of funding:** In our stakeholders workshops, we discussed alternative approaches to the current funding model which might be more sustainable in the current technological and political environment. The license fee based on the principle of universality has been undermined in the digital era in which, as above, people engage with BBC content via social media and apps without realising that they need a TV licence. This is only going to get worse as the moves to online content via platforms increases. There is a need to rethink the current model and here lessons can be learned from comparable small territories which implement more hybrid systems of funding to meet the needs of the current climate – for example, [Denmark supports its media](#) through taxation for direct subsidies, indirect subsidies, and investment in public service media.

**Visibility of content:** The BBC Scotland channel lacks prominence on the electronic programme guide (EPG) in comparison with the other five main network channels and this further limits the visibility which is critical to maintaining domestic audiences. Audiences to the channel's flagship news show, *The Nine*, now cancelled, are likely to have suffered from this listing. There is a need to address questions of visibility of content both at the EPG and listings level but also the more complex issue of regulating use of BBC content by other information providers.

**BBC independence:** The recent fall-out from the re-editing of the Panorama programme on Trump's January 6<sup>th</sup> speech, and subsequent resignation of the Director General, opens up new questions about the independence of the BBC from government and other political actors. The suitability of political appointees made to the board, and journalistic relations with government ministers, both in the UK and Scotland, should be assessed in respect of fitness for purpose. Other models exist - for example, [in Quebec there is shared responsibility between government, industry and civil society for setting standards and ethics](#). The lobby system in which select journalists have privileged access to briefings and materials (and the now routine practice of 'leaking' online) is also contributing to perceptions of politicisation. There is a need to explore alternative ways of sharing information in a more participatory media system.

**Rebuilding trust:** There is an urgent need for initiatives to maintain – and in some cases rebuild - trust in public service media, particularly amongst those groups most affected. This should be paralleled by efforts to foster a stronger media literacy in those groups most drawn to alternative content. The key point is that news has to change: to include a greater diversity of voices, a need to counter the agenda of politicians, and to move to more accessible forms of language and presentation of news. It is not enough to simply direct people back to mainstream news for 'truth' or 'accurate information'. Audiences must believe news is serving their interests. Our research shows however that audiences still turn to broadcast news in times of crisis – for example, millions tuning into the BBC during the pandemic and there is much to be learned from the ways in which both mainstream audiences and those most disconnected were reached during this time.

### 3) Skills development in the screen and broadcasting sectors.

As our [Scotland's Sustainable Media Future report](#) acknowledged, the scale and nature of job losses in the local and national screen and broadcasting sectors within Scotland are not fully known, and there is a pressing need for research leading to in-depth national data on the scale of reduced investment in media, and the impacts on journalism provision, loss of broadcasting and screen industry personnel and general precarity. Similarly, there is need for more robust data on the skills needs in respect of producing the next generation of journalists to perform their democratic role in a fast-changing technological landscape.

#### Findings and recommendations

**Media skills and training:** The question of skills training is highly topical in the journalism education, broadcast and screen communities in Scotland and globally. There is acknowledgment of the need to prepare industry entrants for a portfolio career. Individuals are likely to change roles multiple times and will need to adapt as technologies and the industry change, often rapidly. To prepare for this 'automation resilience', training and development will be required to move from the traditional focus on technical skills and towards the 'soft skills' which are less easily replaced by artificial intelligence, and which build resilience among the workforce, and encourage a media practice which serves the public interest: critical media literacy and digital literacy; fact checking and verification; storytelling skills such as identifying stories and making ideas clear, engaging and memorable; inclusive leadership and teamworking; reflective practice; writing and communicating effectively; environmental awareness; financial skills and an awareness of the industry and its new business models; and an understanding of legislation and how it affects journalism practice. Possibly the most important skills will be critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, curiosity and flexibility.

**The impacts of generative AI:** AI brings challenges in terms of skills and ethics, hand in hand with positives and opportunities. Journalists will need sufficient technical skills to identify and use appropriate AI tools, leveraging AI to work faster. However, specific technical skills will become less crucial than a broader knowledge of how AI in its current forms can be applied as a tool to support great storytelling, supported by a critical awareness of its potential bias and other ethical challenges such as copyright. Because of the legal and ethical considerations posed by AI, key journalism skills will continue to be an awareness of media law, and the ability (and the time) to keep up with a changing legal landscape and how the law impacts on reporting.

**Impacts of constant upskilling:** The need for constant upskilling raises concerns for diversity in the industry, with freelance broadcast workers and journalists from lower income backgrounds potentially missing out on opportunities for training and development. In our media programmes at the University of Glasgow we see increasing pressures on media students - the cost-of-living crisis; housing insecurity; caring roles; wellbeing and mental health - all with a constant undercurrent of anxiety over jobs and prospects. Signposting the value of media skills in other sectors builds confidence and empowers individuals who seek to apply their training in other



industries or career pathways ([Forrest, et al, 2023](#)). We need to encourage widening participation in education and promote greater diversity. [With the Reuters Institute identifying under a third of top editors in global brands are women](#) - and the UK at around 46%, we can do more to encourage women into leadership and editorial roles. A homogenous workforce can only serve to further erode trust in media, as noted above.

**Coaching and mentorship:** Informal and formal coaching, mentorship and training opportunities will become increasingly important ways to support industry entrants and career returners, and to address diversity issues. Women in Journalism Scotland (WiJS) runs mentorship schemes which encourage women to enter sports journalism and other underrepresented areas. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and BECTU, ScreenSkills, and many other organisations including some publishers such as the BBC and investigative journalism outlet, The Ferret, deliver up to date industry skills and media literacy training. There is however a lack of coherence in information about broadcast, screen and journalism skills forecasting and training opportunities, and Scotland would benefit from skills forecasting research as well as a central national resource which would help avoid skills gaps, overlaps and missed opportunities as learners transition into employment.

**Curriculum for Life:** The University of Glasgow has developed a model, the Curriculum for Life, which aims to help students transition into employment: ‘for students to graduate as creative leaders, social innovators, global citizens or change makers, they must have space to practice taking power, acknowledging their own accountability as investors in their futures, from work futures to democratic futures’ ([Ferrie et al, 2025](#)). This approach is an important consideration in future media skills training – encouraging media industry entrants to become confident and active citizens who use quality storytelling skills to hold power to account.

#### **4) The BBC Charter and Framework renewal process: what should a future BBC deliver for Scotland, particularly in reference to the above points.**

In 2027, the government will examine and renew the BBC’s Royal Charter, establishing the terms for how the BBC operates in this challenging global media landscape. In our opinion, and drawing on the previous points, a future BBC should aim to deliver for Scotland:

- 1) A BBC which represents the diversity of the public in respect of demographics, geography, interests and political opinion and does not simply report a narrow agenda focused on the Central Belt or Holyrood political debate.
- 2) A sustainable funding model for public service media which moves beyond reliance upon the license fee to a more hybrid model of targeted investment and direct subsidies which can respond to challenges as they arise.
- 3) A more participatory approach to setting journalistic agendas which may involve members of the public getting involved in identifying topics of importance and moving away from a narrow range of sources (business people, politicians, media personnel) to those with expertise and experience of all areas of public life.

- 4) A BBC which is independent from government in respect of both journalistic freedom, and a BBC Scotland which has autonomy from London in respect of its reporting practices and agenda.
- 5) A BBC which responds to a changing set of informational needs in respect of new forms of expertise and more relatable content with everyday application - a good example drawn from research with focus groups is Martin Lewis, [moneysavingexpert.com](http://moneysavingexpert.com), with his cross-media model of trusted expertise and audience participation.
- 6) A BBC that can be trusted to offer the best, most accurate account of what is going on in the world and which is not compromised by 'AI slop', clickbait headlines, or the tabloidization of reporting.