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Scottish Broadcasting

Introduction

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Scottish Parliament Culture Committee inquiry on Scottish broadcasting. This written contribution is informed by over 20 years' in the screen and broadcasting industry, encompassing professional practice, support for students and new talent, as well as academic research in this field. In particular, it draws on a commissioned report for Screen Scotland, published in 2023, mapping filmmaking and television teaching provision across Scotland.

The submission sets out key considerations and recommendations to support the Committee's scrutiny of Scottish broadcasting, informed largely by engagement to date with BBC Scotland and reflecting on current challenges, examples of best practice, and opportunities for the future.

For over 20 years, the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) has delivered undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes across film, television, journalism, radio and podcasting, in addition to music, performance and digital art. In 2012, UWS became one of only three Scottish higher education institutions to be recognised by Creative Skillset as a centre of excellence in creative industries teaching, resulting in the establishment of the UWS Creative Media Academy (CMA). The Creative Media Academy continues to focus on employability and industry relevance, demonstrated through professional accreditation from ScreenSkills, the Joint Audio Media Education Support (JAMES), the Broadcast Journalism Training Council (BJTC) and the Scottish Music Industry Association (SMIA).

The recurrent success of our student films at the Royal Television Society (RTS), BAFTA and Grierson Awards is testament to our standing within the UK and internationally. Most recently, two UWS student films were nominated for the 2025 BAFTA Scotland Best Short Film Award: *My Dad and the Volcano* by MA Filmmaking graduate Gavin Reid, and *The Flowers Stand Silently, Witnessing* by doctoral student, Theo Panagopoulos.

At undergraduate level, Mathilde van Ooijen's short documentary, *On the Red List*, won three 2025 RTS awards including the National RTS Student Television Award for the category of Saving the Planet. Additionally, director Daniel Kelly's film, *Gas and Electricity*, won both Best Scotland and Best UK Student Drama at the 2025 RTS National Awards. Daniel is also the recipient of a 2026 BAFTA Studentship to study on the MA Filmmaking programme at UWS, one of only six such scholarships in the UK.

The UWS Creative Media Academy views itself a key stakeholder in the Scottish screen industry ecosystem and as such has a strong interest in the current health and future vitality of BBC Scotland and STV, particularly in the following respects:

1. As major employers of our graduates, both as production crew and talent.
2. As commissioners of programmes and content that provide opportunities for our alumni, both directly and indirectly through independent production companies.
3. As the leading Scottish broadcast platforms for the expression and exploration of cultural representation and democratic values.

Skills development and employment

In 2023 I was the lead author on a report commissioned by Screen Scotland that mapped existing filmmaking and television teaching provision in Scotland, with a view to determining the need for – and viability of – a national film and television school for Scotland.¹

The report set out to identify the educational and skills pipeline for filmmaking and television production students, from school through to college and university, and ultimately, to the highest level of education, postgraduate study.

Unlike previous reports, analysis followed CILECT² and ScreenSkills criteria, considering only college and university programmes with pedagogical approaches in which at least 50 per cent of core teaching is practice-based. This threshold reflects programmes that can be considered to “deliver film and television audio-visual training to a level that would be considered a professional preparation for industry”.³

Our research found that, as of 2023, Scotland’s provision comprised:

- 1,112 students enrolled on 35 film and TV production relevant programmes at 12 further education colleges.
- 814 students across eight undergraduate degree programmes at five universities
- 101 students across five postgraduate degree programmes at four universities

Given the international student focus of current higher education business models, we also analysed the proportion of Scottish-domiciled students being instructed on

¹ *A Film School for Scotland: Mapping Existing Provision* (2023, University of the West of Scotland, 128 pages) research report commissioned by Screen Scotland and produced by Professor Nick Higgins (lead author), Dr Alesandra Webb & Dr Niclas Hell.

² CILECT is the International Association of Film and Television Schools (French: *Centre international de liaison des écoles de cinéma et de télévision*, CILECT), the association of the world's major film and television schools.

³ See the sections on Undergraduate Filmmaking Education & Postgraduate University Education in *A Film School for Scotland: Mapping Existing Provision* (ibid) pp. 40-63 & pp. 66-71 respectively.

each higher education programme. The results revealed lower numbers of Scottish students than might have been expected, particularly at the most advanced level of Masters study:

- 538 (66%) of those enrolled on identified undergraduate programmes were Scottish-domiciled
- 52 (52%) of those enrolled on identified postgraduate programmes were Scottish-domiciled

In theory, this educational pipeline represents the main source of skilled labour for the Scottish broadcast and film industry. Given the BBC's recognised role (according to the charter review) in skills and workforce development, we therefore recommend that BBC Scotland formally adopts a sector leadership role through the establishment of new mechanism to support sharing opportunities, training and work experience with the six identified universities actively delivering practice-based education in the sector.

In previous years, we have benefitted from such an approach through the Creative Skillset Scotland National Board; a forum chaired by BBC Scotland that brought together representatives from Skillset accredited film and television programmes in Scotland, alongside major film and TV industry employers including STV, production companies and facilities houses, serving as a key mechanism and interface between education and the screen industry.⁴

At its best this national screen skills board:

- Enabled hundreds of students to participate in the Commonwealth Games broadcaster initiative⁵
- Support university and college staff to engage in CPD programmes facilitated by the BBC
- Sowed the seeds of the STV local TV-university partnership, leading to the establishment of a newsroom on the UWS Ayr campus
- Crucially, supported the difficult transition from education into employment, resulting in real jobs and positive graduate outcomes for many students

Currently, BBC Scotland engages with the college sector through 'The Social' initiative, an online digital project that has been running since 2015 and supports young people across Scotland to develop and create short form, presenter-led, low-cost online content for The Social's social media channels. While this initiative has been a welcome and valuable addition to the media landscape, it does not offer a clear progression route from the educational pipeline we have identified that seeks to professionalize craft skills such as cinematography, sound recording, editing,

⁴ For an overview of Creative Skillset activities in Scotland in 2015 see parliamentary submission from Alasdair Smith <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/58565/pdf/> Creative Skillset was relaunched as ScreenSkills (UK) in 2018.

⁵ See Host Broadcaster Training Initiative (HBTI) 2014 summary report (01.09.2014)

producing and directing. If it does, it only offers skills development within a very limited online format.

BBC Scotland staff also make a welcome contribution through regular guest lectures and seminars across the six higher education institutions that deliver professional level film and TV education in Scotland. This contribution is very much appreciated by staff and students alike. However, this engagement is not formalized and operates on an ad-hoc basis. Nor does it offer a transparent, equitable or formal entry point into the institution.

We therefore recommend that BBC Scotland adopts a renewed, sector-leading role approach to skills and workforce development in Scotland, which might include:

1. The establishment and leadership of a new Screen Skills Scotland National Board, bringing together the six higher education institutions that currently offer a professional level of screen skills education (UWS, Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh College of Art, University of the Highlands and Islands, Glasgow Caledonian University and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland), alongside further education representatives, major broadcasters, production companies and facilities houses. This would serve as a key mechanism and interface between education and the screen industry, promoting opportunities for students, staff and graduates.
2. The introduction of targeted graduate bursaries and paid internships
3. Sponsorship of a Scottish Students on Screen Festival
4. Broadcast the best student films on the BBC Scotland channel

Production of Scottish-made outputs

As a major supplier of crew and talent to the screen workforce in Scotland, the UWS Creative Media Academy has growing concerns about a number of recent developments within the BBC that risk impacting the sustainability of the Scottish screen industry ecosystem. In each of these cases, our concern centres on the loss of opportunity for our graduates and the longer-term implications for a sustainable production sector in Scotland:

1. **Closure of River City.** The decision to close River City – the longest running broadcast soap – is of particular concern. As a long-running, studio-based drama, the programme offered one of the few reliable sources of regular income for freelance screen professionals in Scotland. Crucially, it also functioned as a skills and progression pipeline. The closure of the River City Training Academy – and prior to that, the loss of more informal but regular opportunities for emerging directors, such as Ruth Paxton and Siri Rodnes, to experience studio production – has removed one of the few avenues BBC Scotland offered for the development and talent progression of directors and craft practitioners, reducing opportunities for progression at early and mid-careers stages.⁶

⁶ <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/constitution-europe-external-affairs-and-culture-committee/equity-river-city-briefing-for-constitution-europe-external-affairs-and-culture-committee-15-may.pdf>

2. **Lack of Scottish crew on The Traitors.** We also share wider sector concerns regarding the lack of Scottish behind-the-camera crew on productions identified as 'Scottish-qualifying', such as the documented case of *The Traitors*. While the programme met Scottish quota requirements on paper, there was a failure to meaningfully employ Scottish crew, therefore contradicting the intent of such policies to support Scotland-based commissioning. Such gaming of the quota system harms the wider broadcast ecosystem, exacerbating the already recognised precarity of the Scottish freelance sector that the BBC should be supporting. We therefore encourage the BBC to undertake greater scrutiny of qualifying productions and to ensure the percentage of crew from Scotland meets their own nations and regions targets.⁷

It would be remiss not to welcome the commissioning of three new dramas; *Grams*, *The Young Team* and *Counsels*.⁸ Nevertheless, with two of the commissioned production companies having their main base in London, concerns remain regarding the employment of Scottish crews, directing talent and entry level opportunities for recent graduates. We therefore seek assurances that BBC Scotland will prioritise the engagement of indigenous crew and talent across these productions.

3. **The overhaul of the Radio Scotland schedule.** BBC Radio Scotland has recently announced significant changes to its late-night music programming, axing four long-running shows that have been a fixture of Scotland's musical broadcasting for decades. Commentators and critics, including independent writers and sector organisations, argue the decision risks 'gutting' the national broadcaster's commitment to Scottish music at a time when curated, specialist shows provide rare, trusted platforms for new and established artists alike.⁹ Without dedicated platforms that value depth, diversity and discovery over broad, mainstream formatting, there is a risk that the next generation of radio makers will have fewer role models, fewer gateways into the profession, and fewer spaces where innovative, culturally rooted Scottish music can thrive. Emerging artists, in particular, may face even greater challenges in breaking through in an increasingly crowded and algorithm-driven media environment, with far less opportunity to be heard on national airwaves.

Opportunities for Innovation

⁷ Figures on the Scottish impact of *The Traitors* remain under dispute, see both the BBC report <https://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/documents/bbc-the-traitors-scotland-economic-impact-report.pdf> that recognises a lack of local crew deployment and the case for closer scrutiny of the BBC figures and justification <https://www.thenational.scot/culture/25607361.scotlands-talent-loses-celebrity-traitors-attracts-11-million/> & https://substack.com/inbox/post/178700520?r=5bkjfp&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&showWelcomeOnShare=false&triedRedirect=true

⁸ See <https://theknowledgeonline.com/news/bbc-announces-new-scottish-dramas-as-river-city-is-axed>

⁹ See <https://www.thenational.scot/news/25661773.petition-calling-bbc-scotland-reverse-schedule-changes-hits-13k/> & <https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2025/12/17/scottish-musicians-in-open-revolt-against-bbc-scotland/>

Whilst recognising the challenging environment that all linear broadcasting operates within, with a loss of viewers to streamers and online content, we welcome the proposed plans to place greater emphasis on the opportunities offered by the BBC iPlayer.

In this context, we would encourage BBC Scotland commissioners to embrace a more creative and inclusive approach to programming. The current BBC Scotland channel relies heavily on a number of formats within its schedule, however, with a monthly audience share of 0.12 per cent,¹⁰ we would suggest there is scope to experiment more boldly with its schedule.

The following recommendations are based on a desire to see the BBC Scotland channel offer a greater variety of programmes and, in doing so, to play a more active role in the development, championing and showcasing of new and existing talent within the wider Scottish screen industries.

1. **Feature documentaries (investment & procurement).** Scotland excels in quality authored feature documentaries that regularly screen at international festivals and receive theatrical releases. A recent example is the forthcoming feature *Everyone to Kenmure Street*, directed by Felipe Bustos Serra, that will premiere at this year's Sundance Film Festival but currently has no BBC investment. BBC Scotland could create a regular documentary slot to support Scottish talent, as well as strengthening its international perspective that will help overcome the dangers of an overly insular production model. Such a slot could include:
 - New commissions, potentially through co-production models similar to those used by other small national broadcasters in Finland, Sweden and Denmark¹¹
 - The procurement of Scottish-produced documentaries from previous years.
2. **Drama pilot season.** The BBC Scotland channel could offer a low budget opportunity, offering screenwriters the opportunity to create a series of drama pilots. This model would both develop emerging talent while lowering the risk of commissioning high-end TV drama series, allowing scope for creativity, more experimental concepts, testing and refinement.
3. **Showcase short form filmmaking.** BBC Scotland could play a vital role in showcasing the best short films (documentary and fiction) produced by both students and the Screen Scotland funded documentary and drama development schemes (Bridging the Gap and North Star Shorts). This would help to provide visibility, and a new progression pathway for early career filmmakers.
4. **Current Affairs international features.** BBC Scotland could take the lead in commissioning reports from similar sized European nations, allowing for a

¹⁰ <https://www.barb.co.uk/monthly-viewing/> accessed on 17 Dec 2025 based on July 2025 figures

¹¹ See Nick Higgins & Inge Sørensen (2025) Documentary funding in the age of the streamers.

In: Nash, Kate and Williams, Deane (eds.) *The Intellect Handbook of Documentary*. Intellect Books.

reflective and comparative analysis of how small nations are governed and what Scotland can learn from our close neighbours.

The Role of Broadcasting in Sustaining Scotland's Democratic and Cultural Traditions

In 2022, Screen Scotland adopted the BFI Diversity Standards, incorporating Scotland-specific criteria to help make projects more representative of the Scottish population.¹² In doing so, Screen Scotland recognised that there are specific barriers faced by under-represented groups within Scotland's screen sector (both on-screen and off-screen) that are not fully captured by the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Two of the eight additional characteristics included are 'being from a background of socio-economic disadvantage' and 'being resident in Scotland within an under-represented geographical area, whether a region, location or community'. Projects seeking funding from BBC Scotland are also required to meet these criteria.

As Scotland's leading institution for widening access, UWS strongly welcomes this advancement in Scottish-specific understanding of diversity, and the recognition that Scotland's diversity challenges are distinct from those elsewhere in the UK. With nearly half (44.8%) of UWS undergraduates being the first in their family to attend university, and 32% of Scottish undergraduate students coming from SIMD20 areas, UWS is actively committed to supporting student success regardless of background or circumstance. This commitment is delivered through initiatives such as the Foundation Academy, strong college partnerships, and our Student Success model which supports retention and progression. We therefore welcome wider sectoral initiatives that align with this ethos and continue to support our graduates into sustainable employment.

A UWS four-year doctoral research project, initiated in 2021 and funded by the Scottish Graduate School of the Arts and Humanities (SGSAH), focuses on understanding diversity within the Scottish screen sector and is delivered in collaboration with the University of Glasgow and BBC Scotland.¹³ While the research has focused primarily on the experiences of ethnic minorities in Scotland, a number of its conclusions have broader relevance for achieving Scotland-specific diversity targets across the sector. As the research nears completion, several conclusions are particularly pertinent to BBC Scotland's role as a public service broadcaster:

1. Clearer careers information for students
2. Ringfencing of roles based on Scotland-specific diversity targets¹⁴
3. Specific graduate & Scotland-specific diversity freelancer pools¹⁵
4. Collaborative pathway partnerships with HE
5. Presenting and sharing data on diversity and commissioned productions

¹² <https://www.screen.scot/funding-and-support/support/bfi-diversity-standards-screen-scotland>

¹³ Undertaken by doctoral researcher Perpetual Brade and funded by the Scottish Funding Council through the SGSAH Applied Research Collaborative Studentship (ARCS) scheme on a project initiated by Professor Nick Higgins.

¹⁴ <https://bectu.org.uk/news/three-quarters-of-creative-industries-jobs-go-to-friends-and-connections-reveals-bectus-bectu-survey>

¹⁵ <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/A-Class-Act-1.pdf>

6. Clearer updates on progress towards diversity targets

Scotland is – in its own specific way – a multi-cultural and young modern democracy. As such, BBC Scotland has a vital role to play in ensuring that this diversity is represented both on-screen, as well as in the talent and crew working behind the cameras and microphones.

The BBC Charter Renewal offers BBC Scotland an opportunity for a reset that builds on its current successes and places it more firmly at the heart of the Scottish screen ecosystem, acting as a catalyst for new talent, fresh programming and the creation of an inclusive and sustainable production infrastructure.