

University of Glasgow, Centre for Cultural Policy Research

Scottish Broadcasting

I am pleased to provide a submission to this inquiry based primarily on a project about public service media (PSM) that is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ES/X005690/1) which I am currently leading. 'PSM and the Digital Challenge: Purpose, Value and Funding' is a three year study being carried out by Professor Gillian Doyle (Principal Investigator), Professor Raymond Boyle (Co-Investigator) and Dr Kenny Barr (Research Associate) based at CCPR, University of Glasgow.

As the Committee will know, the UK is home to a unique and diverse system of Public Service Media (PSM) whose success in serving audiences and supporting the UK's creative economy is widely lauded but whose future is now under threat due to a changing economic and competitive media landscape, new audience habits and concerns about PSM funding mechanisms. The scope of our project investigates the purpose, public value and funding of PSM across the UK and recognises the importance of a sustainable media framework for each of the nations of the UK. PSM plays a crucial role in serving local and national audiences, representation of diverse constituencies and the promotion of social cohesion. At a time when changes in distribution and in the economics of the media industry have fueled consolidation and rise of powerful global competitors, our study examines the challenges faced by PSM across the UK and how they deliver public value.

Notions of what role PSM should perform have evolved over time. The vision that the purpose of broadcasting is 'to inform, educate and entertain', initiated by the Corporation's first DG Lord Reith, not only established a blueprint for the BBC but also became widely adopted internationally and, alongside such principles as universality and impartiality in news provision, still continues to guide PSM organisations in the UK and beyond. However in addition there is now much greater awareness of economic and industrial aspects of value creation by PSM through, for example nurturing creative talent, promoting regional and independent content production and, more generally, supporting the creative economy.

Growth and success on the part of the UK television production sector in recent decades is indicative of how public policy can potentially help creative industries to thrive. The key measure - the so-called 'Terms of Trade' that mandated broadcasters to adopt Codes of Practice in their negotiations with producers such that, when programmes are commissioned by UK PSBs, indies are able to retain a sizeable share of ownership of the IPRs - was set out in the Communications Act 2003. And it is well recognised that publicly and commercially funded PSM broadcasters - BBC, ITV, STV, C4, C5 and S4C - have a vital role to play, through their strategies of commissioning content, in nurturing and supporting the domestic television production sector. Although broadcasters are facing more competitive challenges these days, they are still the largest customers for original content made by UK

independent production companies. And much of their spend is focused on smaller producers which is important for revitalisation and renewal.

With regard to the implications of changing technology, the findings of our current ESRC-funded project suggest that, in the digital environment, provision of trustworthy news in times of national crisis, representation of marginalised communities, building connectedness and sustaining social cohesion are key aspects of how PSM create value. As the roster of functions that organisations such as the BBC perform is re-shaped by advancing digital technology, the role played by PSM in underpinning culture and democracy and in supporting informed public discourse in the face of ever-rising levels of dis and misinformation is such that it now forms an integral part of the infrastructural assets needed to preserve and protect everyday life and national security. Moreover, as Scotland is a key screen production hub, serving domestic and global markets, Scotland's PSMs are also an essential pillar of the creative economy. It is clear that BBC Scotland, MG Alba and STV make a vital contribution to the PSM landscape, in the Scottish context and across the UK.

The key implications which the Committee may wish to consider are, first, that a robust system of PSM provision has now become essential to the safe and proper functioning of everyday life. Indeed, our research indicates that audiences in Scotland, and across the UK, continue to derive significant personal and societal value from a pluralistic PSM framework. Secondly, related to this, PSM deserves recognition as a key national infrastructural asset. New functions have effectively re-positioned PSM as elements of what might be seen as 'critical media infrastructure'.

Our project also investigates to what extent organisations in the PSM sector can learn from studying the forces that shape their conduct and performance in other critical national infrastructure (CNI) sectors in the UK. Our findings indicate that the functioning and experience of these other critical infrastructure sectors serves in various ways as an instructive exemplar for PSM in relation to issues including, for example, interdependencies, competition and universality and resilience.

These two papers may assist the inquiry:

Doyle, G., Barr, K and Boyle, R (2025) Public service media as critical media infrastructure for the digital era, *Media, Culture & Society*, 47(6): 1132-1149.
Accessible at:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/01634437251330119>

Doyle, G (2023), *Insights for Policymakers: Television Production, International Trade and Pressures to Consolidate*, Newcastle University and RSA: Policy & Evidence Centre for the Creative Industries (PEC).

Accessible at: https://pec.ac.uk/policy_briefing_entr/television-productioninternational-trade-and-pressures-to-consolidate/

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