

SCOTTISH PRODUCERS RESPONSE TO DIGITAL BRITAIN CONSULTATION

This response to the Digital Britain consultation from the independent production sector in Scotland confines itself to those issues which affect the future of public service broadcasting in and from this part of the UK. It should be read alongside the submission we made to the Ofcom PSB review last year.

Scottish indies have two main areas of concern which are of equal importance: first, that there are appropriate levels of network television production from Scotland for the main UK public service broadcasters and, second, that there is genuine competition for BBC Scotland in the commissioning and production of public service content for Scottish audiences.

On network television production, the BBC has made binding commitments to source at least 8.6% of commissions (by value) from Scotland by 2016. It is our firm belief that the BBC should be able to hit this target much more quickly and we would support the widely-held view in Scotland that the date for achieving this level of production should be 2012. It is important that politicians and others continue to press the BBC on this issue and indeed that there is very close monitoring of the extent to which the promised increases in production are actually being delivered, and the processes by which they are delivered. We are firmly of the view that commissioners and controllers must be willing to establish new relationships from within the culture of Scotland if the cultural and economic ambition of the targets is to be delivered effectively. Transplanting existing relationships and projects could be argued to be a means to this end, but long term will deliver the worst of all worlds, increased cost and no cultural benefit. We also firmly believe that in the long term, new relationships with indigenous producers will drive down costs of production as the lower costs of living and working in Scotland are complimented by an larger and stable infrastructure capable of delivering quantity and quality.

We would also stress the importance of the new UK-wide public service broadcasting entity (the enhanced Channel 4) having a firm commitment in its remit to increased production from the nations. Digital Britain suggests that this is likely to be the case, and we would look forward to further information and consultation as the shape of the new organisation begins to emerge. There is a clear role for the two British PSBs to reflect the cultures and perspectives of the UK in all their diversity. It is also important that the economic as well as the cultural benefits of network television production are distributed around the UK on a reasonably equitable basis.

With broad agreement having been achieved on most of these points, the outstanding issue to be settled in Scottish broadcasting is how to secure high-quality and substantial competition for the BBC in the provision of public service content for audiences in Scotland.

Scottish independent producers support the analysis of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission that the ITV system with its threatened regional licences will not support such competition in future. Indeed, the position is already one where there is substantial competition to the BBC only in the area of News.

From an industry point of view, the proposed new Scottish Network would give Scottish independent producers a further source for the commissioning of programmes. BBC Alba has already demonstrated the potential to grow on a relatively small scale. The Scottish Network would provide the opportunity to develop new ideas and new talent and to build businesses of larger scale more able to compete in the UK and international markets. There is real potential to grow the contribution of the sector to the Scottish and UK economy, and this new source of funding would help to underpin and encourage such development.

Our understanding from the SBC report is that the new service would commission in all the main programme genres, with annual funding in the region of £75 million. The proposed network would not have its own in-house production teams but would source all content from external suppliers and in particular from the Scottish independent production sector. It would also be commissioning content for broadband and the other digital platforms. All of this could have a transformational impact on the ability of the Scottish sector to compete in new media and in overseas markets.

The proposed new network has the unanimous support of all parties in the Scottish Parliament, and we would join in the general recognition in Scotland that it represents the best solution for genuine PSB plurality.

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