

12th July 2017

OFCOM consultation document:

“Holding the BBC to account for the delivery of its mission and public purposes”

Response from the Gaelic Society of Inverness

Established in 1871 to “cultivate the language, poetry and music of the Scottish Highlands and generally further the interests of the Gaelic-speaking people” the Gaelic Society of Inverness (GSI) continues to be an active campaigner for all promotion and development activity for the Gaelic language and its culture.

Over the past 146 years GSI’s campaigning activities have included helping towards establishing the first Chair of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh in the 1870s; setting up The Napier Commission in the 1880s which led to the Crofter’s Act in 1886; and the first provision for the teaching of Gaelic in the 1918 Education Act. More recently GSI has supported the passage of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005 and the establishing of a Gaelic Language Board.

GSI has also actively campaigned for a comprehensive Gaelic language broadcasting service and it very much values BBC Radio nan Gaidheal and BBC Alba, both of which help to inform, educate, and entertain, and also unite a scattered national and international community of Gaelic language users.

GSI is aware that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages gives Scottish Gaelic official recognition under international law as a minority language deserving of state protection. Article 11 of the Charter requires a public service broadcaster to encourage / facilitate the broadcasting of television programmes in the regional / minority language **on a regular basis**. The aspiration of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act, mentioned above, that Gaelic should be an **official language of Scotland ‘commanding equal respect to the English language’** reinforces what GSI believes to be the rights of the Gaelic speaking community to parity of esteem, and provision, in all public services including broadcasting.

The OFCOM consultation document **“Holding the BBC to account for the delivery of its mission and public purposes”** gives welcome attention to Equality Impact Assessment and the BBC’s responsibility to serve all audiences. GSI has considered the list of diversity groups detailed in the consultation document with interest and it is our view that as an ethnic minority group (8.7.5) the Gaelic community is also represented in every other diversity group identified. Consequently, we very much welcome OFCOM’s intention that *“the licencing approach as detailed in the consultation document would have a positive impact on the ... diversity groups”* identified. GSI believes that the most positive impact on the broadcasting provision for Scottish Gaelic users will be a **substantial increase** in original programme production. We believe that such an enhancement of both Radio nan Gaidheal and BBC Alba output would better match the **“regular basis”** facilitation stipulation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages referred to above,

GSI takes the view that with 1.1% of the Scottish population using Gaelic (2011 Census) the total Scottish Budget spend of only 0.7% on Gaelic (all provision including BBC Alba) by

2015 was hardly equitable. Gaelic users pay taxes like everyone else and GSI believes they are entitled to equal and fair treatment.

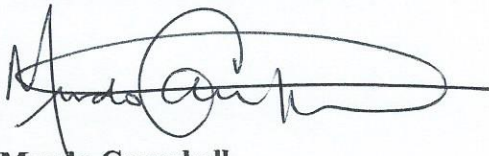
GSI welcomes the cross-party support which the Gaelic language enjoys at both Holyrood and Westminster and it is also greatly encouraged by the Census evidence of growth in Gaelic speaker numbers in the under 20 age group. This confirms the success of Gaelic Medium Education and we are aware of growing demand for this provision across Scotland. Bord na Gaidhlig's 2013-14 Report showed that the number of children being educated in GME at secondary schools rose by 7% and 6.1% at primary school level. In Glasgow, demand has been so high for the one Gaelic school that a second school has been opened. A new school was also recently opened in Lochaber, and a new school is currently under construction in Portree, Skye.

Given the importance of radio and television in education delivery, and also the fact that we require to build a Gaelic Broadcasting service to meet the needs of a growing audience, we believe the case for more resources to be immediately applied to Gaelic broadcasting to be compelling.

It is important to note that BBC Alba has consistently attracted audiences substantially greater than the official Gaelic speaker population totals, and GSI believes this to be evidence of programme quality, growing awareness of the language, and interest in its acquisition.

GSI believes that BBC Alba and BBC Radio nan Gaidheal continue to sustain audience appreciation and that both services deserve recognition and increased resources,

GSI appreciates the opportunity to respond to this consultation.



Murdo Campbell
Chairman – Gaelic Society of Inverness