

Your response

What is your response to this call for inputs?

Confidential? –N

Dear Ofcom, please accept my response to your consultation.

I would first like to reiterate your points that: “One of the Public Purposes of the BBC is for the BBC **to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the UK**” and “in doing so, **the BBC should accurately and authentically represent and portray** the lives of the people across the UK”.


Given these ambitions, I would like to say that **I was disappointed on reading your ‘Terms of Reference’ document that you failed to acknowledge the existence and cultural importance of the UK’s language and speech communities**. This seems to me a glaring omission. Please register this as an ‘expression of concern’ alongside the valid concerns of the groups you identified: ‘younger and working-class participants, and minority groups, including people from ethnic minorities, the LGBT community and people with disabilities’.

As you are no doubt aware, communities of this country speak a diversity of languages including English, Welsh, Cornish, Gaelic, Scots/Ulster Scots, and Irish. Whilst bespoke broadcasting services exist for English, Welsh, Gaelic and Irish (and to some extent Ulster Scots), **there appears to be no explicit recognition by the BBC of the need to reflect, represent and serve the at least 1.6 million speakers of the Scots language** (2011 Census; which by-and-by is why a new BBC channel for Scotland would be beneficial). And yes, Scots is a language: as recognised under the European Charter for Regional or Minority

Languages (ECRML) which was ratified by both the UK Government and the Scottish Government in 2001 (at a time when Labour and the Liberal Democrats were in power). However, that is not really necessary for my point.

I believe that Ofcom and the BBC should acknowledge that people in this country speak with different accents, and in different dialects and languages, and that - if “the people we see on television should be broadly reflective of those who are watching it” then - we need more representation from speakers of Scots and speakers of English dialects. Whilst this would no doubt elicit complaints from the ignorant and unimaginative, the need is already written into the Public Purpose of the BBC. And for the faint of heart, there is plenty of evidence that audiences appreciate seeing the country reflected back at them on television (e.g. see the success of Gogglebox) and that drama in regional dialects can immeasurably enhance quality and authenticity (e.g. the Baltimore dialect in *The Wire*; the-like-of-which one still cannot imagine the BBC having the courage to make, despite the example).

To sum up, I will leave you with a quote from the English-born historian Professor Geoffrey Barrow who famously said in his 1979 Inaugural Lecture at Edinburgh University: “The failure of Scotland to establish its own organisation for public service broadcasting was the greatest cultural disaster which Scotland suffered in the 20th century.” Why should he say that? **Because how we speak is “linked to fundamental aspects of who we are and how we see ourselves” (Ofcom) – and for many speakers of dialects of English and Scots ‘who we are’ is not represented on the BBC.**



I hope Ofcom will include an explicit statement on the need for the BBC to *reflect, represent and serve* the diverse linguistic communities of this country in its final report.