



## Delivering super-fast broadband in the UK

MG ALBA<sup>1</sup> welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. MG ALBA runs BBC ALBA, the new Gaelic digital television channel, in partnership with the BBC. Although BBC ALBA has been successfully launched on satellite in partnership with the BBC, we remain committed to securing its distribution on *all* digital platforms, and to ensuring a sustainable future for Gaelic broadcasting. We focus our comments in this response on the current scope and future prospects for online carriage of BBC ALBA programmes.

MG ALBA's remit<sup>2</sup> is to secure that a wide and diverse range of programmes in Gaelic is made available by broadcasting or by other means to persons in Scotland. We seek to monitor through audience research the means by which audiences are consuming Gaelic television content and their changing viewing habits, and we are aware of the increased popularity of online access to television programmes through BBC iPlayer, youtube and other sites. A selection of BBC ALBA programmes is currently made available for post-transmission viewing through the iPlayer. We would like people throughout Scotland, and indeed throughout the UK, to have access to BBC ALBA content online, if that is their preferred means of access, through broadband connections that are fast and reliable enough to carry audiovisual content.

We are aware of the current limited access to broadband in the Highlands and Islands, where a large proportion of BBC ALBA's core Gaelic-speaking audience live, and of the challenges that will be involved in bringing high-speed broadband to these areas and to other parts of Scotland.

Some parts of Scotland are still "not spots" even for first-generation broadband. In some areas, schemes have been established as a result of public sector intervention and partnerships, although the download speeds available to end users are in some cases less than 1Mb. Significant investment in infrastructure will be required to bring next generation broadband to areas outwith urban centres.

We note the Caio report and Ofcom's acknowledgement that the private sector will not deliver truly national coverage of next generation access. We also note the Broadband Stakeholder Group's estimate that next generation broadband is likely to reach only two thirds of the UK.

We recognise that it is highly likely that public sector intervention will be needed to deliver high speed broadband services throughout Scotland, and we agree with Ofcom's opinion that such interventions should focus on the geographical areas that can already be identified as remaining under-served in the future and should be co-ordinated across the UK. We also agree that the framework for action should encourage effective public sector intervention in locations where the market seems less likely to invest.

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<sup>1</sup> MG ALBA is the operating name of Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig (Gaelic Media Service).

<sup>2</sup> Communications Act 2003

We note Ofcom's comments on the potential for super-fast broadband to promote social inclusion, and we acknowledge that it may take time for evidence of this potential to emerge. We would be concerned if remote, rural or economically fragile communities were to be denied next generation access because of the cost or scale of rolling out investment in these services. Therefore, although we agree with Ofcom's analysis of the coverage that is likely to be achieved by a market-led approach to investing in next generation broadband, we do not believe that a wait-and-see approach is the right one, and we urge Ofcom to recommend to Government a policy of proactive investment in infrastructure development in these areas.

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