

Written submission from MG ALBA dated 13 February 2026

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Inquiry into Scottish Broadcasting

Purpose

MG ALBA welcomes the Committee's inquiry into Scottish broadcasting and the opportunity to make a written submission.

We offer this submission

- to make recommendations as to how Gaelic broadcasting's contribution to Scotland's screen economy and culture can be better appreciated, supported and enhanced; and
- to ask the Committee to recommend the creation of a sustainable funding model for Gaelic broadcasting so that its contribution to Scotland's economy, skills, citizenship and Gaelic language can be protected and grown.

We draw to the Committee's attention that the funding gap between Gaelic and Welsh language broadcasting has now risen to £100m each year, and that the gap continues to grow each year.

We make the case for increased investment in Gaelic broadcasting, citing below an investment report by Ernst & Young.

Following the enactment of the Scottish Languages Act 2025 which recognises Gaelic as an official language of Scotland, we believe this strengthens the case for increased investment in MG ALBA.

Who we are

MG ALBA is the Gaelic Media Service. It was created by an Act of the UK Parliament and is overseen by Ofcom. Scottish Ministers must provide "appropriate" funding to Ofcom for MG ALBA's purposes.

MG ALBA is the only body whose sole remit is for Gaelic media. That remit is set out in section 183 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 (as amended):

"The functions of MG ALBA shall be to secure that a wide and diverse range of high quality programmes in Gaelic are broadcast or otherwise transmitted so as to be available to persons in Scotland and to others"

A report commissioned from Ernst & Young in November 2023 (**the EY Report**) summarised this mission, saying that "MG ALBA is the primary steward for Gaelic Media in Scotland, and beyond".¹

In 2008, MG ALBA entered into a collaboration with the BBC to create and deliver BBC ALBA.

In 2026, under the banner of BBC ALBA, the "partners" will invest around £25m in Scotland's screen sector. This supports jobs and skills acquisition, especially in many of Scotland's fragile

¹ https://mgalba.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/MG-Alba-Investment-Report_Final-Issued_v3-2.pdf

communities. The EY Report states that, on income of £13.6m MG ALBA contributes “a Gross Value Add (“GVA”) of around £18.2 million” and that “A strengthened MG ALBA will deliver benefits across Scotland and the Gaelic media sector, amplifying the value of the investment by 137%”.

MG ALBA’s content creates UK-wide and international recognition for the Gaelic language and for Scotland’s screen sector. For example:

- at the Circom Awards in Barcelona in May 2025, *An t-Eilean (The Island)*, produced by Black Camel Pictures, picked up the Award of Best Drama & Entertainment Show and the Grand Prix for the best programme in European Regional Broadcasting;² and in January 2026
- *Dà Sgadan* (a Gaelic short film for young people produced by Channel X Hopscotch) was nominated for the Prix Jeunesse (“the children’s Oscars”) which promotes and honours excellence and innovation in children’s TV and digital.³

Both productions were MG ALBA commissions for BBC ALBA and were supported by Screen Scotland.

Challenges

1. **Lack of status (leading to uncertain funding and unclear accountability)**

Despite its obligations and its practical contribution of funding and staff to BBC ALBA, MG ALBA does not have PSB status or any formal recognition of its role in the delivery of broadcasting.

To address this, during the passage of the Media Act 2024, an amendment was proposed to include MG ALBA as a PSB (the other PSBs are the BBC, ITV, C4, C4, STV and S4C). The situation was described as follows:

Gaelic broadcasting falls foul of one of the rough edges of Scotland’s devolution settlement. On the one hand, broadcasting is a reserved matter. The statutory underpinning of MG Alba is UK legislation. A UK regulator, Ofcom, is the arbiter of sufficiency. Yet, on the other hand, the function of providing MG Alba’s funding is devolved to Scottish Government Ministers, who are not answerable to Ofcom: split responsibilities, with MG Alba falling between the cracks”

Lord Dunlop, 28 February 2024 [Media Bill - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

The amendment was not progressed on the grounds that the renewal of the BBC Charter would provide a better opportunity to find a sustainable model for Gaelic broadcasting.

This reliance on the BBC Charter arises because, unlike the Welsh-language broadcaster S4C or Irish-language broadcaster TG4, BBC ALBA lacks a statutory basis. In other words, it exists as a BBC brand or a service within the BBC portfolio. It does not have a corporate existence with its own priorities and obligations.

Whilst acknowledging the flexibility and agility that this provides, the absence of standalone status creates two significant structural disadvantages which must be addressed:

² <https://mgalba.com/gaelic-language-drama-an-t-eilean-wins-international-award/>

³ https://www.linkedin.com/posts/mg-alba_tha-sinn-gu-math-toilichte-innse-gun-deach-activity-7422256901813563394-egeV/

- Funding

Unlike S4C and TG4, BBC ALBA has no funding mechanism. BBC ALBA is dependent on the annual, separate, funding decisions of Scottish Ministers in relation to MG ALBA's contribution and the budget decisions of BBC management in relation to the BBC's contribution.

This funding was frozen for 10 years which resulted in a real terms reduction of nearly 50% for Gaelic television broadcasting during that period and there is no transparent mechanism to address the funding deficit. This deficit equates to a shortfall of £10M, which has led to a reduction of almost 30% in the number of hours of new programming since 2015. The reduction in new programmes has had a huge impact on audience figures, particularly among younger viewers.

This critical funding situation is at odds with the clear and transparent financial support offered to the Welsh and Irish language television services, which have both received £millions of additional funding since 2020.

- Expectations, Performance and Accountability

BBC ALBA is viewed through the regulatory prism of the BBC Operating Licence. Effectively, this means that BBC ALBA is officially treated as a BBC portfolio service, one of many contributors to the fulfilment of BBC purposes.

However, BBC ALBA is more than a service for a segment of the BBC audience. It is the UK's only Gaelic language television service. It fulfils a hugely significant purpose for Gaelic, for Scotland and for MG ALBA. And, it fulfils the UK's commitment under Article 11 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

This absence of standing within the UK's policy and regulatory provision means that Gaelic broadcasting is too often "below the radar" or treated as a niche interest or an "at risk genre" and not as a necessary PSB service that requires transparent and sustainable policy provision and investment.

2. Discoverability and Prominence

The fast growth of viewership on mobile devices and smart TVs means that there is more competition for viewing. As platform algorithms increasingly drive content suggestions, there is an urgent need to create prominence in the digital domain for public service content.

For example, how do you find public service Gaelic content in the digital domain? Or how can Gaelic content of interest or relevance be surfaced to platform and device users who are not looking for it but might appreciate it?

A key aim for broadcasters is to ensure that their brands and apps are prominent on the home pages or screens of smart TVs and devices, so that users are given direct access to the content they want.

While Welsh and Irish speakers will be able to directly access their language services S4C and TG4, those who want to view Gaelic content must first access the BBC iPlayer app and then navigate further to find Gaelic content. If not addressed, this could put Gaelic content viewers at a significant disadvantage.

Further, whereas Welsh and Irish speakers in the international diaspora can directly access S4C and TG4 online, Gaelic diaspora speakers are unable to access BBC ALBA. This too should be addressed.

Opportunity

The Green Paper⁴ has some clear aspirations, which we propose the Committee should elaborate on when they make their recommendations. The Green Paper says:

“The government is committed to the continued success of minority language broadcasting in this country, and Charter Review will explore the potential for new regulations or bilateral frameworks that could help support minority language broadcasting across the UK. Based on what we have heard to date, that could include more explicitly defining the BBC’s commitment to minority language communities or adapting how the BBC is made to partner with existing minority language broadcasters.”

And again:

“MG ALBA, which co-funds BBC ALBA content along with the BBC, also plays an important role in the provision of minority language broadcasting by working with the BBC and other partners to ensure audiences have access to high-quality content in Gaelic. We will consider options for providing MG ALBA with more certainty over its funding as part of the Charter Review.”

A new BBC Charter offers the best opportunity to address the structural disadvantages faced by Gaelic broadcasting.

We propose that the Committee recommends that:

- The new BBC Charter should give parity of esteem to Welsh and Gaelic language services;
- The new BBC Charter should recognise the unique status of BBC ALBA as a Gaelic language partnership service -
 - The Charter should recognise that BBC ALBA contributes not only to the fulfilment of BBC purposes but also to wider language, social and economic outcomes that are important to UK policy, to the Gaelic language and its communities, and to MG ALBA and its funders;
- The funding arrangements should include a mechanism to provide sufficient funding to BBC ALBA in the same way that it does for S4C;
 - This would unite the UK and Scottish Governments in a shared mechanism to establish sufficiency of funding through the dual routes of the Licence Fee (via BBC) and Scottish Ministers (via MG ALBA);
- The new BBC Charter or Ofcom should ensure appropriate prominence for BBC ALBA in the digital domain and availability overseas.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/britains-story-the-next-chapter-the-bbc-royal-charter-review-green-paper-and-public-consultation/britains-story-the-next-chapter-bbc-royal-charter-review-green-paper-and-public-consultation>