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29 January 2025

Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP
Deputy Convener
Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Via email ceeac.committee@parliament.scot
cc. Rodger Evans Rodger.Evans@parliament.scot

Dear Mr Halcro Johnston

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. The Committee asked for further information on the arrangement between the BBC and YouTube in light of Mr Harvie's two concerns: the risk of enriching a rival's offer, and the risk of degrading trust in the BBC given its output will appear alongside other content provided by the algorithm.

BBC–YouTube Partnership

The new strategic partnership with YouTube is designed to ensure that the BBC continues to deliver value for all audiences in a rapidly changing digital environment. Audiences are spending significant time on platforms such as YouTube and the BBC's strategy recognises that people expect content to be available where they already are, rather than coming exclusively to dedicated BBC services. This is not a shift away from the BBC's own platforms but a formal strategic development of a longstanding engagement between the BBC and YouTube.

The partnership includes: investment in content to showcase the best of BBC storytelling and journalism for under 25s; collaboration to highlight shared cultural moments and a training commitment to content creators. The joint training and skills programme, to be delivered by the National Film and Television School across BBC hubs, including Glasgow, will upskill mid-career media professionals to produce high-quality digital-first content.

Mr Harvie's question regarding the risk of enriching a rival's offer

The partnership is rooted in the principle of reaching audiences where they already are. The BBC has operated on YouTube for c20 years and meeting audiences on YouTube ensures they continue to

benefit from BBC content delivering our universality strategy in the UK particularly for the younger audience that spends the majority of their time on YouTube.

The BBC's approach is focused on audience value. A small number of existing programmes will be made available, alongside YouTube-first content. This will allow the BBC to test what works while ensuring that the breadth of BBC content remains anchored on BBC iPlayer, BBC Sounds and other core services. All YouTube-first content will be available on BBC platforms.

Making single episodes or key programme moments available on external platforms will help to bring wider audiences to BBC brands, acting as a discovery point, and drawing people to BBC services. The intention is to extend the BBC's reach, by strengthening and broadening our relationship with audiences.

The partnership strengthens the BBC's contribution to the creative industry, with training and development opportunities, while ensuring BBC content remains relevant and discoverable in an increasingly fragmented digital world.

Mr Harvie's question regarding risk of degrading trust in the BBC given its output will appear alongside other content provided by the algorithm

Clear branding and attribution are central to the partnership, ensuring that audiences can easily recognise what is BBC content. In a digital landscape where discovery increasingly happens on third-party platforms, it is important that trusted BBC journalism and programming, governed by strict editorial standards, are present within that mix. Being absent from YouTube could create a greater risk - that audiences navigating an unpredictable environment would encounter little or no reliable, high-quality information from the BBC.

Being part of the broader ecosystem allows the BBC to provide accurate information and trusted context where audiences are already searching, viewing and discussing. The serendipity of discovery is a core part of how people now consume content online. If trusted, authoritative BBC content is not available within that environment, other forms of content - some unreliable - fill the space.

Forthcoming channels such as Deepwatch and expanded children's channels, alongside new global news formats designed to cut through the noise, will reinforce the visibility of trusted BBC journalism and content.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hayley Valentine', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Hayley Valentine
Director, Scotland