



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

Thursday 29 October 2020

Session 5



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CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
25th Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Steve Carson (BBC Scotland)

Fiona Hyslop (Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture)

Glyn Isherwood (BBC)

Jamie MacQueen (Scottish Government)

Pete Whitehouse (National Records of Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Herbert

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

Thursday 29 October 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Joan McAlpine): Good morning. Welcome to the 25th meeting in 2020 of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, which is our 15th remote meeting.

The first item on the agenda is a decision on taking agenda item 6, on draft correspondence, in private. Are we agreed to do so? As no member objects, we agree to take item 6 in private.

Subordinate Legislation

Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 [Draft]

09:01

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is evidence on an affirmative instrument. I welcome Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture; Jamie MacQueen, a lawyer in the Scottish Government; and Pete Whitehouse, the director of statistical services at National Records of Scotland.

I remind everyone to allow broadcasting colleagues a few seconds to operate the microphones before asking or answering a question. Also, I would be grateful if questions and answers were kept as succinct as possible.

I invite the cabinet secretary to make a brief opening statement, after which we will move to questions. If any member wishes to ask a question, they should please type R in the chat box.

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): Good morning. It was back in February that I last appeared before the committee in respect of Scotland's census. At that appearance, you recommended approval of the draft census order, and National Records of Scotland was making good progress and was on track to deliver a successful census in 2021.

I am here today to seek your approval of the amendment census order that will change the date of the census to March 2022. Let me make it clear that the decision to move the date of the census was not taken lightly. We are all aware of major events around the world that have been cancelled or significantly disrupted due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Like many of those events, planning for Scotland's census has been seriously impacted.

You will have heard me say before how important census data is. It is crucial that a high response rate is achieved, which, in turn, produces high-quality outputs for use by data users in the short, medium and long terms. It is for that reason that the decision was made to move the census to 2022. We must ensure that the census produces the high-quality data that is required by data users, and moving the census date provides the best chance of achieving that.

No other survey provides the range of information that the census provides. We get only one chance every decade to ask the people of Scotland to complete a census, which makes it all

the more important that a full census is taken and that it reaches all communities across Scotland.

NRS officials have told you about the different options they considered to preserve the 2021 census date. None of those options provided the necessary confidence in relation to securing high response rates and achieving a successful census.

I appreciate that some data users will be disappointed at having to wait an additional year for data or will be concerned about Scotland's census being out of sync with the rest of the United Kingdom. However, I can offer you and all data users and stakeholders the reassurance that NRS will continue to work with the other UK census offices and data users to ensure that Scotland's census delivers the high-quality analyses and outputs that are required. The change of census date provides the best opportunity to do that.

I am grateful to the committee for your careful consideration of the census legislation thus far and for your support in ensuring that the census is a success. I formally invite the committee to recommend approval of the Census (Scotland) Amendment Order to the Scottish Parliament.

The Convener: Thank you, cabinet secretary. As you know, representatives of National Records of Scotland came to the committee to talk about the delay, and, as you have just said, we all agree that it is important that we get accurate data from the census.

You said that NRS was on track to deliver the census before the pandemic struck. However, we know that, ahead of the pandemic, the delivery confidence assessment had moved to an amber grading. When the NRS representatives were before us, I raised the issue of the Office for Statistics Regulation report from October 2019 that looked at how all the census authorities across the UK were progressing, and I pointed out that, of course, it is only Scotland that has delayed the census.

That report suggested that NRS had experienced difficulties. For example, in paragraph 4.5 it said that NRS had told the regulator that it was facing challenges that included

“procurement issues, concerns over effective decision making ... and contingency planning arrangements.”

It went on to say that it was putting a new governance structure in place to deal with those things, but it said that there remained a delivery risk for census outputs in Scotland.

Did that report give you cause for concern, and do you believe that, notwithstanding the pandemic, NRS will overcome those issues and get into a position in which it can deliver the census in 2022?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes. That report was published back in 2019, and I have been keen to ensure that there is continuous programme board oversight and review of the progress. That is why we have the ratings—it was important that we had them previously, and it is important that we have them now.

We must separate out two issues. Clearly, the decision that was taken this year involved the completion rates and, therefore, the success rate of the census in 2021. In relation to the planning for the Scottish census, we were embarking on issues around procurement, particularly with regard to recruiting and training operators, and we were thinking about the provision that would be required in the summer and autumn in that regard.

NRS was moving from amber towards a more positive place—I will bring in Pete Whitehouse on that, because the governance and the changes in the oversight, particularly with regard to the operational side of the census, are obviously the responsibility of NRS. Nevertheless, as a Government minister, I spent a great deal of time on the matter and have had regular updates on progress, and I have pressed back on some of the issues that were highlighted in the report that you mention, which was from the previous year.

I appreciate what you are saying, convener, but we believed that NRS would be able to deliver, and we pressed back to test whether it really had to delay the census. However, like other countries, we have taken the view that, increasingly, the wisest and most sensible thing to do is to ensure that the participation rate is as high as possible. Given that we are spending £100 million of taxpayers' money, a 60 per cent return rate would not represent good value and would not provide the data that we need.

Pete Whitehouse can talk about the amber rating that was in place in March.

Pete Whitehouse (National Records of Scotland): As Paul Lowe said when NRS officials appeared before the committee a short while ago, the ranking of this complex programme as amber was not unusual. He spoke about how the Office for National Statistics was also in that space and said that that was the normal trajectory of a complex programme of this nature. The feeling in the programme board and within our organisation at that point was that we were going to be able to deliver a successful census in March 2021. However, that scenario changed when the pandemic hit.

Our conclusions are that we have made great progress. Some of the conversations that we have had with the Office for Statistics Regulation have taken the form of peer conversations with colleagues to talk through issues and get feedback

on areas that we need to think about and on which we need to work. It is a very helpful and supportive improvement mechanism rather than something that should be seen as the marking of homework or something of that nature.

Our position was that we were ready to go; amber was the position that we were in, which, as Paul set out, meant that we were going to be able to deliver. As is absolutely the case with all censuses across the globe, the year running into the census is hugely complicated and difficult—we all know that—and it is usual for a census to be in an amber situation at that point. As I said, we continue to work with the OSR and it continues to give us good support and advice, as do other colleagues across the UK, to make sure that we overcome what will be the usual problems that we face. We are well set to do that, and we are confident that we will be able to deliver.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I have an observation: with hindsight, it is good that we are reducing the contact between enumerators and members of the public over the next year. That is increasingly looking like a good move.

My question is quite different and is directed to Pete Whitehouse. Given that there will now be an 11-year gap between censuses, which are a key statistical underpinning for much public and a good deal of private planning, how will we support data users in that extra year when the data is much more obsolete than it used to be? Will you do any additional sampling work to keep the data that was produced some 10 years ago relevant and reliable for users?

Pete Whitehouse: There a number of different types of data. We will continue to engage with all our users, so that they are fully aware of the work that we are taking forward and that we understand their need for data and how we can help them to, as you imply, bridge the gap between when they were expecting to get census data and when they will get that data for Scotland.

In areas such as population estimates, we will continue to use the methodology that we have and will roll that forward for a further year, so that will continue to provide the data. As Paul Lowe said in his letter back to the committee after our last attendance, we are working with the Office for National Statistics and other parts of the UK to ensure that we are consulting users of population data, migration data and other sources so that they are fully aware of how that data will come forward and how we will help them to use and have access to population data. That is one sort of data for which there is methodology in place that works at the moment, which we will roll forward for another year. Nevertheless, our position is that, as the cabinet secretary set out, providing the high-

quality data of the census is paramount for us, which is why we made the recommendation to move it back a year.

On the other sets of data, the other surveys that are in place do not do what the census can do. The real value of the census is its ability to go to such a low level on different population groups and different geographies, but there are other sources of survey data out there, such as household surveys, health surveys and others, that will continue to provide valuable information to people as they wait for the census data to come on track. There will, however, be certain pieces of data that only the census can provide, and our recommendation was based on our delivering data of the quality that is required by users. The one-year delay will allow us to do that.

The Convener: A couple of other members want to ask questions.

09:15

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Good morning. I have two questions; the first is addressed to Mr Whitehouse and the second is for the cabinet secretary.

Mr Whitehouse, further to its evidence session with NRS in September, the committee wrote to Paul Lowe, the registrar general, on 21 September, raising a number of points, and it received a reply. My copy is not dated, so I am not sure when that reply was written, but it states:

“As part of the re-planning exercise we are updating the full lifecycle resourcing plan and supplier costs to the Programme to inform the overall financial impact assessment and subsequent costings.”

Can you advise us whether that process has been completed? If it has not, when will it be completed?

Pete Whitehouse: We are still working through our replanning work. As Paul Lowe said in the set-out, we will write to the committee when we have concluded it. At the moment, we think that that will happen in December.

Annabelle Ewing: Thank you for that.

Cabinet secretary, in the convener’s letter to the registrar general, she asked that the committee receive

“regular ... updates on the delivery of the 2022 Census including details of Delivery Confidence Assessments provided to the Census Programme Board and of any concerns raised regarding deliverability.”

Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the committee will receive—[*Inaudible.*]—updates? That issue was not really addressed by the registrar general in his reply to the convener.

Fiona Hyslop: The sound was breaking up a bit, but I think I got that. As has always been the case, as we move into the final year, we will want to ensure that there are more regular updates for the committee on the progress of the census, and I am committed to doing that.

In relation to the census programme board reports, I will look at the level of the provision and the detail of that, but I have always been certain that I want to engage the committee on a regular basis through updates on operation and costs, deliverability and any risk aspects. It is my responsibility, if there are any risks to the census, to bring that to the attention of the committee. That is my commitment to you.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the cabinet secretary for that. We look forward to those updates, because I imagine that the cabinet secretary has to rely on the assurance of the registrar general and NRS that the next deadline of March 2022 will be met, and it would be a pity if the cabinet secretary's trust was not met in that regard. The committee is very happy to do what we can to ensure that the next deadline is met.

Fiona Hyslop: I can reassure the committee on that. The point of the broader oversight provided by the programme board is to give that range of test and challenge. Also, as the committee has heard, within the census community across the UK and, I dare say, internationally, there is understanding of the pressures on the census, not least because we are not the only country that is experiencing those issues. That test and challenge is really valued, and it is important to me.

I will be providing regular updates to the committee, and, obviously, my duty and responsibility is to make sure that the Cabinet more widely understands the issues. That is why, particularly in relation to the decision about the order that is front of you, I have made sure that my Cabinet colleagues are fully aware of and understand the issues. I engage with them actively on that.

Annabelle Ewing: Thank you.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Good morning, cabinet secretary. I find the first paragraph of the letter that has just been received from Mr Lowe quite an interesting curiosity. It says:

"An important indicator is the overall response rate which in 2011 was 94 per cent".

It goes on to say that

"about 340,000 were thought to be missed and subsequently adjusted for during data processing."

It seems strange to me that we are conducting a census to get 100 per cent accuracy, yet there is

an estimate of people who have clearly not responded to the census.

The same paragraph goes on to say that

"Coverage assessment and adjustment (CAA) methodology was able to derive"

census population estimates using the census coverage survey. It then says that the response rate was 89 per cent in Glasgow and 96 per cent in the Borders, with the response rate in other local authority areas falling somewhere in between. How critical is the census if that information can be delivered more or less without it—so it seems—and how confident are you that it is accurate? It is suggested that the census represents 100 per cent of the population, but that is without getting a fully accurate census.

Pete Whitehouse: The census is a statistical tool. Its purpose and intention is to provide an account of all the people in Scotland on the census date. Like all censuses across the globe, it attempts to get as much information as it can from across the population. However, it is never going to represent 100 per cent of the population. The census does not work like that in places like America, Australia, New Zealand or Scotland.

Kenneth Gibson: I know that it cannot represent 100 per cent of the population, but we estimate that 340,000 people were missed out of the last census. That seems counterintuitive. That, as well as the fact that you can get variances between 89 per cent and 96 per cent, is what I am trying to get clarification on.

Pete Whitehouse: If it would help, I can put a paper together to explain how we do a range of other things.

We run the census and try to maximise engagement with it, so we have strong communication and engagement strategies running up to and throughout the census. As was mentioned in Paul Lowe's letter, we also conduct a census coverage survey, which is a statistical tool that is used across the other UK censuses to understand whether, for example, certain households in certain areas did not respond. That gives us an opportunity to produce estimates. We present our figures, and we do that with confidence intervals and information that tells the user how precise the data is.

We know that response rates vary in different areas, and we do extra work in some of the areas where response rates have traditionally been lower, so that we are engaged with the community and provide support through whatever means is needed. That could be by helping people to access it, by providing translation services or by creating awareness of the census. A whole

package of information and work allows us to produce the best-quality estimates.

In response to the member's earlier point about the role of the census and its importance, the census allows us to go into fine-grain detail and gets information about different groups in our population, different work patterns and all sorts of things that surveys that might go to 6,000 households or 10,000 people cannot allow us to get. The census is absolutely critical in allowing that work to be done and in providing a message and story about our country. It also gives people an indication of the accuracy of that data, which will have been the case in every census that we have done.

It is the role of the Office for Statistics Regulation, in its assessment of our national statistics accreditation, to be clear about the quality of the estimates that we produce. The process in Scotland is no different from the process in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, America, Canada or Australia. It is the technique that is used to produce high-quality estimates for countries.

I am more than happy to provide a paper setting that out, if it would help.

Kenneth Gibson: That would be helpful.

Fiona Hyslop: I will remark on the visit that I made to the operations of the test census, when it was targeting the areas that we were previously concerned about. That is one of the reasons why particular areas of Glasgow were targeted during the test. Engagement and publicity are important, particularly in areas where, in the past, there has been a lower level of completion. Within that test area, there were many areas—for example, in relation to the Roma community in Glasgow—where we had to make sure that people were aware that the census was coming and that they were encouraged to complete it. There was also recognition of the disparity between urban and rural areas. Therefore, the test sessions were conducted not only to check that the systems work but to improve penetration by ensuring that the communication exercise maximises completion of the census. For example, we know that poverty has a big impact in lots of walks of life, and the census is no different. How do we ensure that we get the most accurate information? That is another layer with regard to making sure that we maximise penetration and get the completion rate up.

Kenneth Gibson: Okay. Thank you.

The Convener: Thank you. I welcome the assurance that the committee will receive regular progress updates on the delivery of the 2022 census, because we are all agreed on its importance.

The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-22767, in the name of the cabinet secretary, on the approval of the Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020. As no member has indicated that they want to make a contribution, I invite the cabinet secretary to speak to and move the motion.

Fiona Hyslop: I thank the committee for the time, attention and focus that it has given to the census. I appreciate the desire and need to keep abreast of developments and to scrutinise the progress that is being made. I reiterate my commitment to the committee on that.

Motion moved,

That the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee recommends that the Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 [draft] be approved.—[*Fiona Hyslop*]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: The committee will shortly report to the Parliament on the instrument. Are members content to delegate to the deputy convener and me responsibility for signing off the final report?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I thank the cabinet secretary and her officials for their attendance this morning.

09:29

Meeting suspended.

09:31

On resuming—

BBC Annual Report and Accounts

The Convener: Welcome back to the committee. The next item of business is evidence on the BBC's annual report and accounts. I should have put on record earlier that we have received apologies from Dean Lockhart MSP.

I welcome to the meeting Steve Carson, who is the director of BBC Scotland, and Glyn Isherwood, who is the chief financial officer for the BBC. I welcome Mr Carson to his new position.

As always, I would be grateful if questions and answers are kept as succinct as possible. I remind members and witnesses to give broadcasting staff a few seconds to operate their microphones before they begin to ask a question or to provide an answer.

Before we move to questions, I invite Mr Carson to make a brief opening statement of around two to three minutes.

Steve Carson (BBC Scotland): Thank you very much, convener. I hope to be slightly briefer than that in order to allow more time for discussion and questions.

The BBC's annual report and accounts cover the period to March 2020, which is a year in which the BBC Scotland channel reached more audiences than any other digital channel in Scotland, including well-established and high-profile channels. On the BBC iPlayer, demand for BBC Scotland-commissioned and co-commissioned titles more than doubled in the channel's first year. It grew 125 per cent to 62 million requests to view.

That was possible only because the creative sector in Scotland rose to the challenge along with our important relationship with Screen Scotland, so that we could deliver results working with more than 70 independent production companies that supplied content to the channel in its first year. I think that that included 18 companies that had not worked with us before.

The channel sits alongside a host of our other creative services, such as BBC One Scotland, BBC Radio Scotland, BBC Alba, our partnership with MG Alba, BBC Radio nan Gàidheal, the BBC Scottish symphony orchestra, and our many other popular online services.

In many ways, March 2020 seems like a lifetime ago. Like all of Scotland and all industries across Scotland, public broadcasting has adapted and changed at pace to meet the evolving needs of our

audiences, from providing extended news services to providing special education and religious programming. There have been imaginative ways to fulfil our mission to entertain, despite the very real limitations that have been posed by Covid. The fact that we can announce later on today two new BBC Three and BBC Scotland co-commissions to be made in Scotland and supported by Screen Scotland shows how the BBC, the wider creative sector and our screen agency are working together to keep production activity going and new programming supplied to our audiences in this crisis.

I am honoured to be appearing before the committee this time as the director of BBC Scotland alongside—virtually—the BBC's chief financial officer and interim chief operating officer, Glyn Isherwood. I look forward to engaging with the committee in looking at the past year with the annual report and accounts and to the future.

The Convener: Thank you very much, Mr Carson. We certainly look forward to engaging with you in the future.

I will start with some general questions about money. What has been the impact of the pandemic on spend and on continuing activity in Scotland, both in absolute terms and in relation to the other UK nations? What scenario planning is the BBC undertaking in advance of the next funding settlement from 2022? For example, what is the range of possible impacts on services and commissioning in Scotland?

Steve Carson: Perhaps Glyn Isherwood could lead on that.

Glyn Isherwood (BBC): Your sound broke up a little bit during the question, but I think that you were asking about Covid and about the licence fee settlement next year.

Covid has had a broad-ranging impact on the BBC. It has had an impact on our income—like many other organisations, we are not immune to the financial challenges—and operationally, particularly our ability to produce during this time. We have been really clear that we want to strongly support the UK and to continue to inform and educate people, particularly on the impact of coronavirus and what that means for the population during this important time.

We have put in place services to help the UK, such as our daily Bitesize service to educate kids who found themselves at home during lockdown. That has been operationally challenging. A lot of our news services have run very well but, in the background, we have had to adjust and adapt at speed to do things more quickly and simply to keep our services going. It is inevitable that some of the larger productions have had to pause during that time, and that has had implications for us.

Many sporting events have been deferred into the next financial year, but we still have significant funding commitments in line with them.

Covid has had broad and deep impacts. More than 80 per cent of staff in Scotland and across the country are working remotely, and we are having to support staff welfare as they do that.

There are on-going financial challenges. Our income will be impacted. Our commercial income is lower than anticipated because our advertising revenue has been impacted. We have also made decisions about collecting income from the over-75s. We took a decision—which was the right one—to defer that to the beginning of August. Therefore, there is quite a broad picture.

We are engaging with the Government now on the settlement for 2022. That is about setting the BBC's budget to the end of the charter. It is not a question of the type of funding or of support for the licence fee; it is about the level of the overall settlement. It is important to think about the financial impact on the BBC and also about how we can continue to successfully deliver our charter commitments during that period and invest in the sector. That includes across Scotland.

Steve Carson: I can echo that from a Scottish perspective. Covid has had impacts on production activity this year. It is a tribute to the production teams in BBC Scotland and the wider sector that people very quickly changed their ways of working and kept as normal a schedule as possible on air. That has included radio services as well as television and online ones. Almost overnight from the start of lockdown, presenters began broadcasting from home under a duvet to preserve the sound quality.

Big productions, such as drama and comedy productions, have been particularly affected. As members know, "River City" had to go dark earlier this year. It took a lot of hard, safe and imaginative work to restore production. That has been echoed across the piece, particularly in scripted productions. Everyone has worked incredibly hard throughout this year to keep activities and services going.

The Convener: My next question is for Mr Carson. Obviously, you have now assumed the role of director of BBC Scotland. Can you outline your priorities? Has the new director general discussed with members of the panel—with you in particular, Mr Carson—how his four priorities will be applied to the political and creative cultures of Scotland and how the BBC's strategy in Scotland is supporting Scottish communities' voices being heard across the UK network?

Steve Carson: As you have said, the director general has set four clear priorities for the whole organisation. Restating our commitment to

impartiality, making unique, high-impact content, making more of our online service and growing our commercial income are four clear priorities that plot through in Scotland as they do anywhere else.

Personally, I thought hard about the role as I came into it. As I said to staff earlier this week, I have a very clear and simple focus. We are really here for one thing, which is to serve our audiences, and it is a privilege to do so.

As I said to staff this week, I am very conscious of the unique way that the BBC is funded and the fact that we get £157.50 from every household that consumes BBC content. Those people are our friends, our neighbours and people in communities across Scotland whom we will never meet, but they are our bosses and the people we serve.

With regard to our overall approach, I believe very strongly that BBC Scotland is a very large and influential creative organisation but that we are part of a broader creative sector. We might be a keystone and a catalyst for activity, but it is not all about us. There is a wide creative sector in Scotland, and we want to grow the creative economy. That is a public good in itself but, in doing so, we serve our audiences better.

I am strongly committed to working in partnership with other organisations. That will be a key part of my tenure. We will build on what we have already been doing over the past few years and, fundamentally, we will ensure that we keep delivering high-quality news and information services. We bring people together through shared interests, from sport to the arts. We can offer people a diversion, some light relief or a laugh at the end of a busy day.

The full mission is to inform, educate and entertain across genres. We provide high-quality dramas such as "Guilt" and distinctive Scottish comedies such as "Two Doors Down", and some new titles are coming through. There is really strong documentary and factual provision in Scotland. We have had some real success in the past few years through sport and the arts—the full works. We are a content business, and we are here for the audience. In a nutshell, that is my vision.

The Convener: Thank you. I am sure that a number of members will want to explore some of that.

The next questions are from the deputy convener, Claire Baker.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I want to ask about the Covid situation. Can the witnesses be a bit more specific about the financial impact? Reference has been made to commercial income being reduced and the pressure relating to BBC licence fees, but I am

interested in whether figures can be attached to the funding pressures.

Mr Carson talked about the changes to how “River City” is filmed. I assume that that means that there has been an increase in production costs. He also talked about growing the creative economy. Do the financial pressures that are caused by Covid not put extra pressure on BBC Scotland’s ability to do that?

Steve Carson: Glyn Isherwood might want to talk about the wider financial picture for the BBC. I can come in afterwards.

Glyn Isherwood: I will pick up in more detail the income impact and the additional cost pressures on the BBC because of Covid.

We can think about the BBC’s tranches of income. Our commercial income, some of which is collected in the UK and some of which is collected overseas, is dependent on advertising markets. In the first part of lockdown, some of those markets fell by 40 to 50 per cent in a month. That was a significant drop, but the situation has eased a little bit throughout the rest of the financial year.

Our overall commercial income has dropped, which means that the income across BBC studios, which were successfully growing year on year and delivered profits of £181 million, according to last year’s annual report, will be substantially reduced this year. That reduces the amount of money that can then be put into public service broadcasting across the whole of the BBC.

The decision to defer the collection of the licence fee for the over-75s from June to August cost the BBC £70 million in-year. That was the right thing to do, given the impact across all sectors of society. We wanted to ensure that, when we collected the money, we could do so in a Covid-safe way. At that time, we were not ready to do that, but we are now, and a process is in place, which is going pretty well.

We found that, in March and April, normal licence fee collection was down year on year. That related to our ability to collect. We had to put in place new processes for our operating television licensing centre to work in a Covid-safe way, and for some people to work remotely. However, it now looks as though the position is recovering.

09:45

In total, we anticipate a £125 million net impact on BBC finances through Covid for the coming year. We have taken a number of measures to find additional in-year savings in order to cope with that. We have had to reshape some of our content spend this year, and we have to reduce our marketing costs. We have had an in-year senior level pay freeze, we have paused recruitment for

all but broadcast or service-critical roles, and we have put in place a pan-BBC voluntary redundancy programme, which will deliver savings this year and into the future.

We have also had to make a call on some big projects that we wanted to do this year. We were going to invest in Northern Ireland’s building, technology and infrastructure in the year, but that has had to be put on pause.

There is quite a broad impact. Steve Carson may want to talk a bit about the Scotland savings and the work that he is doing, as well as the impact on Scotland’s creative economy as a result of that.

Steve Carson: In relation to the Scotland-wide picture, a lot of positives came through in terms of how we serve audiences, which is a tribute to those involved. Right at the point of lockdown, we went out to the creative sector to launch a request for new programming, which we saw come on air within weeks.

Susan Calman did a programme from her garden called “Socially Distant”, which was made during the tightest of lockdown restrictions and which went down very well with our audiences. That was partly a way of giving creative workers, musicians, comedians and others a pay cheque during that time.

We saw Covid editions of “The People’s News” and we saw new religious programming as churches, temples, mosques and synagogues closed. Again, within a week, we were doing special religious programming—such as “Reflections at the Quay”—in Covid-safe ways, and individual faiths were having services broadcast on the new channel. That is on-going. In fact, “Reflections at the Quay” has been recommissioned and will come back, because people of faith are still challenged in relation to how they can go to churches, temples, synagogues and mosques.

We put a whole raft of new things on air. I pay particular tribute to our BBC bitesize education team. Within days of schools closing in Scotland—which took place, as the committee will remember, slightly earlier than it did in the other four nations—that team had a daily BBC bitesize TV offering for Scotland on air in the morning. That was a full month ahead of the network service. A raft of new programming was put in and we found new ways of doing our core programming, from “Good Morning Scotland” in the morning right the way through to “Lunchtime Live”, “Drivetime”, “Reporting Scotland” and “The Nine”, which are core information services.

Much production activity continued, and new production activity started. However, productions such as “River City” had to go dark at that point.

As has been said, some extra costs are involved in that, which we will work through and support the companies with. We continue to commission regularly—commissions for BBC Three, BBC Scotland and Screen Scotland were announced today.

However, we simply cannot make some productions that we would have liked to this year. I am thinking of a very successful show on the channel called “Mirror Mirror”, which is set in hair salons all around Scotland. Although we will recommission it, it simply cannot be made at the moment, while people are wearing masks.

Levels of production spend at BBC Scotland and elsewhere have been affected—[*Inaudible.*]

I simply want to pay tribute to the many people who worked incredibly hard to work out safe ways of keeping our services going.

Claire Baker: I will ask a couple of questions about BBC Alba. As Mr Carson suggested, productions are obviously challenging at the moment. However, I think that there was a commitment that we would see seven hours of new programming a week on BBC Alba by 2020. There was also an assumption that it would receive additional content from the BBC Scotland channel. How far along are we in relation to that commitment?

I also understand that the new BBC Scotland channel is broadcast on high definition, whereas BBC Alba is still on standard definition. Is there a plan to improve the BBC Alba offer?

Steve Carson: The BBC Alba offer, which is provided in partnership with MG Alba, is already very strong for our Gaelic audiences. Of course, BBC Scotland led the way in providing Gaelic broadcasting in the form of BBC Radio nan Gàidheal.

One of the things that we have noticed is that there is a renewed interest in learning Gaelic across Scotland, with people signing up in their thousands for language apps. With the help of Scottish Government funding, we are launching a new learning service, too.

There have already been tangible results of the collaboration between English language services and Gaelic language services. Along with Margaret Mary Murray, with whom I work closely as head of commissioning, we have generated shared content across a slate of programmes. For example, the broadcast of the TRNSMT festival was primarily an English language-funded service, but it was shared with BBC Alba for broadcast, which was a direct benefit to BBC Alba. Similarly, additional funding was put into a series that BBC Alba commissioned on Scottish priests in Rome. That funding supported that programme and also

created an English language documentary called “Priest School”, which went down very well with our audiences.

Production in the Gaelic sector has been impacted, but we have worked together on various things. For example, our children’s offer—CBeebies and CBBC—is also now a part of the BBC Alba fold and has generated additional programming.

Claire Baker: On the definition issue, are there plans to move to HD, which would deliver the level of quality that can be found on the BBC Scotland channel?

Steve Carson: We need to be careful. We want to put the money on screen—that is, into content. Therefore, when it comes to spending significant amounts of money on distribution issues, we need to balance our priorities. Obviously, the BBC Alba content has its own HD space on iPlayer, which is valuable in terms of people’s ability to find it, because people are increasingly consuming our content on HD.

There is a balance to be struck with regard to the level of investment that would be needed to buy the spectrum necessary to run an HD service on linear, when it is already available in HD on iPlayer, which is the distribution platform of the future.

I would like to see BBC Alba on HD, but I would need to make a business case for taking money away from the production of content.

Annabelle Ewing: Good morning. I welcome Mr Carson to his new role as the director of BBC Scotland.

I want to address a couple of issues. As I know that another colleague has questions on one of them, I will start with the issue of equal pay, which we have raised in previous evidence sessions with BBC Scotland, as we are interested in the progress that has been made in that regard.

I note that the report says that the median gender pay gap sits at around 6.2 per cent. Does that figure reflect the position in BBC Scotland or in the BBC as a whole? What specific plans does BBC Scotland have to address its particular gender pay gap issue, and within what time frame will that be done?

In previous years, we have raised the issue of outstanding pay claims in this area with witnesses who have come to speak to us. It would be helpful to have an update on that.

Steve Carson: As you know, the BBC published figures relating to its gender pay gap several years ago and has been doing detailed work to reduce it. The overall figure is lower in Scotland than it is in the other nations in the UK. A

significant amount of work has been done. We asked people to make queries about reviewing their pay. There were 74 such queries in Scotland, and those are being worked through.

I am conscious that we are now getting down to very small numbers of people across the BBC in general and in Scotland in particular, and the danger of identifying individuals keeps me from saying much more.

Significant progress has been made. There should be no gender pay gap, and there is a commitment to close the one that exists. Of course, the figure represents an average across the organisation. Certain craft areas are dominated by one gender or another, and the key solution in that regard is to recruit in a more diverse way.

Glyn Isherwood can give an outline of the wider picture.

Annabelle Ewing: Just before you hand over to him, you have said that the figure in Scotland is lower—do you know what that figure is? It is 6.2 per cent UK-wide, but what is it here?

Steve Carson: We are looking at around 5 per cent but, as I have said, a gender pay gap of any percentage is something that we need to work on.

Glyn Isherwood: I will give the committee a bit more information on the picture across the UK. The BBC has made substantial progress in the past few years. When we first reported our gender pay gap, it stood at 9.6 per cent. This year it has come down again, from 6.7 per cent to 6.2 per cent and, as Steve Carson has said, it is slightly lower in Scotland. That reflects the huge amount of effort that we have made in putting a clear pay framework in place across the organisation so that people can see where they sit within the cohort of pay and within the pay range. We have also put in place principles that underpin that approach so that our pay is fair, transparent, market competitive, and consistent across the different grades.

Steve Carson is right that, overall, we had 74 pay queries in Scotland, but no such queries are outstanding at the moment—they have all been dealt with. Across the BBC, we have dealt with 1,333 queries, of which only 12 are outstanding. From those figures the committee will see the tremendous amount of progress that we have made since we last attended its meetings.

Although that is good, as Steve has said, we are not complacent about it—we have further work to do. Even though our own gender pay gap is less than half the national average, and significantly better than the gender pay gaps of many of our competitors, we want to set ourselves a high bar in tackling the issue. We have many programmes in

place to enable us to do so. The remaining gap is not around pay itself; it concerns a structural issue about where men and women sit in relation to the hierarchy of the organisation. For example, if we were to have more women in senior leadership positions in the BBC, that pay gap would come down again. We are making a lot of effort to resolve the current imbalance.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank you both for your answers. I want to pick up on the chief financial officer's final point. You mentioned a structural issue and the need to bring women into the pipeline now. In an earlier answer, you said that your current approach to hiring was focused very much on the broadcasting side. In recent hiring rounds, what balance between men and women have you achieved?

Glyn Isherwood: We now have a much better gender split across the organisation. As the committee will know, the impact of Covid has required us to pause recruitment. I do not have figures on the proportions in the gender split in our most recent recruitment round, because it has slowed down since the beginning of the financial year. However, overall, we have women in 45 per cent of leadership roles across the BBC, which is an improvement on the previous year's figure of 43.8 per cent. The committee will therefore see that a higher proportion of women have been hired for leadership roles compared with the previous position. That is really positive, and we are making progress.

As Steve Carson has said, although we are making progress, there are certain areas of the BBC, such as technology, that tend to have fewer women working in them across the UK. We are working with those sectors to try to get more women into senior roles. That is important for Scotland, because we have invested quite a lot in having a significant digital hub here, which now employs nearly 200 people. We have made a strong effort to recruit women into roles in that part of BBC Scotland—indeed, more than 35 per cent of people in those roles are women.

Annabelle Ewing: It would be helpful if BBC Scotland could write to the committee to provide a bit more information on recent front-line broadcasting hirings. If there is more information about the general position at BBC Scotland, that would also be useful.

Steve Carson: Pay review queries are one thing but, for clarity, I confirm that there are a small number of outstanding pay claims across the BBC. I can talk more about the gender split in BBC Scotland if the committee wishes, but I will certainly write to it on that specific point.

Annabelle Ewing: If you could write to us, that would be really helpful. Thank you for that clarification about outstanding queries.

10:00

Steve Carson: In Scotland, the majority of our senior leadership cohort is female.

Annabelle Ewing: Okay, but it would still be quite interesting to see the information about recent hirings in front-line broadcasting.

If I may, I will turn to another issue, on which I think another member might wish to come in. As I understand it, for yet another year, the rates of satisfaction with the BBC are lower in Scotland than they are in the other countries of the UK. It was interesting that, earlier in the meeting, Mr Carson said that the people of Scotland are

“our friends, our neighbours and ... who ... we serve”.

What would he say to the fact that, although that is clearly his view, it does not currently seem to be reciprocated by the people of Scotland?

Steve Carson: I would contest that. The annual report and accounts include the results of a survey that was done for that document, and they show that, in some cases, levels of satisfaction with the BBC were lower in Scotland than they were elsewhere. That is a long-term historic trend. However, a rolling piece of survey work that we do with a large panel shows an aggregate of approval scores on people’s general impression of the BBC. That shows that, over the past five years, the gap between overall approval for the BBC in Scotland and the rating across the UK has narrowed quite significantly. A few years ago, it stood at 0.7 of a difference on a 10-point scale; our most recent figure was 0.3, but at one stage towards the end of last year it went down to 0.2.

Our services are widely consumed by many people across Scotland. Overall viewing for BBC television is higher in Scotland, and overall viewing of BBC online content is also higher. I could give the committee many examples of why people come to our services, but instead I will give one example of what has happened during the Covid pandemic. During the past few months, on any day on which significant new information on the virus has been distributed—for example, on case loads or on new regulations—people have flocked to BBC Scotland’s news services. The audience figures for “Reporting Scotland” have towered over those for its competitors. I think that that shows the audience voting instinctively: when they need information that they can trust, and which is to protect themselves and their families, they come to the BBC.

I do not seek to downplay any issues, or the fact that perceptions of the BBC in Scotland might be

different. Those undoubtedly present challenges, but we will respond to them in the only way that we can, which is by doing good work.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank Mr Carson for that answer. I noticed that he flagged up the issue of Covid, and the importance of information that was needed to protect people and their families. Could he therefore reflect on the decision-making process that ensued, in which we saw, certainly at one point, that BBC Scotland said that it would pull coverage of the Scottish Government’s live daily briefings held by the First Minister? The people of Scotland were certainly puzzled by that. Perhaps he could elucidate it. Given that he has already stressed the importance of the role of a public broadcaster during a global pandemic, why was it thought that that was a reasonable approach to take, albeit one that has mostly been reversed?

Steve Carson: I will deal with that specifically. Our contribution to covering the coronavirus pandemic and public health information has been widespread. Of course, it covers all our outlets and news programmes—not just the Scottish Government’s briefings. You are right. I regret that, for a period of days, many ordinary members of the audience felt that the BBC had decided that it would no longer cover coronavirus. That is not what we said or what we intended, but clearly our message got muddled. That is on us.

During that period, our intention was to make it clear in communications to stakeholders—the Scottish Government and others—that the basis on which we carry the Scottish Government briefings is not any directive, but the exercise of our own editorial independence and news judgment. In the period that we were facing, and the period that we have now come through, our judgment was that such briefings are necessary. In a way, we were making a policy point about our carrying them being based on our own decision and not any other directive.

That was interpreted by many people as our withdrawing from that service. Of course, we did not intend to do that, and we did not do that. We then adapted the programme on BBC One to include a range of other voices, which, over the coming months, will help us to preserve our legal obligation to be impartial. Again, it is another function of having a channel. We broadcast the Scottish Government briefings and the question-and-answer sessions in full on BBC Scotland, but the programme on BBC One is a more produced programme. It has the Scottish Government statement and other public health information, and now it also has a range of other political voices, as well as explainer films, which are a key part of our public service offer.

However, I agree that, for a period of days, people were incredibly confused about what the BBC was doing, and I regret that.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): On the performance of the BBC Scotland channel, I am working on the assumption that, over the past six months or so, the overall statistics for viewership and audience share for the channel will have risen considerably because of its role in broadcasting the briefings. Putting aside the specific coronavirus public health briefing coverage, can Steve Carson outline the overall performance and audience share metrics for the new channel over the past six months? The committee was obviously very supportive of the channel's being set up, and we are keen to keep an eye on it, given the interest that those who are perhaps less supportive of its establishment have had in audience numbers?

Steve Carson: You are right that the performance over the past six months has been, broadly, very strong. Like all broadcasters, during the summer, we saw dips, which is normal, and, of course, there was less sport on than we would normally have had. Since its launch at the end of February last year, BBC Scotland has emerged as the channel that reaches more audiences in Scotland than any other digital channel. In fact, it is not far behind Channel 5 in its reach, which is exceptional. It is well ahead of other digital channels that are long established, such as Sky One, More4 and E4, and even our own BBC Four and BBC News channels.

In quarter 2 this year—the first three months of the pandemic—we saw audiences coming to our services for news and information, as you rightly said. In the absence of live sport coverage, we offered classic football matches, and we saw that people had a real craving, which we all felt, for diversion—for something else.

The share of the available audience captured on a particular evening does not get reported. However, on three occasions in the past two weeks—last Sunday, last Friday and the Friday before—BBC Scotland channel's share of the available audience was ahead of that of a combination of terrestrial channels comprising BBC Two, Channel 4 and Channel 5. With the slight exception, potentially, of ITV2 when it broadcasts "Love Island", digital channels do not do that.

The channel's overall performance is very strong, which is a tribute to the people I work with in the BBC but also to the wider creative sector. That was the challenge: with that level of investment and the expansion of activity and ambition, can Scotland's creative sector do it? I think that we have proven that it can, as demonstrated by the awards that the BBC

Scotland channel programming is winning across the UK. To win best drama and best documentary, which are the key content categories at the Broadcast Digital awards, against Sky One, the Discovery Channel and so on—you name it—is extraordinary and a testament to the producers in the independent sector who make those programmes.

Ross Greer: On the point about making programmes, as you will be aware from your previous attendance at the committee, one of our areas of interest is commissioning authority. We have asked the BBC about that every year, when various executives come to the committee. Can you confirm how many individuals in Scotland have ultimate commissioning authority—the ability to greenlight something without having to run it by an executive who is based in London or Manchester?

Steve Carson: The BBC Scotland content budget, which, according to the annual report and accounts, is £125 million, including overheads, sits entirely within BBC Scotland and within the decision-making ability of the head of commissioning—my former role—and the team of commissioners.

On network commissioning spend, we have a network of network commissioners in Scotland—and I would like to come back to that point to pick up on a recent hearing that the committee had. Those commissioners operate as genre experts in daytime, entertainment, children's and drama programming. I will not get too technical, but all commissioning systems involve two ticks: the genre person, who says, "I really like this idea," and the service person, who says, "Okay, let's do it." You need both of them.

In Scotland, we do that ourselves. If our factual commissioner, David Harron, said, "This is a really good idea for a documentary," internally in Scotland, as head of commissioning responsible for the service, I could say, "Okay, let's go ahead." That is within our gift. That spend is £125 million, including news.

The way that the network piece works is that the genre person says, "This is a good idea in Scotland," and they go to somebody else who wants the service, whether that is BBC One, BBC Two or any other service.

That is how the two-tick system works—it is not unique to Scotland. There is no commissioning system anywhere where one person can just say, "Let's go ahead and do it." The question whether it fits the service portfolio is asked, just to bring—*[Inaudible.]*

Ross Greer: I get that; with any large budget expenditure, whether it is in the creative sector or anywhere else, it would be rare to have just one

individual with sign-off ability. However, the issue that we have been concerned about is whether sufficient authority rests in Scotland, whether it is one individual or a system that involves multiple individuals.

When it comes to network commissioning, can both those ticks come from staff who are based in Scotland? Can you go through a commissioning and greenlighting process for network content such that it is entirely greenlit by staff who are based here?

Steve Carson: From a network point of view, you would be talking to a channel head, whether it is daytime, BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three or BBC Four, or their radio equivalents. However, I point out that the system is not unique to Scotland.

I know that the committee has taken a close look at how network commissioning works—I convey that to my colleagues in the BBC's content division. Let me give an example of the system working. A new commissioning editor at senior level, Neil McCallum, yesterday announced a big order for 30 episodes of "Ready Steady Cook" to be made in Glasgow. We have senior commissioning editors in Scotland, in drama, daytime, entertainment and children's programming. A commissioning editor is a senior commissioner grade.

Ross Greer: You mentioned perhaps wanting to come back in to comment about a previous hearing that we had—I think that you were referring to a previous session that we had with folk from the independent production sector on this issue. Do you want to expand on that now?

Steve Carson: The people you heard from are leading lights in the creative sector and they are people we have been working with. That hearing showed that Scotland is at the top of its game in terms of high-quality production. I think that they said that there was a reduction in network commissioners and that some specific commissioners they dealt with in their genres had moved on. However, right now, we have five network commissioners based in Scotland, in slightly different genres perhaps, for them to do their pitching to.

Ross Greer: Thank you very much.

The Convener: Could I just come back in on that? As Steve Carson says, that session included people who are leading lights in their field—Alan Clements, Neil Webster and Claire Mundell. They were extremely complimentary, Mr Carson, about you and your team, as you probably heard when you listened to the session. However, they were quite firm that they did not think that there was enough commissioning power in Scotland. Let me quote Alan Clements, who said:

"We have to get people out into the nations and regions to deal with the companies directly."—[*Official Report, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee*, 8 October 2020; c 8.]

They also said that, during the pandemic, things had improved slightly because everyone moved on to Zoom, but there was a real fear that, once the pandemic was over, we could go back to the situation of the power being in London. They were very clear that, despite having a high regard for you and your team and what you are doing at BBC Scotland, they did not feel that there was enough power in terms of network commissioning in Scotland.

Steve Carson: Yes, and I would not dispute that perspective head-on at all; I was just trying to address the numbers point.

I think that what we have shown in Scotland, probably more so than in other nations, is the ability to combine nations content and network content, and we are co-commissioning more than ever. In fact, over the past few weeks, there have been more BBC Scotland titles playing on network channels than ever before, which provides a revenue stream to the independent producers. Going through the schedule, we have had "Fish Town", "Paramedics on Scene" and "Beechgrove"—that is co-commissioned now as well. We also had "Murder Case" recently, and last night, a BBC Scotland documentary called "The Dark Shadow of Murder"—a very fine film—was broadcast on BBC Two.

10:15

BBC Scotland and our team can help producers go through to the network through us as co-commissioners. Quite considerable activity has been generated in that way.

I was looking at the issue the other day. Since 2018, when the new investment began to come on stream, across 35 titles, there was £8.8 million of investment in BBC Scotland. Along with other producers, we have raised eleven point something million pounds of investment from other sources. I include network BBC as a proportion of that—I think that it was about £4 million.

With that £8.8 million-worth of investment, BBC Scotland leveraged more than £20 million-worth of production spend activity. That makes for more unique, high-impact content that has a high production value and injects money into the creative economy. That is a strong example of what investment directly into Scotland can do in terms of multiplier effects and bringing creative benefits for the audience.

The Convener: That is encouraging.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I will raise the issue of television licences for over-75s and the decision to introduce a fee for them, which Age UK said was a “kick in the teeth”.

I note that over-75s who are in receipt of pension credit will continue to receive a free licence. However, we have already mentioned the importance of public broadcasters during the Covid pandemic, as people are keen to hear the news, not only daily but almost on the hour. What impact has the licence fee issue had on the over-75s? Has there been any assessment of that?

Glyn Isherwood: I will come in on that. The decision that the BBC's board made on the policy for the over-75s was very difficult. It was a policy instrument that was given to us by the Government, which stopped the funding of free licences for the over-75s.

We did a very broad consultation, which received 190,000 responses from members of the public and organisations. We took those responses into account and thought about the feasibility of any new policy and about what the financial impact would be on the BBC and those who would have to pay. We also thought about what was fair, because any concession would have to be funded by the BBC and, ultimately, by other licence fee payers, through a loss in service levels or in the content that they enjoy.

The cost to the BBC of funding licences for all over-75s would have been about £745 million, which is more than 20 per cent of the entire BBC budget. For the BBC to fund that would have meant a significant reduction in the services that people enjoy: the closure of BBC Two, BBC Scotland and other main services. We would not have been able to make that level of saving through operational or efficiency savings alone.

Having come to that decision, we thought that it would be fairest to continue a concession—funded by the BBC—for people in receipt of pension credit. That is a poverty-related measure that is meant to help those who are the poorest in society. We played a strong part in putting that in place.

We are aware that, particularly in these challenging times, it is difficult for many people to find ways of funding the licence fee. However, people of that generation are strong viewers of the BBC and strong users of its services. The BBC's reach across the UK is 91 per cent, and during lockdown it was 94 per cent—on occasion, it was a little bit more than that.

We have started to collect the revenues, which we are doing very sensitively. We are taking into account that many people over 75 are the most vulnerable in society, so we are making the process as easy as possible by providing multiple

ways to pay. We have also made the process Covid-safe. There is no reason to leave the house to pay the licence fee; there are many different ways to pay, including online or over the phone. We have also introduced an over-75s payment plan, so people who are not able to pay in one go can spread the cost over the period of the licence.

To date, we have collected a level of income. We have had 700,000 applications from those receiving pension credit across the UK. We have already taken 1.3 million full licence payments, and half a million people are set up to pay via instalments. As you can see, we have made good, substantial progress already, which indicates strong support and a desire to pay the licence fee from that community. There is no indication of significant levels of evasion among that population, which is really positive. We have been very careful and mindful of how we collect the licence fee during this period.

We estimate that there are 350,000 people over 75 in households in Scotland, and some of those people receive pension credit. We use exactly the same process to collect the licence fee across the whole UK.

Beatrice Wishart: On the issue of the over-75s paying what is due, in general, older people do not like to have any debt associated with them whatsoever. Whether or not they are happy to pay the licence fee, I think that they probably will pay it, but the decision has not gone down well, especially in rural and remote areas, where isolation is an issue and the television is a great comfort for many.

There has been an impact on people, particularly during Covid. I know that there was a decision to defer the payment from June to August. Did you consider deferring the payment for longer, given that the pandemic has continued?

Glyn Isherwood: There is always a balance to be struck between collecting revenue and the funding of services. The decision to delay for two months cost the BBC £70 million. A further delay would have started to have a more substantial impact on services. The money that we collect is used to fund the services, content and programmes that everybody enjoys. We do not want to have reducing income, which means that we would have to reduce funding for content that people enjoy. There is an important balance to be struck.

We are incredibly mindful of how we collect the licence fee. It is about offering customer support to older people in an appropriate way and recognising that they have to pay bills in other areas of life. We also have to facilitate an easy payment of the bill. We have to do that remotely;

we do not have people knocking on doors at the moment, because Covid restrictions are in place.

Clearly, we have to think about communication when we send people letters, and we recognise that not everyone has access to digital technology at home. They might need help from other members of their family to use that technology. We are doing all that we can. We have special—*[Inaudible.]*—in place and a customer support service online and by phone that can help people from those sections of society.

Beatrice Wishart: I do not think that we should get into the content of letters from the TV licensing service, or we could be here for some time.

Some of my colleagues and Mr Carson have touched on the public perception of the BBC. Ofcom's report on the BBC for 2018-19 highlighted that

"certain groups continue to have a lower than average perception of the BBC; people from lower socio-economic groups, people aged over 65, especially disabled people in this age group, and people in Scotland continue to rate the BBC's delivery less favourably than the population as a whole."

I know that Covid has changed things, but will you expand on what you are doing to improve the services and the perception of the BBC?

Steve Carson: As I said, the Ofcom survey from 2018-19 also pointed to some positives. The BBC remains highly trusted in Scotland, albeit less so than in other parts of the UK.

Although our consumption levels are higher—across the board, I think—people in Scotland consistently, over a long period, have appreciated the BBC less. That is in part because they perhaps do not feel that the content is relatable to them and their lives in Scotland. There is a pan-BBC push to increase the portrayal of all four nations of the UK on our network services. Of course, the investment in Scotland was to generate hundreds of hours of new content on the audiovisual side that is aimed squarely at audiences in Scotland.

The honest answer is that the only way that we can address those perceptions is by making good-quality content that is relevant and relatable for people in Scotland, and by reaffirming our commitment to due impartiality. I know that the journalists who work for BBC News Scotland are people of equality and integrity who work hard every day to provide a diet of fair and accurate information and expert analysis using professional judgment informed by evidence. That is the service that we provide. Being a creative organisation made up of humans, there are occasions on which mistakes are made, and we hold our hands up for those. However, the way to address those perception issues is through more

high-quality content that relates to people in Scotland, and by being clear that we are an organisation that is firmly committed to due impartiality.

As I said, whether or not it is unconscious, on days when people want trusted and accurate information—during Covid, for example—they come to the BBC in droves. Although they might have told a pollster that they are a bit worried about the BBC, when it comes down to it and they want safety information for themselves and their family, they come to "Reporting Scotland" and to the BBC News Scotland online site. We have millions of people using that site and searching by postcode to find out what Covid is doing in their communities. There is all sorts of evidence about people and audiences in their millions behaving in a way that shows that they trust the BBC. Nonetheless, I agree that surveys over a number of years show that there is less trust than in other parts of the UK.

Beatrice Wishart: Are you specifically reaching out to the certain sectors and groups that were highlighted in the report?

Steve Carson: Yes. That is another feature of our programming. Although it is not all about the BBC Scotland channel—we have a range of other services that reach mass audiences—one of the interesting things about the Scotland channel, with its distinct range of programming, is that it has what we call unique reach. It reaches people who do not watch any other BBC television channels during our core hours—prime time—from 7 pm until midnight.

There is 1.9 per cent unique reach in relation to people who come from working-class backgrounds—I think that the subdemographic is C2DE—with the Scotland channel, which is a digital channel; it is not BBC One Scotland. Around 2 per cent of people from that background in Scotland watch the Scotland channel but do not watch other BBC television. There is a similarly strong figure in relation to 16 to 34-year-olds, which is another audience group that broadcasters find harder to reach nowadays. The channel is part of that, but our services as a whole serve the audience and make the case for the BBC.

I was talking to staff this week about BBC people being involved in communities. We have 13 BBC bases around Scotland that are becoming more involved in their communities. They are not oases of BBC activity; they are becoming rooted in their community as a community resource. Exploring ways that we can do that is another way that we can make the case about what people get for the licence fee.

Stewart Stevenson: I will initially ask Steve Carson about the public purposes of the BBC. To

paraphrase slightly, an important part of those purposes is that the BBC should help people across the UK to understand the other nations of the UK. How does BBC Scotland contribute to other parts of the BBC to ensure that other parts of the United Kingdom understand what is going on in Scotland and how that may touch on and inform what issues they should be thinking about elsewhere?

10:30

Steve Carson: From a BBC Scotland point of view, we are focused on serving audiences in Scotland, but, of course, it is important that audiences across the UK understand and see Scotland portrayed as well, and we do that in a number of ways. On BBC iPlayer, which is available in all four nations, we saw strong growth in the channel's first year—125 per cent—and, interestingly, in the quarter after that, quarter 2 of this year, when we were competing against quarter 2 last year when the channel was there, we saw growth of more than 30 per cent. Those titles are available across all four nations. We found that about 60 per cent or so of the viewing was outside Scotland, so that is a win-win; we are providing services that are relevant to and that resonate in Scotland, and people in other parts of the UK are getting a sense of Scottish lives and stories.

The network co-commissioning piece that I talked about and that range of titles from documentaries to "Guilt", which is our landmark comedy drama, is an example of combining our resources with network BBC resources; we do a network transmission, so that is a BBC Two and BBC Scotland co-commission. I agree that we have a dual mission there.

Stewart Stevenson: Let me give you two examples of where I think it might be possible to do better. I am looking at the newspaper headlines on the national UK BBC website and it says that it was updated five hours ago. There are newspaper headlines on the BBC Scotland part, which covers Scottish publications—I understand that and I am not criticising that—but if you go to the home page of BBC news and look at the newspaper headlines, you would not even know that there is a newspaper published in Scotland from the graphics that are provided or the related internet links alongside the story. There is not a single publication included from Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales, so it is not a uniquely Scottish issue.

The other example that I will give is a slightly hoary one from a wee while back when I was listening to a Radio 4 news bulletin. There was a discussion that was prompted by a press release from the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied

Workers about Sunday opening in shops, but at no point was it explained that it was an England-only story. Even as somebody in public life, I genuinely did not know that shops in England could not open on Sunday. That was not explained to me in Scotland but, equally, it was not explained to the English audience that shops could open elsewhere in the UK. Perhaps some of the harms that were being described in the story could have been seen in the context of Scotland and Scotland's experience. I am not criticising USDAW for pursuing that—that is not my point at all.

Those are just two examples of how Scotland is not on the radar elsewhere and so is not understood and does not have the opportunity to inform but, equally, we do not understand what is going on elsewhere because it is not being explained with any understanding of the Scottish context. Is that a fair characterisation? If so, how could BBC Scotland help to change that?

Steve Carson: The point about the newspapers is interesting, and I will take that away. We, in BBC Scotland, and the other BBC nations, have dialogue with colleagues across all four nations to make sure that our network coverage is clear when something refers to only one nation in the UK. If you look back several years, you will find more egregious examples, on a fairly regular basis, of the assumption that something that applies in England applies everywhere in the UK.

One of the repercussions from the Covid public health crisis is that devolution across the UK is ever more apparent, and even devolution in England, with the metropolitan mayors, is now very tangible in people's minds. I think that our network news colleagues now know—with maybe the odd unfortunate slip—that, when they talk about the health service, they are talking about England and Wales; when they talk about public health, they are talking about England; and that Wales has its own responsibilities, as do Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In fact, the investment in journalism that went into "The Nine"—that additional news resource—has helped us during the crisis. For example, when the Prime Minister has made a statement, we have quickly been able—for the lockdown announcement, it was within about an hour—to mount a special programme on BBC One Scotland to say that parts of it, such as border controls, related to Scotland and other parts did not. Part of our role is to explain what is different in Scotland. We make representations—to a willing audience, I think—that, in network transmissions, they should be clear that they know to which nation something applies.

The point about newspapers is interesting, and I will take that away.

Stewart Stevenson: It is merely a symptom, rather than a major issue.

Steve Carson: Scotland has a long tradition of having more daily newspapers than anywhere else, so they should be reflected.

Stewart Stevenson: Yes. As I represent the north-east of Scotland, I should remind people that *The Press and Journal* is bought by more people than buy *The Herald* and *The Scotsman* put together. However, there we are; that is another issue for another day.

As a wee footnote, I hope that Freesat continues to be supported by the BBC, because I cannot get any terrestrial television at all where I am, and I do not want to pay vast sums of money to Rupert Murdoch.

One of the best programmes, which has been going for a long time, and which tells Scotland about the rest of the world through Scottish eyes, is “Eòrpa”. I wonder why it is such a singular example of excellence in Scotland in showing the rest of the world? It is subtitled, so it is perfectly reasonably accessible to people outside the Gàidhealtachd. Is there scope for other such programmes that might reach wider audiences?

Steve Carson: You are right to highlight “Eòrpa” as a long-standing and very high-quality offering, which, as you say, is consumed by and available to people across the language communities.

There is a significant focus on making sure that our services are outward looking and cover other parts of the world—I would say that, wouldn't I? Our correspondents are looking at the US presidential election, and we have covered events in eastern Europe. It is part of the ethos of “The Nine” that it covers national, UK and international news.

Albeit that this is slightly in a sidebar, that approach has even been taken in our documentary output. The documentary “Real Kashmir FC”, which has won UK awards and has been nominated in many other categories, showed Davie Robertson from Aberdeen managing a football team in Kashmir. In an odd way, that helped to bring the events in Kashmir to a non-traditional news audience.

It is part of the ambition of what we do as a broadcaster in Scotland, and I take your point that we should do more.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I am interested in news gathering and journalism, and specifically in the local democracy scheme. How do the panellists feel that that has worked, and what has it contributed? I have certainly heard a mixed bag of feedback. I have heard that, in some places, it is working well and linking in well with local journalism but that, in others, people feel that

it is replicating services that are already there and is not really adding value.

Steve Carson: Glyn Isherwood might want to lead on that.

Glyn Isherwood: The local democracy scheme was set up some time ago to ensure better reporting of democracy across the country. Clearly, lessons have been learned along the way. I think that we concluded our review of that scheme last year. There is more to learn. We have probably not deployed as quickly as we would have liked. However, it is clear that it is finding its feet, and it is improving democracy reporting across the whole country.

With regard to the future of the scheme, we are committed to it at the moment but, as with all areas of BBC expenditure, it is subject to review. We put a substantial amount of money into it, and it reflects the pullback and difficulty for many regional newspapers in relation to funding their newspapers and having journalists on the ground. Across the UK, the BBC plays an incredibly important part in local journalism, and the scheme is one important aspect of that.

Oliver Mundell: I also want to follow up on coverage across the country. Speaking for my constituents, we have a very good team in Dumfries. There is excellent radio output and really good local journalists who work hard, but there is often a frustration that stories that are important to that part of Scotland do not make it on to the main news bulletins, because the news output is often central belt or urban dominated. There is a similar sentiment elsewhere; there is not a lot of community news that reflects rural Scotland. There tends to be a focus on negative stories, which are part of news, but what goes on in communities and positive news stories do not get picked up. Are you looking into ensuring that national Scottish news output reflects the whole country?

Steve Carson: Yes. I reaffirm our commitment to that rather than say that it is a new commitment. When I talked to the BBC Scotland teams across Scotland this week, I made a point of saying that diversity and inclusion are part of serving our audiences and that we cannot serve them if we do not reflect them on screen and in our workforce. I broadened the concept of diversity and inclusion; of course, it includes ethnicity, gender, sexuality and people working with disabilities, but it also includes geography. People in all parts of Scotland pay their licence fee, so people in all parts of Scotland deserve to see their communities and stories reflected.

You will see that commitment to doing so in BBC Scotland. A big proportion of the Scottish population is urban, and a lot of people live in the

central belt, but I am fully committed to reinforcing our ability to work from a network of bases across Scotland and reflect those stories.

It is not just the BBC; the whole creative industry and sector gravitates towards Glasgow. Although I am determined to reflect the lives of people in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, we need to work hard to ensure that there is proper portrayal of stories from other parts of Scotland.

Oliver Mundell: In comparison, STV—specifically ITV Border—in the south of Scotland finds more creative ways of bringing regional stories into its national bulletins. I have finished my questions, so we can move on, but I ask you to reflect further on that.

Steve Carson: I will reflect on it. That opinion has been gathered before.

Kenneth Gibson: As a wee aside, I note that last year I mentioned “Politics Scotland”. I am curious to know why “Politics Scotland” follows the Westminster calendar rather than that of Holyrood. BBC Scotland is supposed to ensure that its coverage relates to things that are specific to Scotland, yet when Westminster is in session, “Politics Scotland” is shown and, when Westminster is in recess, it is not shown, regardless of whether the Scottish Parliament meets. Why does the BBC consider coverage of Westminster to be the priority rather than coverage of the Scottish Parliament?

Steve Carson: I am not sure that I take that as a fact; let me look into it. We look at the level of “Politics Scotland” coverage regularly. Across this year, there has been a huge explosion—

Kenneth Gibson: Hold on. My wife is an MP, so I am pretty clued up on those things. I know that, when she is in recess, “Politics Scotland” is not on, regardless of whether Holyrood meets. I raised that issue a year ago and was told then that it would be looked into, but it has not been. Given that we already get a huge amount of Westminster coverage from the UK service, I do not understand why scheduling of a programme that is produced in Scotland is not more focused on Holyrood.

10:45

Steve Carson: I will look into that and get back to you.

Kenneth Gibson: The committee got a report showing the number of people that the BBC employs in Scotland. Over the past three years, that has been very stable, at about 5.7 per cent of the BBC’s UK workforce. That is about two thirds of what we would expect, given our population share of about 8.3 per cent. I realise that a huge component of the BBC’s workforce is still in London and that you are trying to move some

people out, but it seems that, over the past three years, there has not been any progress on the proportion who are working in Scotland.

I also note that BBC Scotland is looking to cut about 60 more jobs, which is a real concern, especially as Scotland is collecting £43 million more in licence fees than is being spent here. One would think that we would, if more of that was spent here, be able to retain and increase the share of jobs here, in Scotland.

Steve Carson: Some of the figures that you are looking at represent people who are directly employed by BBC Scotland. I do not think that they include people who are employed by other parts of the BBC, including BBC Studios, which is our commercial production arm and BBC design and engineering, which has brought 250 jobs to Scotland in the past two years. BBC Children’s employees are also not included in the figures that you are looking for, as far as I am aware. Of course, in BBC Scotland, the new programme “The Nine”, directly created 80 posts in journalism.

You are right that we have, along with the rest of the BBC, been part of a voluntary redundancy process since June, in order to achieve efficiencies. Many colleagues with long service who have made distinguished contributions to—*[Inaudible.]*—are going to be leaving over this financial year. I think that the figure now stands at 77 or so. We are working through the final pieces of that process. It is not possible to increase investment in content and it is not possible to increase investment in certain areas and not also make cost-efficiency savings elsewhere.

Finally, the BBC’s activity in Scotland is not confined to people who are directly employed by the BBC. The point that I have been making is that we are part of a wider creative sector to which investment flows as much as it flows to our employees. The witnesses in the previous evidence session would be concerned and want to know that BBC investment does not simply produce more jobs for the BBC. We want to ensure that investment goes into the wider sector.

Kenneth Gibson: The source for the jobs figures was “BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20”. I also looked back to 2017-18.

Steve Carson: *[Inaudible.]*—wider BBC employment role in Scotland. That is the only difference that I am noting.

Kenneth Gibson: Either way you look at it, Scotland is punching well below its weight in terms of BBC overall staff numbers.

I will move on to radio. I have been looking at the cost per user hour, which is quite interesting. You would expect a very low cost per user hour for BBC Radio 1 and Radio 2. I think that it is about

1p per hour. Radio Scotland is about 10 times that cost, at about 10p per user hour. Obviously, you have to provide a service across a large geographical area with a smaller population, so we cannot expect to make direct comparisons. However, it is interesting that the cost per user hour for BBC Radio Ulster is about two thirds of that of Radio Scotland. How is the cost arrived at? What is the reason for the difference?

Steve Carson: There are two key drivers. The cost per user hour that you have just asked about is arrived at by dividing the cost between the available audience. BBC Radio Scotland is available across the UK on BBC Sounds, but it is primarily a service for people in Scotland, so we divide the cost of the radio station by 5.5 million people, which is why, on that metric, it is more expensive than a service across all four nations.

BBC Radio Ulster, which is part of my former patch, is a remarkable national radio station that has a high percentage of the radio audience in Northern Ireland. That is a function of the fact that BBC network radio services perform less well in Northern Ireland—possibly, they do not feel so relevant there. The figures are a tribute to Radio Ulster, but they are also a function of the market.

BBC Radio Scotland is the second-biggest radio station in Scotland—BBC Radio 2 is the biggest. That is why you get those figures. In one way, costs per user hour applied to a nation's services is a sign of our investment commitment. Even though the cost is high, providing the service is what we are here for.

Kenneth Gibson: I think that that is a good thing, and I would certainly not criticise investment in Radio Scotland. However, I would like to know what steps are being taken to increase the number of users, relative to Radio Ulster. You have talked about the successes in Northern Ireland. What can be done here to emulate them—not just so that we can reduce the costs per user hour, but so that we can get more listeners for the same amount of money?

Steve Carson: That is the strategy. Earlier this year, just before Covid hit, we remodelled the Radio Scotland schedule and introduced changes to the anchor news programmes, which are the daytime ones. We kept “Good Morning Scotland” and we created two new shows: “Lunchtime Live” and “Drivetime”. I think that they have demonstrated a level of expertise and also the supportive, warmer and more human approach that is part of the channel identity.

Unfortunately, Radio Joint Audience Research—RAJAR—which measures radio consumption, is paused, because it involves an in-person survey. That means that we do not know

how much performance has gone up by during the pandemic period.

However, on our digital streams, which we can measure, there is absolutely enormous consumption. “Off the Ball”, for example, has become one of the biggest digital properties in the BBC. The “Off the Ball” team pioneered a fairly unique blend of sport, humour and public health questions and answers, and there was definitely a receptive audience for that.

Kenneth Gibson: I think that Mr Isherwood wants to comment. Before he does, I would like to raise an issue that I meant to mention earlier.

When I try to watch “Politics Scotland” on catch-up, I get sent to one of the equivalent shows that are broadcast in north-west England, London or the Midlands. I do not think that I have ever managed to reach it on catch-up. If I decide to watch it on a Monday evening or even an hour after it has been broadcast, I get sent to one of those other shows. Why can I not get it on catch-up?

Steve Carson: I will look into that. BBC iPlayer sort of invented the streaming market and there is a different level of investment in it now, which means that—this might be a bit of a pitch—it can now show content for 12 months rather than 30 days, which is going to make it enormous.

I think that news content on iPlayer comes down after a day. However, I do not know why you are being redirected in the way that you describe, so I will look into that.

Kenneth Gibson: We need our Gordon Brewer fix, obviously. It would be great if you could get back to us on that.

Mr Isherwood—do you want to comment?

Glyn Isherwood: It will be helpful if I clarify something that was referred to earlier. In total, including production, the number of BBC employees in Scotland has gone up by 107 during the year, to 1,310, which is a 9 per cent increase.

However, on the point that Mr Gibson made about proportion of spend, we want to do more. In the past few years, the direction of travel has clearly been right. Two years ago, 71 per cent of the licence fee that was collected in Scotland was spent in Scotland; the figure for this year is 85 per cent. The launch of the BBC Scotland channel has been helpful in that regard.

There are costs that sit outside that. For example, only 69 per cent of the licence fee that is collected in England is spent in England. The spend includes the rights costs of six nations rugby. Because the sport department sits in Salford, that cost sits within English spend, but of course the benefit is shared by all the nations.

There are examples of spend in other areas that benefits Scotland, too.

Kenneth Gibson: We fully appreciate that, but even when we add network costs into the spend in Scotland, there still appears to be a £43 million shortfall from what is raised from the licence fee. The contrast between Scotland and Northern Ireland and Wales is most stark for me and other members of the committee, but I thank Mr Carson and Mr Isherwood for their answers.

The Convener: We have a little bit of time in hand for supplementary questions.

Ross Greer: I would like to go back to commissioning. My question is really about health and safety during the pandemic. Recently, I have spoken to a number of freelancers and small businesses in the independent production sector who are feeling a little bit challenged. At the moment, they simply cannot afford to give up on work when it is available, but when people arrive to take part in a production, they often find that the public health guidance that has been issued is not being followed as stringently as they would be comfortable with. However, they also do not feel comfortable speaking up about it—hospitality workers also do not feel comfortable speaking out—because they simply cannot afford to lose business. In a freelance-dominated sector, that is obviously a big issue.

When the BBC commissions work to be produced by independent companies, what oversight does the BBC carry out? Does it do spot checks? How does it ensure the on-site health and safety of people who are taking part in productions?

Steve Carson: It is concerning to hear about such cases. The system for programmes that are produced by the BBC directly and for programmes that are contracted to independent providers is very rigorous and careful, and it is evolving, as regulations evolve to cope with the virus. There are risk assessments and filming protocols. A huge amount of work goes into each and every production that is green lit.

Independent contractors have an obligation to perform under the legislation, and there are requirements to ensure the health and safety of contributors. As part of the commissioning process, we set out the requirements. Each production takes safety advice and has a safety adviser.

I have direct experience of many productions; people have felt very well looked after, with work being done methodically and safely. If there are specific instances of productions not following the regulations—individuals might not want to be identified—I will follow that up.

In relation to the bigger picture, the work that has been done by so many people in so many parts of the industry, including the independent sector and the BBC, to safely sustain meaningful production levels is genuinely remarkable. That is part of the story of this year.

There have also been support measures. Right from the beginning, Screen Scotland put bursary schemes in the field for the freelance sector in order to support people. I take my hat off to it for that. The BBC has also provided support for BBC freelancers.

Ross Greer: Thank you for that answer. I should say that no one I spoke to had complaints directly about the BBC; the complaints were about productions that were being made independently. However, as the commissioning force, the BBC has a duty of care. I am interested in how the BBC ensures that agreements that have been reached are followed up when it is not an in-house BBC production.

Steve Carson: People often contact us directly with any issues about a production. If you have seen evidence of the regulations not being followed, we will review that. However, with the vast majority of productions, a difficult task is being performed under very safe conditions.

Ross Greer: Absolutely.

The Convener: No other members have indicated that they wish to ask supplementary questions, so it looks as though we will finish just ahead of time.

To wind up, I will ask another couple of questions. The first relates to expenditure by service in Scotland. The annual report shows that, between 2016 and 2020, development costs rose from £1.6 million to £7 million. Can you explain what that rise in development covers?

My second question relates to on-screen talent and the fact that some very familiar figures, in news and current affairs in particular, are moving on. Other colleagues have asked questions about head count, but my question is of a more qualitative nature. People such as Brian Taylor, Gordon Brewer and Isabel Fraser are moving on, and I am sure that they deserve their retirement. However, they are cultural figures in Scotland and they have a cultural memory. They have a memory of the Scottish political scene that goes back many decades, which is irreplaceable. What have you been doing to nurture their successors and to develop home-grown talent so that there are people who can step into their shoes? I am talking about not just new starts but people who share the same kind of experience and collective memory, which is really important and which the BBC in Scotland does well; even though sometimes we might not like some of the

questions that those figures ask politicians, they are extremely important.

11:00

Steve Carson: For the record, a colleague has informed me that “Politics Scotland” was broadcast yesterday, while Westminster is in recess, but I will follow up on the general point that was made.

To take the convener’s second question first, with regard to the number of very distinguished—

Kenneth Gibson: I am sorry, but I was talking about the Sunday edition. I apologise—I should have made that clear; it is my fault.

Steve Carson: I will follow up on that.

With regard to the very experienced, distinguished and talented journalists who are leaving, I want to pay tribute to their decades of service. The convener is right that we need to find a balance in the mixture of experience that is going and the opportunity that that presents to other people to expand their areas of experience. That is even more the case, given that many long-serving members of the Scottish Parliament might move on in May.

We have worked through areas such as the voluntary redundancy requests and the head of news, and I am very confident that we have an extremely strong broader team of journalists in BBC News Scotland. The new investment that we have seen over the past few years, particularly in journalism, is a great boon to that. We have been able to bring in, or work in different ways with, talent such as Martin Geissler, Rebecca Curran, Laura Miller, Laura Goodwin and James Cook. A number of journalists who have been with us for a number of years will now get other opportunities, and a number of people have joined us or taken on new roles with us in the past few years.

However, I take your point. I think that the audience will miss some of their favourite familiar and trusted figures.

The Convener: Thank you for that. I, too, would like to pay tribute to those journalists and wish them all the very best in their retirement.

Can you cast any light on the development figure?

Steve Carson: Glyn Isherwood can speak about how that was worked out in the annual report and accounts.

Glyn Isherwood: Development spend has gone up over the period. That is a reflection of the additional effort that we have put into increasing spend in Scotland. Commissions for new programming come out of seed funding some of

those areas, whether that is trying out pilots, establishing new talent or putting in place new programming. The increase in development is a significant part of that. You can see that we have been trialling out new programming across BBC Scotland for the past couple of years, and the level of spend has increased. The increase in development now will be reflected in hoped-for commissions in the future.

The Convener: Thank you very much. This really is my last question, Mr Carson. It reflects the fact that a number of committee members have asked you questions and raised concerns about the website, the whole of the BBC web content and the digital catch-up service. Stewart Stevenson mentioned Scottish newspapers, and Kenneth Gibson also raised questions.

Are you confident that, in Scotland, you have enough control over how the offering that people access through the website is developed? Did Scotland have enough decision making on that? It sounds to me as though there are some issues there, in that decisions are made in London and Scotland is bypassed. It is great that you are taking those things forward, but do we need more decision-making power here?

Steve Carson: There are a number of things to say about that. Obviously, we are able to offer our created and tailored news Scotland service on our home page in Scotland. We have good relationships with the network services or platforms, so they take our content and promote it across the UK.

We have a strong footprint in services such as BBC iPlayer and BBC Sounds; Radio Scotland and Radio nan Gàidheal have a discrete space on Sounds, and BBC Scotland and BBC Alba have valuable prominence on every version of the iPlayer, on whatever device people are looking at. I want to make sure that our content is being surfaced prominently enough in all future developments of iPlayer and BBC Sounds. As the director, I have been and will be engaged in discussions on that. Those are four-nation platforms, so they need to be able to operate across all four nations.

We can see the draw of content that is local and relatable—people watch that in droves—so it is clearly attractive if, for example, through iPlayer, we can offer a blend of content from Scotland to people who have a Scottish postcode. We have seen that because, in creating a channel, we put a “Scotland” stamp on every version of the iPlayer. That has helped greatly, because people can now find our content. Before, they had to go into a category called “Scotland”; I think that you needed to work for the BBC in order to find it. That prominence on iPlayer and Sounds means that we

are involved in those discussions at a very senior level.

The Convener: Yes, I have noticed the change from having that imprint in the past couple of years; the situation has definitely improved.

That concludes our evidence session; shortly, we will consider the evidence that we have heard in private. I thank both our witnesses for giving evidence. We look forward to seeing you again next year. We will undoubtedly turn our attention to the BBC again soon.

11:06

Meeting continued in private until 11:32.

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