

# **EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 17 June 2009

Session 3

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### EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2009, Session 3

#### CONVENER

\*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

#### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

\*Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

\*Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

\*Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP)

\*Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

\*Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

#### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP)

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

\*attended

#### THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Donalda MacKinnon (BBC Scotland)

Ken MacQuarrie (BBC Scotland)

Michael Russell (Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution)

Mark Thompson (BBC)

#### THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

#### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

#### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Nick Hawthorne

#### ASSISTANT CLERK

Emma Berry

#### LOCATION

Committee Room 2



## Scottish Parliament

### Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

Wednesday 17 June 2009

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

### Broadcasting in Scotland

**The Convener (Karen Whitefield):** I open the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee and welcome everyone to the meeting. We have received apologies from Claire Baker, who is unable to attend this morning.

I welcome Ted Brocklebank to the meeting. For the benefit of our guests this morning, who may not be aware of the way in which the Scottish Parliament's committees work, I explain that members can attend meetings of any committee—they do not have to be a member of the committee. As I am sure that you are aware, Mr Brocklebank has a long-standing interest in culture and broadcasting in Scotland.

The first item on the agenda is the committee's consideration of broadcasting in Scotland. Following the committee's scrutiny of the evidence that was given to the Scottish Broadcasting Commission on the creative industries and evidence from the Office of Communications, the committee is now taking evidence from the BBC. It is my pleasure to welcome Mark Thompson, director general of the BBC; Ken MacQuarrie, director of BBC Scotland; and Donalda MacKinnon, head of programmes and services at BBC Scotland. I understand that Mr Thompson wants to make an opening statement before we ask questions.

**Ken MacQuarrie (BBC Scotland):** I will respond first. We are having a very strong year in BBC Scotland. In this calendar year, we will deliver between 5 and 6 per cent of all the network output. We are on target to deliver just under 9 per cent by 2016, and our target for 2012 is to deliver approximately 6 per cent under the Ofcom definition. We are delighted that we have made such good progress in delivering against the network strategy review, on which we gave evidence to the Scottish Broadcasting Commission. We indicated that we would work within the Ofcom definition and that we would deliver against the targets as outlined.

The story is also positive in terms of our news provision. We are engaged in a number of different initiatives to deliver better news across

Scotland, including democracy live—a pilot that will seek to deliver better information for all our licence payers on the workings of the Parliament and, indeed, all the democratic institutions.

BBC Scotland has a very positive story to tell, and this has been a momentous week for the BBC as a whole.

**Mark Thompson (BBC):** I will add to that on behalf of the BBC as a whole. The most important thing that I want to say to the committee is that, over the past five years, there has been a sea change in the attitude of the BBC towards investment in Scotland and the improvement of services to everyone in Scotland who pays for the BBC. That can be seen in our physical investment. Pacific Quay is the most advanced digital broadcast and production centre that we have anywhere in the world. It is a visible symbol of our commitment to finding great talent and making great programmes here. We are now engaged in the task of filling Pacific Quay as we ramp up network production here.

As Kenny McQuarrie said, we are also keen to improve services to licence payers in Scotland on quite a broad front. I was lucky enough to be present at the launch of BBC Alba, our partnership with MG Alba. That brand new service got off to a great start. We continue to believe that there are reservoirs of untapped talent in this country and that the BBC, with its global reach—we reach hundreds of millions of people around the world—and its global sales and distribution effort can make a real difference in getting Scottish talent to audiences around the world. Along with others, we want to ensure that Scotland's creative industries have the best story possible about growth and development, and we are engaged in conversations with the rest of the sector in this country.

This week, we signed a memorandum of understanding with Scottish Television about a broad range of partnerships, which relate to ways in which we can support STV and ways in which STV can bring things to BBC Scotland and the wider BBC. We see the pathway for the BBC in Scotland as one of increased commitment and investment from us and of working with the rest of the sector here to obtain the best possible result for the Scottish creative industries and the Scottish public.

**The Convener:** I will start by asking a couple of general questions. Do you agree that Scotland should have a fair share of the BBC's budget for the United Kingdom on the basis of its population, so that we can stimulate and nurture the broadcasting industry here? If you agree, how do we ensure that that happens?

**Mark Thompson:** What you describe should be the direction of travel. For example, on the critical issue of network television supply, we have committed to reaching a point at which the proportion of the spend on network television programmes from Scotland—using Ofcom's definition of local production—reflects the percentage of UK households in Scotland.

The kinds of investment that we make throughout the BBC's services are manifest. I will give two examples. We have a bureau with nine people in Tehran, which provides news about what is going on there for BBC services here and around the world. That is a shared facility that is not based in the UK. In a sense, one benefit for anyone who pays the licence fee in Scotland is access to global news gathering. That is exogenous to your question.

Similarly, together with ITV, we are lucky enough to have the rights to show the 2010 world cup. We will show that live sport throughout the UK. As the committee knows, the world cup will be held in South Africa. The BBC's spend on that cannot be geographically apportioned to any one part of the BBC. However, in activities such as network production, we should as far as we can ensure that licence payers throughout the UK—that absolutely includes licence payers in Scotland—can see that a fair proportion of investment is visibly spent in and delivers great programmes from their part of the UK.

**The Convener:** I think that we all welcome the global news gathering for which the BBC is famous. I appreciate and rely on that service, which I want to continue. However, concern is felt in Scotland about the BBC's commitment to its political broadcasting. Recently, experienced political broadcasters have been made redundant. The news output in Scotland at 10 pm has been cut back. How can you reassure us that the BBC remains committed not just to global news gathering but to Scottish political coverage in Scotland and in the rest of the United Kingdom, so that people in the rest of the United Kingdom know what we are doing?

**Mark Thompson:** First, I want to say that the provision of high-quality, authoritative and impartial news is the BBC's single most important task. It is what the public expect most from us and it is our most important duty. That absolutely includes the delivery of outstanding news and current affairs coverage of political events and other events in Scotland to the public in Scotland.

That does not mean that we can stand still. We work in a high-tech industry. In many ways, broadcasting is becoming as high tech as the computer industry is. Automation and new technologies mean that opportunities exist for us, just as they do for pretty much every other

enterprise in Scotland and in the UK, to deliver more for less input—in other words, to achieve productivity gains. Part of the reason why we have to do that is that we have a duty to deliver value for money for licence payers. We understand the constraints on our funding and we can deliver the services of the future, such as democracy live, only if we can find ways of delivering our existing services for less money.

New technology is arriving across the BBC, including at BBC Scotland, and you can see it if you go to Pacific Quay or our operation in Edinburgh. You will also see us trying hard to deliver more for less, which sometimes means job losses. In the debate about job losses, people—particularly those who might be at risk of losing their job—will always try to argue that the fact that we are trying to run a particular operation or programme with fewer people means that we must have lost our commitment. It does not mean that; it means that we are trying to drive in value for money.

We are trying to ensure that quality is as high as it has been and to find ways of investing in the future. You can see future investment all over the place in BBC Scotland. You can see it physically in Pacific Quay, but you can also see it in projects such as BBC Alba and in the way that we are ramping up investment in network production.

If you look at things in the round, I believe that you will see a passionate commitment to high-quality journalism in the BBC and BBC Scotland. You will also see us squeezing money out of our existing services to some extent so that we can fund our future and future services for the public.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Political coverage is not static. We are changing and investing more in online coverage, but we are also introducing and strengthening areas such as our business coverage with journalists such as Douglas Fraser moving into broadcasting. The strengthening of that area has been welcome and timely. We are also bringing another generation of people through, which is essential in the broadcasting industry. At the same time, you often see established correspondents, such as Brian Taylor, on the 6 o'clock, 10 o'clock or 1 o'clock news contributing the story of Scotland to the network. That has been true in business, too.

**Donalda MacKinnon (BBC Scotland):** Regardless of whether we cover politics as extensively as some of you might wish, we have not reduced our commitment to political coverage. What we do in the round in any given week is fairly comprehensive. We have "The Politics Show" on a Sunday and "Politics Scotland". Scotland at 10 is as strong a proposition as it was previously. We also cover First Minister's question time, which has another outing via BBC Parliament. Our

commitment to covering politics has not reduced in any way; in fact, we always aspire to cover it as well as possible and we aim to do better where we can.

**The Convener:** I want to pick up Ken MacQuarrie's point about bringing new people through. We all expect the BBC to maximise what it gets for every pound that it spends, not least because it is taxpayers' money. You have to be conscious of that—I am sure that you are—but there are concerns that, as technology changes, we must have highly skilled and trained people to deal with it. What emphasis will the BBC place on providing such training, which you have been famous for, here in Scotland to ensure that you have the highly skilled individuals to provide services not just for programmes that we will watch but for programmes that you broadcast in other parts of the United Kingdom?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We are absolutely committed to maintaining our investment in training. We have had huge investment in training in BBC Scotland, particularly on moving to new technology in Pacific Quay, which has given us a group of programme makers who are skilled in the latest digital technology. We want to work in partnership with other bodies and agencies, such as in tertiary education, to ensure that we get graduates coming through with the right skill levels. In another part of my life I chaired Skillset Scotland. We work with not only the providers from Skillset but all the providers throughout the industry.

10:15

Increasingly, as part of the partnership with Scottish Television, we will be offering places on our training courses in BBC Scotland to journalists from Scottish Television, allowing STV to participate in any of the investment that we make, at marginal cost. Once we have the trainers in situ, there is a sunk cost in any case, so we want to emphasise and maximise the public value of that investment and training.

I am absolutely passionate about delivering the best quality of training that we can, working with our college of journalism and working across the BBC to ensure that we have the highest skill level. This has been a very positive story for us. We are delivering training in a much more comprehensive, uniform and structured way than has been the case in the past.

**The Convener:** Are you able to tell us how much you are actually spending, as a percentage of your budget, on training in Scotland?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** There will have been a peak because of our activities at Pacific Quay. I will come back to you with a note of the percentages of our budget that we committed to training over

the period of moving into Pacific Quay. I will be happy to give you the exact detail of that.

**The Convener:** That would be helpful.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I am pleased that the BBC will be covering Scotland's anticipated triumph at the 2010 world cup in South Africa, which I look forward to viewing.

You have spoken about the BBC's expenditure overseas, with its bureaux, and you mentioned Tehran. Surely the work of the people who are based in Tehran comes out of London, and so there is still a metropolitan bias. How many people have moved from working in journalism in Scotland through that sort of route in recent years? Is there likely to be an opportunity for people in Scotland to follow that sort of path?

Mr MacQuarrie, you talked about network output in Scotland being between 5 and 6 per cent now, growing to 6 per cent by 2012 and to 9 per cent by 2016. That still means taking seven years to reach our population share. I do not think that anyone around this table would think that to be desperately ambitious. You can correct me if I am wrong, but it almost seems as if the BBC is setting that percentage as a ceiling. Is there a possibility that you might even go beyond that 9 per cent figure at some point?

**Mark Thompson:** I will begin with your second set of questions. First, the targets for network production from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland absolutely include our commitment to Scotland. We regard that figure as a floor, not a ceiling. In other words, there is every prospect that we will overshoot the target.

Secondly, although there are variations year to year, the evidence from the current year suggests that we are ahead of timetable—in other words, that we will hit the interim target for 2012 before 2012. I would hope that we could hit the 2016 target before 2016.

We want to build that expenditure in a way that will be truly sustainable. The BBC has had a crack at improving things a couple of times in the past. Ideally, we want to end up making improvements in a way that is built into the fabric of what we are doing. We have appointed a lot of commissioners here, and that real commissioning power in Scotland is valuable. People are not just making things here; people who commission things are based here.

We want to build things from the right combination of existing titles and new ideas. We are moving some titles to Scotland as part of this story, but we want to ensure that there is plenty of room for people in Scotland to develop brand-new ideas based on new talent, rather than simply

moving an existing part of the landscape to Scotland. We should be trying to base that on a creative infrastructure that is growing in confidence and success, and we might consider in particular what Anne Mensah has delivered here in recent years in rebuilding our success in television drama, from what was frankly a pretty low base—that was a very disappointing area for us.

It has taken some time, but there is much to be proud of now. Specialist factual programming is now in an exciting place in Scotland. I will give two examples. The first is the rather brilliant “A History of Scotland” series, which was made in the first instance for BBC Scotland but was shown to great acclaim on UK networks. Secondly, BBC4 recently commissioned a Scottish season for UK network showing. Commissioners across the BBC are beginning to get behind and back the judgment and talent of our Scottish teams, which feels new. I believe that at the moment we are ahead of target. I hope that we can get there sooner, but we want to do so in a way that is really sustainable.

I have two points to make on the issue of journalistic talent. First, it is important that we ensure that our most distinguished journalists—Brian Taylor is a good example—are used regularly on the UK networks. We have a major political story in this country; the right person to tell it is our political editor in Scotland. Brian Taylor has just as much credibility with UK audiences today as Nick Robinson or any of our other political editors. Secondly, when we are thinking about the foreign correspondents of the future, we should look at the enormous talent that we have in BBC Scotland. That is not a new point, but I agree that we have a really strong talent base here and would like more people to move from our newsrooms in Glasgow and around Scotland to international news coverage.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Surely that would be easier if we had something like a “Scottish Six”, with a direct Scottish input. There would then be fewer stories on “Reporting Scotland” of the “Mrs McGlumpher’s cat caught up a tree” type. Issues would be presented from an international perspective—at present, coverage is still mind-numbingly parochial on occasion. Would such an approach not be a better way forward, as it would allow people to see international issues from both a Scottish and a UK perspective?

**Mark Thompson:** You started on a narrow point and ended on a broader one. On the narrow point, I disagree with you about “Reporting Scotland”, which is one of our strongest 6.30 programmes. In recent years, in particular, it has grown in stature, as it has been able to report on the devolved politics of Scotland. We produce for S4C in Wales an integrated news programme, “Newyddion”, with

extensive international reporting. I am not sure that the lack of a programme such as a “Scottish Six” has been the decisive factor in moving individual talent from Wales and Scotland. We have distinguished journalists who began by reporting in the nations and moved on to UK and international reporting—that is not unusual.

On the broader point, I believe that both the work that was done by the BBC in 2003 and the survey work that was done more recently by Blair Jenkins’s Scottish Broadcasting Commission suggests that the integrated news hour of the 6 o’clock news and “Reporting Scotland” works well for a majority of viewers. We do not have—and have not had for some time—a strong sense from the Scottish public that they are being underserved and would be served better by a reorganisation.

Judging from the letters, e-mails and phone calls that we get from the public, the biggest challenge for the BBC is to provide better coverage of the regions of Scotland, rather than a remixing of Scottish and UK news. When people talk about metropolitan bias in the BBC, they are normally referring to London, but some people in Scotland would say that there is also a central belt metropolitan bias in our coverage—Kenny MacQuarrie and his team must look at that issue. Our original plans for so-called local TV—enhancement of our broadband—were turned down by the BBC trust, but we continue to hope that we will be able to invest to improve the texture of the way in which we report on the different regions of Scotland.

**Kenneth Gibson:** There is probably more coverage of the Highlands than of Ayrshire, Fife or Tayside, which may be more neglected.

When people think of the central belt, they are talking about Glasgow and Edinburgh. Other areas in the so-called central belt, such as Lanarkshire, are not covered in the same way. The Highlands always seems to get reasonably good coverage.

**Mark Thompson:** Kenny MacQuarrie is the person who is responsible. Perhaps he will come in on that.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I turn first to the speed of delivery of the network strategy and our level of ambition. Clearly, it is my job to deliver that in a planned way and with an absolute focus on sustainability, as Mark Thompson said. The targets that we have set are floors not ceilings. We will drive all our creative energy to delivering the best and most ambitious network output that it is possible for us to do.

I turn to the transfer of staff to other areas, including the international stage. There are a number of positive stories about where we have been able to do just that. It has never been better

or easier to move staff and give them opportunities within the organisation. We have a number of initiatives, one of which we call hot shoes, under which we give staff experience in other divisions. They get that experience and move on in their career path, which has not only a staff value but is important to us as a broadcaster.

I do not agree with the description of “Reporting Scotland”—I guess you would not expect me to. The audience research that we receive is extremely positive and the performance of the programme is positive. Every day and every week, we strive to deliver better journalism from the “Reporting Scotland” team. We also do that with the team that delivers “Good Morning Scotland” on BBC Radio Scotland who—obviously—take an international perspective of events. As we have noted, we also broadcast programmes such as “Eorpa” that take a European perspective. “Eorpa” is part of the BBC Alba service. We have a positive story to tell. We have a plan to move staff through the organisation and to develop their careers over the period of their life at the BBC.

**Mark Thompson:** Careers can move on in a number of different ways. For example, I have reported from the Horn of Africa with Colin Blane, whose career has taken him to every corner of the world but who has also done outstanding work reporting here in Scotland. If you look at our line-up of foreign correspondents at the moment, you will see a disproportion, so to speak, of Scottish talent. We have a lot of strong Scottish foreign correspondents at the moment.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** The point was raised whether we have an even distribution across Scotland of the stories that we cover. I accept that there are areas where we are stronger and areas where we are weaker. One thing that we had hoped to deliver through our investment in local TV was simply getting the resources on the ground to help to connect all of that. We will absolutely address the issue and monitor things on a regular basis to ensure that there is, if you like, parity of provision and an even field as far as reporting Scotland as a nation and a nation of regions is concerned.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I find it amusing when BBC news presenters talk of “the reporter in Newcastle”, “the reporter in Birmingham” and “the reporter in Scotland”, as if Scotland is a town. Scotland has always been presented in a certain way.

Will the controller of BBC Scotland be on the main BBC board?

**Mark Thompson:** The controller is now a director. As director of BBC Scotland, Kenny MacQuarrie is on the direction group of the whole BBC.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I am trying to talk in the third person—even though you are sitting across from me, Kenny. What is your role in the board?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** My role on the direction group is twofold. First, I inform every other BBC division of the key issues for Scotland, including the needs of our audience. That includes monitoring audience figures and delivery in terms of the successes and where we need to change and address issues. Secondly, I take a broad view of the whole of the BBC and contribute to overall BBC direction and strategy from the range of experience that we have in Scotland as a nation. Both roles are important.

Uniquely—or at least in parallel with the other nations—we cover every genre in Scotland and we broadcast on every platform, so what we deliver through Pacific Quay brings a wealth of experience and informed perspective to the whole BBC table.

10:30

**Kenneth Gibson:** Finally, what proportion of BBC network radio programmes is produced in Scotland? How will that be improved? By 2016, what proportion of BBC jobs will be in Scotland?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** In network radio, we are very strong in areas such as drama—we deliver 70 hours of network drama to BBC Radio 4. For example, the *Le Carré* canon that is being broadcast on Radio 4, where it is scoring fantastically well with audiences, was produced by Patrick Rayner from BBC Scotland. We are tremendously proud of that. We are also strong in features and we have a developing strength in science.

We do not have the level of spend that we would wish to have in Scotland in providing to the networks. When Mark Thompson spoke in Pacific Quay in 2007, he indicated that delivering to the networks was not simply about television but included new media and radio. Within BBC audio and music, two internal steering groups are looking at the independents’ supply to all BBC network radio services and the out-of-London strategy for all of radio. Those steering groups—I sit on both groups—will work through this year and will probably report towards the end of the year. We recognise that we have work to do in that area, but we will make a number of proposals towards the end of the year.

**Kenneth Gibson:** The other part of my question was about employment figures.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** On what our projected percentage of the BBC’s workforce will be, I would like to come back to the committee once I have looked at what our best predictions are for the

BBC's overall workforce, which will be a determining factor in working out that percentage. However, I can say that our current level of jobs in Scotland—not only in-house jobs but jobs that are generated as a result of independent production, given that 60 per cent of the delivery of the network strategy review will be via independent companies based across Scotland—will remain strong and grow over the period as we deliver the network strategy review.

The pressures on the organisation to deliver effectively and efficiently will not go away. However, within those constraints, we are confident of the strength both of our talent base and of the workforce in BBC Scotland. In delivering our efficiencies in BBC Scotland, the benefit of having Pacific Quay has enabled us to front-load what was in effect a five-year plan. We have gone through two years of that five-year plan in which we have phased our efficiencies towards years 1 and 2. However, the pressure to deliver ever more efficiencies will not go away.

On our percentage of the overall workforce, I would like to consult with colleagues in human resources before coming back with a detailed answer. Inevitably, because of the timescale that the committee has outlined, that percentage will be within a set of parameters.

**Donalda MacKinnon:** I agree with Ken MacQuarrie that we aspire to do much more in network radio. However, I add that, in addition to supplying to Radio 4, we also supply fairly regularly to Radio 1 and Radio 2. The BBC Scottish symphony orchestra significantly supplies to Radio 3. Of course, we also supply to the digital radio networks as well.

**Mark Thompson:** If I may just take a step back, let me say something about our broad target. Historically, something like three quarters of BBC employees were based in London and the south-east of England, with the remaining quarter being based throughout the whole of the rest of the UK. We are on target to have more than half of all public service employees based outside the south-east of England by 2016. Many of them will be in Scotland, but others will be spread across the rest of the United Kingdom. There is an enormous shift in the emphasis of investment in the BBC. The big headquarters that we are building in the Quays at Salford in Manchester is an example of that, as is the investment that we are making in Scotland. We are in the middle of a really historic shift, with the centre of gravity of the BBC moving out of London and the south-east of England and into the whole of the UK—not only into the non-metropolitan parts of England but also, critically, into the nations.

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** Many people were disappointed that production levels in

Scotland fell as low as 2.6 per cent in 2006. You have talked about the progress that you are making in that regard, however. Mr Thompson mentioned "A History of Scotland" as a good example of that.

A number of commissioning editors have been appointed. Can you point to any upcoming programmes in entertainment, drama, comedy or children's television? I am just trying to get an idea of how much progress is being made.

**Mark Thompson:** Donalda MacKinnon will give you some names, but the short answer is "all of the above". We have a lot of good material coming up across drama, specialist factual, entertainment and children's television.

**Donalda MacKinnon:** We are currently supplying programmes across all those genres, unlike any other production base outwith London.

In children's television, we have just finished production of a 52-part series called "Copcats" that involves families from across the UK. In specialist factual, we have made massive inroads in terms of history and, particularly, science, on BBC1, BBC2 and BBC4. Perhaps you managed to catch "10 Things You Need to Know About Sleep", which was the first of three programmes in that strand that we produced, each dealing with a different subject.

In drama, as you know, we executive produce "Waterloo Road", which has caused some controversy in the past. We have recently begun transmission of a new series called "Hope Springs", which goes out on Sunday nights. "Personal Affairs" is coming up on BBC3. We have also been involved in the production of "Wallander", a series that has won British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards.

In comedy, two series for BBC1 have just been recommissioned, and I am pleased to say that "Rab C Nesbitt" has been recommissioned from the Comedy Unit.

In entertainment, we have just finished the production of "A Question of Genius", which appeared on BBC daytime and was hosted by Kirsty Wark.

In news and current affairs, we contribute to "Panorama", and the investigations team in Scotland produced one of that programme's highest appreciated shows, which was the one on Britain's home care scandal.

It is hard to continue to reel off more and more examples, but there are many. We are currently building a reputation as a trusted supplier to the network across in-house production and the independent sector. We have done work on a number of projects that are not necessarily culturally representative. The big emphasis from

here on will be on ensuring that we get that proper representation—of which there are various definitions—and on encouraging better and stronger indigenous production in Scotland. That has to be our aim. We need to create sustainability on that level. The network supply review underpins that aim.

**Mark Thompson:** Two years ago, we decided that the right way of setting the target was to use not our historical definition of production in Scotland but Ofcom's, which is tougher. It has credibility across the sector, and using it will ensure that, in this situation, beauty—in terms of whether the target is met—is not in the eye of the BBC, as the beholder.

Although I would defend, for a variety of reasons, the ability of teams that are based in Scotland to work with programme makers elsewhere in the UK if it makes sense for them to do so, I also believe that it is important that we have a wholly credible definition of what Scottish network production consists of. We will be judged on our ability to hit the targets that are in line with Ofcom's definition, not the previous BBC definition.

**Ken Macintosh:** I am sure that my colleagues will be as reassured as I am to hear that. The Scottish Broadcasting Commission and this committee have welcomed your support and your commitment to expanding production.

There were about 100 job losses at the BBC last year and about 75 this year. It is difficult to reconcile those figures with the progress that you are talking about and the welcome list of programmes that are being made.

**Mark Thompson:** Over the past four years, across the BBC, we have lost between 7,000 and 8,000 posts. The BBC is contracting substantially in size. We are employing far fewer people than we used to, and are relying more on automation and digitisation. Where possible, we are doing such things as creating multimedia newsrooms, which means that rather than having a television newsroom, a radio newsroom and a web newsroom, we will have one newsroom with journalists who work across television, radio and the web. Such initiatives have a direct impact on employment but we think that, in the end, that is the right way forward—I know of very few major news organisations across the world that are not doing exactly the same thing.

The pattern of employment is changing radically. We are becoming a much smaller organisation in terms of both the number of people who we employ and our physical footprint. As you might know, we are going to sell television centre in west London. That is a direct corollary of the greater

investment in network production in Glasgow, Greater Manchester and elsewhere.

Those reductions in staff and footprint do not mean that we are any less committed to producing great content. By and large, all the measurements that we consider across not only BBC Scotland but the BBC as a whole suggest that public confidence in the quality of our content is not going down, despite the fact that we are losing many of our colleagues.

**Ken Macintosh:** You mentioned that the BBC trust has abandoned the plans for the £68 million investment in local TV. Will you use that money to boost access to local news? What are your plans, and how will they affect Scotland?

**Mark Thompson:** We are close to the finalisation of an alternative strategy. Obviously, the trust considered the issue of value for money, as it was concerned that there was something of a mismatch between the groups that most needed better local and regional services from the BBC and the availability of the new technologies. It was felt that, if we went ahead with those plans, we might not reach the right people. The trust was also heavily lobbied, and listened carefully to the arguments about adverse market impact. Other players in Scotland and the UK were worried that, if the BBC were to improve its services, that would foreclose markets to other media players. In formulating our plans, we must have cognisance of the commercial media landscape, which has become a much more difficult place since we made that decision.

Within those constraints, it is our ambition on the management side to deliver a significant increase in investment in the quality of the journalism and information that we can bring the public with regard to local and regional concerns, with a particular focus on the democratic process and democratic institutions.

**Ken Macintosh:** That is good to hear.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** In that context, I should say that the national trustee and the audience council are rigorous in holding the executive to account and in ensuring that we meet the audience's requirements by feeding into the BBC trust issues relating to audience need, based on information that is gathered from public meetings across Scotland. As Mark Thompson said, those plans are being fine tuned at the moment.

10:45

On the network, an important dimension for us in BBC Scotland is our production of output that does not and should not qualify as Scottish. We have crews and production teams working throughout the world and contributing to global markets. From

a Scottish perspective, it is important not only that we contribute to the UK market, but that we work with co-producers throughout the world to deliver, often in partnership with BBC Worldwide, a range of products. An interesting programme is being made with Mark Beaumont, with whom we previously made a programme called "The Man Who Cycled the World". He is currently cycling from Alaska to the southern tip of South America.

**Mark Thompson:** We heard this morning that he got to the summit of Mount McKinley, or Denali, as it is now called, yesterday afternoon. That is good news.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** He blogs and posts messages online. That sort of output, and that ambition to work as a global contributor, are core to BBC Scotland's work, as is the aim to deliver the targets that are in the network strategy review and are in line with the Ofcom definition.

**Ken Macintosh:** I am delighted to hear that, because, obviously, no one wants the quotas—perhaps that is the wrong word—to descend into tokenism.

I have a final question in this area. The Scottish Broadcasting Commission—the Blair Jenkins commission—heard quite a few concerns about Radio Scotland. Indeed, it recommended a review of Radio Scotland and a new strategy. Have you agreed to that? Have you set a date for it? Is it about to happen?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We constantly review Radio Scotland, but a major piece of research on it is also in train. A range of audience groups is being worked with and different groups of listeners are being talked to in order to establish audience need and the levels of approval and satisfaction with Radio Scotland. We are midway through that project.

**Ken Macintosh:** The project may or may not result in a strategic review.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I will not second-guess its results. They will be audience focused and based on what the audience tells us it wants from Radio Scotland. The work is complex, detailed and well resourced, and I am confident that it will result in a number of recommendations for us and point us in directions where we need to enhance parts of our output and do more of some things and less of others. We will have the conclusions of that interesting piece of work towards the end of the year.

**Donalda MacKinnon:** We constantly review all our services, but we are very proud of Radio Scotland. It is listened to by up to 1 million people a week throughout Scotland, which is almost 20 per cent of Scotland's population. Obviously, we must constantly assess how well our services are

doing, listen to our audiences and ensure that we are as relevant as we possibly can be.

There is ambition in the creation of the audio zones on the internet, which the head of radio for BBC Scotland, Jeff Zycinski, was quite prescient in setting up. There is a lot of really good work going on in Radio Scotland. We should not misunderstand that.

**Mark Thompson:** The audio zones are an imaginative and intelligent response to one of the challenges that Radio Scotland faces. Almost everyone I speak to is signed up to the idea that a national English language radio station for Scotland makes a lot of sense, but radio listeners have different expectations, of course. Some people would like the station to be like a Scottish Radio 4, only more so; other people have other specialist music and cultural activity needs. Therefore, whoever runs Radio Scotland has an interesting circle to square. Trying to tease out ways in which people with different needs from those covered by Radio Scotland can easily find things that suit and work for them is an interesting aspect of audio zones.

As Donalda MacKinnon said, running Radio Scotland is one of the toughest creative jobs in the entire BBC because the expectations of the audience are so complex and sometimes feel almost contradictory. Of course, we should go on looking and listening carefully. One of the great advantages of something such as the Blair Jenkins report is that it is incredibly valuable for us to hear probing questions. However, in many ways we have a lot to be proud of in the heritage and current state of Radio Scotland.

**Ken Macintosh:** I suggest that you are speaking to a number of people who listen to Radio Scotland regularly and have a vested interest in ensuring that it is of the highest quality.

**Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I would like to continue the line of questioning that Kenny started—not Ken Macintosh; the other one, Kenneth Gibson.

**Ken Macintosh:** There are too many Kennys.

**Aileen Campbell:** I agree that "A History of Scotland" was great. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

You have talked about the target of BBC Scotland producing 9 per cent of total network output by 2016. That was the BBC trust's target. However, I think that the Scottish Broadcasting Commission said that it had not heard a convincing explanation as to why it would take eight years to achieve the goal of 8.6 per cent of production being commissioned from Scotland. Indeed, it said that the length of wait between 2012 and 2016 could cost some £20 million a year. I do not know why the commission felt that it

had not heard a convincing explanation as to why it will take a wee bit longer to reach that target. Can you go into a bit more detail about why that target cannot be achieved sooner and what you feel about the loss in revenue because of the delay?

**Mark Thompson:** I repeat that not only do I hope that we will make quicker progress, but there is evidence that we are making quicker progress and that we could hit the 2012 target—the interim target—quite soon.

We are talking not simply about an industrial process, but about creativity, and it is quite hard to produce that to order. We spent 15 years or longer trying to develop successful network television drama in Wales. We had a hit programme called “The District Nurse”, starring Nerys Hughes, in about 1982—there are obviously people here who remember it well and with great affection. However, between “District Nurse” and “Doctor Who” we achieved nothing. That was not for want of trying; we had commissions and multiple heads of drama. We concentrated on the problem, but it took us more than 20 years not only to produce one hit, but to get a drama team producing hit after hit.

There was a kind of magic around two or three individuals. Russell T Davies, the writer, was key but there was also some absolutely critical commissioning and production talent. We now have a very exciting critical mass of drama talent there, which is delivering world-class drama, on which we can build. We will move “Casualty” to join the existing hit programmes and build a bigger base.

It is not possible to send a requisition form out to find a writer of absolute brilliance who is going to come up with a crossover early Saturday evening science fiction show that will be both a revival of an old BBC hit and something about relationships that feels very young and witty. We need to try to create the conditions in which great talent can spark and deliver something. We are passionately committed to doing exactly that in Scotland, across a much wider range of genres than in Wales, in Northern Ireland or anywhere else in the UK other than in London.

We think that we have been judicious in moving one or two programmes here and we have hired some strong local creative leaders and moved one or two creative leaders to Scotland. We have a lot of confidence that we will meet the target, but that needs to be driven by great programmes. I absolutely understand that we will be judged on our ability to meet the target—we will be judged on metrics that will be analysed by Ofcom and which will be open to scrutiny. However, we are involved in a creative endeavour that is about great talent. I do not believe that we can whistle up talent as if it

were some kind of industrial process—it is not an industry in that sense.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** The targets are rock solid and we will absolutely deliver against them. It was our intention to have that firm base against which we could plan our talent and output. On the question of sustainability, we must not get into a sine-curve cycle with the output. I believe that we have fantastic talent in Scotland. As Mark Thompson said, we have the benefit of working in children’s television, entertainment, comedy, drama, arts and specialist factual programmes—those are the genres in which we have excellence in delivering to the network. The planning cycles for drama are long. At present, we are looking at 2012 as far as drama is concerned but, with other genres, the planning cycles are much shorter.

To ensure that we have a sustainable base, we took the view that the targets are floors, not ceilings. I understand that, for some people, 2016 feels a long way away, but the commitment from the executive in Scotland is to deliver against the targets as fast as possible. As Mark Thompson said, the signs are that we are ahead of the planning curve at the moment, but we will not be complacent about that. Using the Ofcom definition, the goal is for 6 per cent of our total output to be produced in Scotland by 2012.

**Aileen Campbell:** I return to the issue of providing better cover for the regions in Scotland. One issue that comes through in the Broadcasting Commission’s report is that the London-centric nature of broadcasting production should not be replicated in anything that is done in Scotland. Will you say a bit more about the commitment that you have to the regions? As a member for the South of Scotland, I am conscious that areas such as Dumfries are not served by a Scottish broadcaster.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** In news provision, we have Willie Johnston and his team in Dumfries, so we have an excellent team there. We are aware that we need to strengthen our ability to gather news in the regions of Scotland. As Mark Thompson indicated, we are in the final throes of producing the plan that will succeed our plans for local TV that the BBC trust turned down. The final touches are being put on that. I do not want to prejudge what the various elements of the trust will think about that or to say too much more about it. We are conscious of the need to strengthen local provision in the regions of Scotland. We recognise that we do not have the equivalent of the local provision that exists in England.

**Aileen Campbell:** Does that mean more investment in Aberdeen or Edinburgh?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Jeff Zycinski, the head of Radio Scotland, is based in Inverness, so Radio

Scotland is run from there. We have a strong base in Aberdeen, from which we deliver programmes such as "Landward" and a range of programmes for Radio Scotland. Obviously, the bulk of the parliamentary coverage and radio features are based in Edinburgh.

**Mark Thompson:** The south-west is an issue, though.

**Aileen Campbell:** Yes, that area is a particular issue, because it is not always covered by a Scottish news team. Are you considering that issue at all?

11:00

**Ken MacQuarrie:** The south-west is certainly a key area for us and it is strongly represented on the audience council. How well we cover the south-west of Scotland is an issue for the audience council. We wish to invest more in the area, but we want to see how our new plans for local delivery go.

**Mark Thompson:** We can also consider whether there are ways in which we and Scottish Television can help each other to some extent, given our respective strengths in different parts of the country.

**Aileen Campbell:** You mentioned STV. Will you say a bit more about the memorandum of understanding?

**Mark Thompson:** We are at a fairly early stage in the partnership conversation with Rob Woodward and his team at Scottish Television. I will be meeting them this afternoon. The conversation covers whether there are ways of partnering that will support STV's ability to continue to provide news, but it also covers areas such as reasonable coverage, to ensure that we are each using our limited resources to best effect.

As Ken MacQuarrie said, a further area is training. Can we open up some of our training facilities and provide training opportunities not just for BBC Scotland but for journalists and others elsewhere in the Scottish industry? We are considering whether STV can join our plans to share the iPlayer. Could there be an STV section on the iPlayer so that STV has the benefit of the technology and the brand that we have built up? The iPlayer could then offer a simple, easy-to-use catch-up service on the web for STV's programming.

Also, can STV get involved in our project canvas, which is a project to deliver a simple standard for internet protocol television to set-top boxes? With that technology, a Freeview digital terrestrial television box can be plugged not only into an aerial but into a broadband connection, which means that people will be able to get

services such as iPlayer and YouTube on their main television set.

Those are all ways in which STV can get some of the benefits of the BBC's scale and scope and develop its business without needing its own research and development function. We have the scale and history, and also the scientists and technologists, to move broadcasting forward. We are saying to other broadcasters throughout the country, "We are happy to make this open source and share it with you so that you can make the same digital migration that we are making." We would very much like STV to be a part of that.

A final thing in the MOU is to consider our archive of, for example, great comedies that have been made by and for BBC Scotland over the years. Could some of them be made available for STV to show as part of its line-up?

The conversation is a broad one, but I have described the spirit of it. When we moved to Pacific Quay, we involved STV in the conversation early on. I remember going to see it at Cowcaddens when I was involved in the conversations nearly 10 years ago. PQ was conceived in consultation with STV, Channel 4, Scottish Screen and all the other stakeholders to try to ensure that the BBC did not just create a little ivory tower for itself but acted as an anchor tenant for what could be a cluster of creative industries.

We need to cover the regions really well with our news, but there is also a strong case for having one or two big critical masses of investment in the creative industries. We believe that Glasgow is an area where the BBC should do a lot to encourage a big cluster so that the city has the scale to produce world-class programmes and compete effectively with Manchester and London.

**Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Good morning. This time last year, the BBC trust commissioned an independent review and the executive of the BBC set up an action plan on how it would respond to devolution. Will you update us on how far that has gone?

**Mark Thompson:** We should be asking you how you think we are doing. Perhaps we will get your answer to that in a moment.

The Tony King report made quite uncomfortable reading for many people in the BBC, including me. The BBC had taken seriously the challenge of covering the new politics of the different parts of the United Kingdom and the new, devolved institutions. Broadly, I feel that there is a positive story to tell about how the BBC wrestles with those issues in its political programmes and coverage. However, Tony King showed that the differences between the jurisdictions were not reflected as precisely as they should be in our news

programmes. More than that, he showed that we were missing opportunities to deepen people's understanding and to pique their interest in the news. In particular, there is a lot of interesting work to be done in comparing and contrasting different perspectives on home affairs issues in different parts of the UK. There are a number of areas—banning smoking in public places is an obvious example—in which Scotland has taken the lead on an issue and other parts of the UK have followed in Scotland's wake. It is useful for the UK news to emphasise and explore such experiments and initiatives as a way into debate on public policy in all parts of the UK.

The King report did not make comfortable reading for those of us who are involved in BBC journalism and, since its publication, we have tried hard to improve the accuracy, precision and relevance of what we do. I have recently listened to and watched closely our coverage of the swine flu pandemic. That is an example of a news story that has impacted differentially throughout the UK. There is also currently a lively debate about future levels of public spending, which has a lot of texture and finesse, and we have had interesting and important developments such as the Calman commission. I watch and listen to our UK news, and I believe that we have made significant strides since the King report came out last summer, although I would not claim that we are there just yet.

**Elizabeth Smith:** One of the report's recommendations was that a devolution tsar—or whatever they would be called—should be established. Has that appointment ever been made? If not, should it be made?

**Mark Thompson:** I am not so sure about tsars. If you look closely at that story, you will see that it does not end happily.

**Elizabeth Smith:** That is why I asked the question.

**Mark Thompson:** We have set up a UK forum that I chair, which is a gathering of all the key figures who are involved in UK journalism and in issues such as network supply, to ensure that the changes that we make to the BBC—in how it thinks about journalism across the UK and how it thinks about its investment in network programmes across the UK—are not left to chance but are actively managed through. A topic to which that forum will return regularly is progress on the recommendations of the King report and that agenda. Separately, the trust will update itself and will, I am sure, commission fresh work to satisfy itself that enough progress has been made. I believe that we have made progress.

Much depends on good working relations and regular contact between our journalistic teams in

the nations—in particular, in Scotland—and in London. Ken McQuarrie may want to talk about the progress that we have made.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Yes. The relationships between the journalists on the ground in Scotland and in London have never been better. An example of that is the fact that the senior news editors from across the UK regularly spend time—perhaps a week—in Scotland learning what the issues are and seeing what is working here from a Scottish perspective. Only yesterday, the BBC News channel controller was here, in Scotland—

**Donalda MacKinnon:** He is here for the week.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Sorry. He is here for the week, taking views on how well we are contributing to the channel.

On a daily basis, our news teams throughout the UK join up to consider the agenda, so that the whole UK agenda is fully informed. I sit on the journalism board, which takes a regular report on our progress on the issues that were raised by Tony King. Neither the audience council nor the trust will relax in its attempt to hold us to account on the issue. There will be a regular survey of the audience and interrogation of the issues.

Kenneth Gibson talked about comparisons being made between Scotland and towns and regions in England. On the rare occasions that such comparisons slip through now, they stand out. They are unacceptable and we want to eradicate them completely. When they do slip through, we hold ourselves—because we are part of that—and colleagues to account. If we are not getting it right, we are open to dialogue with bodies such as this committee. If there are things that we should be doing, we are open to hearing about that, and to improving what we do. There is a spirit of co-operation and commitment to getting things right among all of my colleagues in the network.

It cuts both ways, though. We were talking about the mobility of our staff. It is important for us in our newsroom to ensure through our training that, when our journalists are reporting the UK, they understand not only the various devolved structures throughout the UK but the issues in the regions of England. It is not a one-way street, in which the London journalists have to understand us but the converse is not true.

**Elizabeth Smith:** In his report, Sir Kenneth Calman was fairly general about broadcasting, and said that he needed more time to consider some of the implications. Do you agree with that assessment?

**Mark Thompson:** It is not for me to comment, to be honest. It is not clear to me that I have a locus to comment on the current or future remit of Kenneth Calman's work.

**Elizabeth Smith:** I think that you have a remit to comment on whether you foresee different powers and different relationships within the BBC, post-devolution.

**Mark Thompson:** The only point that I read in the Calman report that is directly relevant to the BBC is on the appointment of the Scottish trustee. That is a matter for dialogue between the various political authorities and the BBC trust—it is not for me to comment. The poachers do not get to comment on the appointment of the ghillies. I have no locus in the appointment of any trustee. The trust is a sovereign body set up to hold me and the rest of the BBC to account.

More broadly, I cannot tell you whether and to what extent Calman will feel that he needs to do further work and what further questions he wants to ask about broadcasting. We saw that with the Blair Jenkins commission on broadcasting. There is a great deal of interest in a variety of topics to do with broadcasting, including how broadcasting plays out in the debate about reserved and devolved powers. We feel happiest when we are covering that journalistically on the airwaves.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Mark Thompson and I met Kenneth Calman, and we gave written evidence. The national trustee, Jeremy Peat, and I gave evidence to Sir Kenneth's commission.

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** Mr MacQuarrie, you touched on the fact that you have a particular role with regard to the skill set. The field of creative industries, which is what we tend to refer to, is a very broad one, and it is one in which the BBC has quite an important role to play. What is your impression of the state of your relationship with the different skills and tertiary education bodies? As a partner, what is the BBC doing to bring forward new talent in Scotland in what is a period of some flux as far as creative Scotland is concerned?

11:15

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We consult the tertiary education bodies regularly. I will give an example. Through "River City" and Glasgow Caledonian University, we have embarked on supporting a full-time television writing course. The ambition was that Scotland would be as important to television writing as Cardiff is to journalism and that Glasgow would develop expertise in bringing writers through. That links with the point about ambition and sustainability. We want to ensure that we have young writers who have access to teaching and to the practical experience of meeting and working with writers.

In addition, we provide a number of work placements for students at the University of the West of Scotland. One of our drives is that we are

open to students who are interested in getting experience of what it is like to work in a broadcasting organisation. Our staff regularly give tutorials and provide tuition in a range of institutions throughout Scotland.

In another sphere, we work with disadvantaged communities. Some 2,500 people have come to Pacific Quay to make and produce a short film and to work with us on media literacy skills, which has enhanced their competence and their confidence. I am proud, too, that Pacific Quay hosts a scheme with Jobcentre Plus, whereby people who are unemployed boost the whole range of their competences and skills, but principally their self-confidence, through media skills work. That course has been tremendously successful in getting the people on it back into the job market—not the media job market but the job market as a whole.

We have strong partnerships with the various elements of creative Scotland, and we envisage that being a tremendously fruitful area for us. As far as the creative sector as a whole is concerned, the work that we have done with the National Theatre of Scotland has been hugely important.

We run a number of writing for radio courses, which focus principally on radio drama. I think that you will find that a number of the leading writers would attest that they simply would not be where they are today without such initiatives. The position is never static. There are always opportunities for us to do more, but we are certainly open to approaches. Donalda might want to say a bit more about what we are doing with the National Theatre.

**Donalda MacKinnon:** We are in constant touch with the National Theatre. Anne Mensah, our head of drama, and Vicky Featherstone meet regularly. At the moment, we are discussing how we might collaborate on two fairly major productions that the National Theatre is involved in in the coming year. We have not established exactly how we will do that, but the dialogue is continuing.

I would like to add to Kenny MacQuarrie's list of training initiatives. At the end of this month, at the Edinburgh international film festival, we will launch—in conjunction with BBC writersroom—a year-long initiative called Scotland writes. It is a particularly interesting initiative in that it will last for a year and will involve regular workshops and talent training sessions and will, we hope, dovetail with the writers course at Glasgow Caledonian University, in which we are involved.

Storytelling is what we are about and we have a strong desire to encourage good writing from Scotland. It already exists; we have established talent in the field. We want to continue that and to be instrumental in ensuring that it continues. We are involved in a number of partnerships, and

Radio Scotland is involved in a number of theatre initiatives.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Our orchestra is also involved in the Sistema project in the Raploch, in which it works with young children to develop their skills in classical music. The orchestra undertakes a considerable amount of outreach activity. We want to build on that. We are delighted not only to have secured Donald Runnicles as the new conductor but to hold Ilan Volkov, our current conductor, as the principal guest conductor. We have built up our orchestra in Scotland by adding a second desk of strings. We have an orchestra that is at the peak of its form, with a world-class leadership.

**The Convener:** The committee will visit the Sistema project in the Raploch in August when it has its away day, so we will be able to see first hand some of the work that you are doing.

**Margaret Smith:** That is an impressive list, even though there are many other things that the witnesses cannot tell us. Bearing in mind what they said about contraction in staff numbers and about new technology, can they assure us that there will be no contraction in the BBC's efforts to develop new talent?

**Mark Thompson:** I think that it is the opposite. We will put more effort into outreach and into opening up training opportunities to new groups, not only to established professionals. The BBC will do more on that than it has done in the past, not less.

**Margaret Smith:** I will ask the tabloid question, if I can put it in that way. In the past year or so, quite a lot of controversy has surrounded the BBC. You touched in passing on the quantity of work that other, independent providers are commissioning. Are you now confident that, having weathered the storm on Jonathan Ross and the various competition and other controversies, the editorial controls in the BBC are not only adequate but of the highest possible standard? You are in a highly competitive business, but it is fair to say that the audience—the public—expects higher standards and a greater level of quality from the BBC than it does from any other broadcaster. How do you square that?

**Mark Thompson:** You are absolutely right. When we ask the public, they typically say that the BBC is better than other broadcasters at ensuring quality, standards and compliance but so it jolly well should be. They have much higher expectations.

The tension is not so much a matter of competition for audiences versus standards. That is not what we wrestle with. We wrestle with how to create an environment in which there is genuine scope for creative risk taking: an environment in

which people can try things out, deal with controversial topics in investigative journalism or edgy comedy and push the boat out quite far—because that is what the public say they want—without crossing fundamental boundaries. The BBC produces tens of thousands of hours of output a year, quite a lot of which is live and the overwhelming majority of which is broadcast not only without controversy but to enormous public satisfaction.

In a way, the question is how we ensure that our journalistic and other editorial compliance processes work 99.999 per cent of the time. It turns out that 99 per cent of the time is just not good enough; the BBC is so big that that would mean a problem every day, not every week. The challenge is how we do that without creating a culture of fear and a culture in which people think that they cannot do anything original because they might get into trouble.

I think that we are trying to be sensible and keep a sense of proportion. When we make a serious mistake—as we have done and as I am sure that we will do at some point in the future, no matter what we do—the right thing to do is to recognise the fact, apologise to the public early and try to put in place procedures to ensure that we do not do it again. If your question is whether I hope that we will make fewer mistakes over the next three or four years than we have over the previous three or four years, the answer is yes. Are we trying very hard not only to put in place procedures but to ensure that the right creative leaders and the people who think about these things are taking the key decisions? Again, the answer is yes.

However, I do not want to preside over a BBC in which no one takes any risks. Indeed, that is not what the public want. A BBC in which everything every day was guaranteed because it had been pre-recorded and looked over by the lawyers 15 times would be a pretty dull place. We have to use our common sense, strike a balance and keep our nerve.

**Kenneth Gibson:** You talked about keeping a sense of proportion. Earlier on, Ken Macintosh mentioned 175 job losses; you yourself have referred to 7,000 or 8,000 job losses over four years. Is it not somewhat obscene that, at a time when corporation jobs are being lost, Jonathan Ross, for example, is getting paid £6 million of what is in effect taxpayers' money? I do not think that his talent is so unique as to justify that money and surely in these very straitened times that point should be reflected on.

**Mark Thompson:** As we have said publicly, the phase that the media market beyond the BBC is going through is very different from the one that existed a few years ago. The impact of the advertising recession on some of those who

compete with us for key talent is going to reduce their ability to pay top talent. If we can strike harder bargains and get key talent for less, we will do so—indeed, we are already finding that we can get such talent at lower prices than we could have done a year or two ago. As you will see, and as we will try to demonstrate to the public, the amount that we pay for top talent will come down over the next few years.

However, at the same time, what the public want and have always wanted from the BBC is the best talent. When, in the 1970s, the BBC persuaded Morecambe and Wise to come across from the ITV, it paid the going rate. In fact, I think that Morecambe and Wise got more than they were getting at ITV to come to the BBC; the BBC certainly paid more than I think we would pay today. However, the move produced wonderful television and everyone now considers it to be the right decision.

Similarly, we pay a great deal of money to secure sports rights for the British public instead of spending it on, say, a great new production from wherever in the UK. However, we know that the public want the right portfolio of great sport from the BBC. Overall, we probably spend less on entertainment now than we have at any point in our history. There is more news, more specialist factual programming, more original drama and almost no acquired programmes. The old BBC had “Starsky and Hutch”, “Dallas”, “Dynasty” and so on—indeed, there was a big American programme on almost every night. We make our own programmes now; we do not give our money to Hollywood studios to fill prime time, although we acquire a few programmes from elsewhere. As a result, we spend much less on acquired programmes and much, much less on feature films.

As I say, we spend less on entertainment overall. We should always do our best to come up with great new talent and hope that, certainly in the early years, we can pay a reasonable price for it. However, if we want one or two of the country’s very best entertainers, which is what I think the public want from the BBC, we might be able to persuade them to come to the BBC for a bit less than the going rate, but not much less.

I appreciate your comments, Mr Gibson, but I cannot quite work out whether you are offering to do Jonathan Ross’s job for less money.

**Kenneth Gibson:** All I am saying is that he is a talk show host—

**Mark Thompson:** I can see it now: “Friday Night with Kenny Gibson”.

11:30

**Kenneth Gibson:** I would certainly do it for £6 million.

My other question is about schedules. Despite the consultation with ITV that you mentioned, comedies and political programmes seem to be on at the same time on all channels. For example, on Thursday nights, BBC puts “Question Time” against “Newsnight”. I do not know why you cannot put “Question Time” on at 9 o’clock, although I appreciate that people have to get to the venue and all the rest of it. What is so special about Thursday night with regard to politics?

Surely with this consultation with the commercial companies there should be more balance in scheduling to ensure that people can watch a variety of programmes and do not have to choose between the four comedy programmes, the three sporting items, the three dramas or the three nature programmes that are all on at the same time. That really gets to viewers. People have been complaining about this for 20, 30 or 40 years now, but I have not noticed any real change in the approach of television companies. They still seem to be saying, “They’re putting on a drama, so we’ll put on the same kind of drama,” or, “They’re putting on a history programme, so we’ll do the same.”

**Mark Thompson:** Your point that consultation and having a closer relationship with commercial operators could lead to more complementary scheduling is a good one. However, for reasons that you will understand, it is harder to achieve that in reality. That said, we try to ensure that we do not run costume dramas against each other and we, ITV and Channel 4 try very hard to find placements for new comedies, in particular, to ensure that we do not set like against like.

Of course, we have introduced the iPlayer, which gives people another chance to watch programmes. Sometimes we use BBC3 and BBC4 for what we call narrative repeats, which means that people who do not manage to see a programme on Friday can see it again on Sunday. There is no question, though, that we can still irritate the public with clashes.

That said, the clash between “Question Time” and “Newsnight”, which is more than a decade old, seems to work surprisingly well for the audience. Interestingly, the audience for “Question Time” is much younger than that for “Newsnight”. I have to say, though, that “Question Time” has worked well at 9 o’clock. A few weeks ago, during the Westminster MP expenses scandal, it did very well when it went out at that time. In fact, that programme and the previous week’s programme, which went out at 10.30 pm, had two of the

biggest audiences that "Question Time" has had since the debate on the Iraq war.

I agree that it seems slightly surprising that we would schedule a political discussion programme and a politically dominated news and current affairs programme against each other, but, as I say, the approach seems to work well for the audience. However, I will take away your broad point, because it is fair to say that all broadcasters—not just the BBC—can irritate the public with our scheduling.

**Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):**

First, I have a wee bit of anecdotal evidence on Margaret Smith's point about skills. A friend of mine, who came forward as a young writer, is having his episode of "River City" screened in the next week or so. Obviously, we are all delighted about that.

Returning to the Scottish Broadcasting Commission's report, I note that the "Digital Britain" white paper, which was published yesterday, failed to take account of its recommendation about a Scottish digital TV network. What do you feel about that? Indeed, how will the other recommendations in "Digital Britain" impact on Scotland?

**Mark Thompson:** Like you, I could not see any reference to a Scottish digital TV network in "Digital Britain". Our starting point at the BBC is that the more public service, the better. We are not shy of competition, and if it were possible to introduce another public service anywhere else in the UK, we would welcome the extra choice for the public. Clearly, a number of quite interesting questions would need to be worked through if one started on that basis. First, how would such a service be paid for? Secondly, what would its impact be on existing players?

On how it would be paid for—I will not bore people with this for too long—our clear view is that one reason why we have a strong BBC across the UK and a strong BBC Scotland is the simplicity and clarity of our funding. The public here and across the UK know exactly what their licence fee pays for. You break that at your peril. Breaking that would give a lot of power to future Governments to squeeze the funding of the BBC—and of any other body that received money from the licence fee—and it would break the simple accountability that exists between the licence payer and the public service. We believe that that would be true if the licence fee were used to support other national and regional news; we believed that it would be true if, as was proposed previously, the licence fee were used to support Channel 4; and we believe that that would be true if it were proposed to use the licence fee to launch a Scottish digital channel. The licence fee would not be a good source of funding for such things.

Obviously, if some other form of public funding were found, it would be quite a different matter.

The other issue is that, to say the least, a tough environment confronts both the main commercial broadcaster in Scotland, which is STV, and Scottish commercial radio. We need to think through what impact a completely new entrant with some level of public subsidy—up to 100 per cent—would have on the other media players in Scotland. We believe that there would not be an impact on our services in Scotland. Although there would be competition for audiences, we are used to that, so it would not be a problem. We do not argue that such a channel should not go ahead because of its impact on the BBC; we simply say that it seems prudent to consider its impact on other players.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I welcomed the principle of a Scottish digital network when the Scottish Broadcasting Commission launched its report. As far as we are concerned, the greater the plurality of public service provision in Scotland, the better. However, we would not wish to weaken our funding base in creating that provision, so the question arises as to how the new channel would be funded. In principle, the provision of such a network would allow us to support a larger critical mass of talent than we otherwise would individually. The same goes for commercial television and commercial broadcasting in Scotland: the stronger the commercial base, the greater the mass of talent that Scotland can provide. Similarly, the more that the load to support that talent is distributed, the better. Essentially, that remains our position, although Carter took the view that the proposal should be omitted from his report. We are absolutely resolute in arguing that the funding of BBC Scotland, and of the BBC as a whole, should not suffer as a consequence of such provision.

**Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Good morning. One problem, it seems to me, is that the BBC has become a kind of broadcasting leviathan. Its annual income from the licence fee is something like £3.5 billion, which is more than the income of all its commercial rivals put together. The BBC has the most generous funding of any broadcasting organisation in the world. Clearly, although I have listened to what Ken MacQuarrie and others have said about competition, no one else in public service broadcasting can compete with the BBC on anything like that level. Therein lie great dangers. Yesterday's proposals on top-slicing the licence fee by 3 per cent at least suggests one way in which ITV could be funded to provide the PSB competition that the BBC requires.

I am interested specifically in the STV situation, because it seems to me that the BBC is never

better than when it is faced with strenuous competition. If, in opposing top-slicing, the BBC is saying that it will not give up any part of the licence fee and will defend it to the death, how might such competition be funded in future?

**Mark Thompson:** Do you mean in the context of STV in Scotland?

**Ted Brocklebank:** Yes, in the context of STV in Scotland, but perhaps throughout the rest of the UK as well.

**Mark Thompson:** How the market is defined is interesting. You left out of your sum the broadcaster BSkyB, the income of which is greatly in excess of that generated from the licence fee. It could be argued that ITV has been replaced as the dominant commercial force in broadcasting over the past couple of decades by a broadcaster that is bigger than ITV ever was in its revenues and bigger than the BBC. In absolute terms, the BBC is getting much smaller than it used to be and its proportion of revenue from broadcasting is going down—it is smaller than it has ever been. Currently, less than a quarter of all broadcasting revenue goes to the BBC, but it used to be well over half.

How we view the situation depends, of course, on the type of lens that we look through. For example, the BBC can look bigger than it was, even though it is smaller, because so many other players are in difficulties. People ask why the BBC should still be strong when they are weak, but that seems a dangerous argument to me. If we are not careful, that will become an argument for weakening the only bit of the system that still works well. To go back to the early part of the discussion, if the BBC were weakened, our ability to invest in Scotland, ramp up network production and share our training and technology with other players would be weakened, too. I recognise that the BBC has a responsibility to do what it can to help sustain and strengthen the rest of the sector, but I am not convinced that top-slicing would improve matters. The danger is that that would weaken the one bit that still feels pretty strong.

We believe that there are a number of potential sources of revenue for channel 3 news, which provides national news on STV, UTV and ITV in Wales and regional news in England. As recently as last December, Ofcom valued the residual regulatory assets of ITV plc at £45 million a year. The value of advertising is also a factor. In some parts of the UK, including Scotland, the advertising that goes with the news is worth serious money, though not in all English regions. We believe that our package of proposals for partnering, with independent finance, news consortia across the UK could be worth as much as £20 million a year.

It seems perfectly possible to imagine a scenario in which those three sources of value—regulatory assets, commercial impacts and BBC partnership—are remixed to ensure that, given the different needs in different parts of the UK, it is possible to give support. If STV's particular circumstances mean that it needs more support, whether in cash or in kind, that could be achieved in a broader settlement that would not require the further injection of straightforward public funding. Part of our case is that we should be careful that, in negotiations with any of the channel 3 franchise holders—ITV plc, UTV and STV—we do not throw away public value through underestimating the residual benefits and privileges that they enjoy from what is a precious piece of broadcasting space.

**Ted Brocklebank:** I accept much of what you have said, but the argument remains—Ofcom has accepted it—that perhaps by as early as next year, given the current burden of PSB responsibility that it must carry, STV could be among the first companies to go bust. It could physically go out of business. You talked about the partnership and other aspects, but I do not see that producing anything like the £7 million a year that STV claims it spends simply on news. You referred to archives, helping with skills and training, and so on, but STV requires a much more serious sum than that suggests.

**Mark Thompson:** I agree with you, but Rob Woodward's management team at STV is in many ways rather imaginative and I would have a lot of confidence in it. I would caution anyone against talking down STV—I am not sure that it will help anyone to predict its imminent doom. Its management team has interesting and exciting ideas about how to develop the business in this country.

Although our MOU is of real value to STV, it does not directly read across to the £7 million. Again, whether the sum is arrived at at the beginning or the end of negotiations is yet to be discussed. Obviously, we have no access to ITV's regulatory assets or to detailed modelling of the advertising revenue that is potentially ascribable to the relevant news slots. However, I have yet to see any evidence that the possibilities have been considered and found wanting.

11:45

**Ted Brocklebank:** Stephen Carter clearly found them wanting or he would not have recommended what he recommended.

**Mark Thompson:** If you look at "Digital Britain" you will not find any detail or data on any of this for evidence-based policy making. The estimates that Ofcom published in its public sector broadcasting

report suggest that ITV plc will have regulatory assets of £45 million a year. That figure is for 2012, after switchover. Where will it use that £45 million residual?

I appreciate that ITV has other PSB commitments, for example national news. That said, in its report from last November/December, Ofcom said that national news was marginally profitable across the ITV network. It said that news was not a burden; it was making money. However, I heard Stewart Purvis, one of the Ofcom people, claim on a BBC programme last week that the entire cost of national news is a burden on the ITV network, as if no advertising revenue was ascribed to news. That is a massive shift from what Ofcom said at the end of last year.

My view is that the principal public service obligation on ITV and STV going forward should be the provision of regional or, in the context of Scotland, national news. Let us debate how much the cost will be. I believe that the resources are available to solve the problem without the use of the licence fee.

**The Convener:** Ken Macintosh has one final question.

**Ken Macintosh:** It has been a long session. I appreciate the contribution that all our witnesses have made. The launch of BBC Alba is widely regarded as very successful. You are surrounded by Gaels, Mr Thompson. Notwithstanding that, will you say what your commitment to BBC Alba is, particularly in the light of the forthcoming review? The future of BBC Alba depends on putting it on Freeview. Are you committed to doing that, assuming that the review is successful? When will the review take place?

**Mark Thompson:** I will answer in English, if I may. I am told that when I speak Gaelic I speak with a Mull accent, because of the hours of framing that Kenny MacQuarrie has to give me before I sally forth.

We are very pleased with the launch phase of BBC Alba and the partnership, which we think is going very well. We are committed to the service in the future. I am not sure that I accept the elision that says, "And that future depends on a slot on Freeview." I am sure that we should continue to examine exactly how the service should be distributed. We are very pleased with the initial reach and audience figures and we remain fully committed to the service. Perhaps Kenny MacQuarrie wants to say something on Freeview and distribution.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Obviously, BBC iPlayer is now on cable. The specific permission for BBC Alba to be on iPlayer allows a large tranche of programmes to be made available through that mechanism.

We are delighted with the success of the channel. It is important not only for the Gaelic audience, but for Scotland. The good range of innovative programming on the channel is demonstrated by audience response. We have surveyed our audience on a monthly basis since the inception of the channel.

The review process is going live at the moment. Margaret Mary Murray participated in that—I think yesterday—with the trust unit. Both the BBC executive board and the trust are involved in the review, with the trust having ownership. It brought forward the review to determine distribution options for the channel.

I cannot let this session go by without noting the success of the channel. I pay particular tribute to Donald Campbell and his MG Alba team who are our partners in delivering the BBC Alba service.

**The Convener:** That concludes the committee's questions. On a number of occasions, you touched on the investment that the BBC has made in Pacific Quay. Perhaps the committee could visit Pacific Quay to see at first hand the level of investment that you are making and some of the things that you are doing.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I would be absolutely delighted to facilitate that.

**The Convener:** Perhaps we can arrange that at a later date. Thank you for your attendance at committee and for answering our questions.

11:51

*Meeting suspended.*

11:56

*On resuming—*

## Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) Bill

**The Convener:** The second item on the agenda is consideration of a legislative consent memorandum on the UK Government's Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) Bill. I am pleased to welcome Mike Russell, the Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution. This is the minister's first visit to the committee. I am sure that it will be the first of many, especially as the creative Scotland bill is to return to the committee. Mr Russell is joined by David Seers, the team leader within the Scottish Government's cultural excellence branch. I understand that Mr Russell wishes to make an opening statement.

**The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell):** I do, convener. Thank you for the invitation to speak to the committee today. I take your statement about my many visits to be an invitation rather than a threat, and I look forward to them.

I am here to talk about the Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) Bill. I hope that in this session we can agree not just on the objective of the bill, but on how we should get there. The Scottish interest in the bill is its purpose to enable the trustees of the National Museums of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and the National Galleries of Scotland to return to their rightful owners or their heirs cultural objects that were stolen or looted during the Nazi era. Currently, those institutions are prevented from doing that by their general statutory duties to preserve collections. Those duties are contained in the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985, the National Galleries of Scotland Act 1906 and the National Library of Scotland Act 1925.

Scottish Government colleagues worked closely with UK Government colleagues to draft amendments to the bill, which were considered and agreed by the House of Commons at committee stage on 10 June, with the agreement of the Scottish Government in principle. The bill has been accelerated, which is why we are talking about it today. It is going through the process faster than we expected. The amendments brought the Scottish institutions into the scope of the bill. That was essential to allow the Scottish institutions to return objects following the findings of the spoliation advisory panel, which was established by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

The panel looks into claims that are made for items and decides whether they could be considered spoliated in the Nazi era. Following

acceptance of the panel's findings by the secretary of state, objects may be returned. The spoliation advisory panel, which was formed in 2000, is chaired by Sir David Hirst QC, a member of the Privy Council and a Lord Justice of Appeal from 1992 to 1999. Members will be pleased to hear that, in this instance, I believe that the existence of a single UK body is not harmful to Scottish interests, as very few cases have been brought in Scotland—indeed, there has been only one case, and it was not within the ambit of the bill.

The amendments to the bill were agreed at Westminster on 10 June, but they require the secretary of state to gain the agreement of the Scottish ministers to approve decisions regarding the spoliation advisory panel's recommendations in relation to the Scottish institutions. That is entirely satisfactory, as far as I am concerned.

There will be limited financial implications. The national institutions have already undertaken work to establish the provenance of their collections. During that exercise, the full history of only a small number of items could not be established, and not establishing a history is not the same as suspecting that an object may have a history of spoliation. Under the existing statutes, the institutions are open to claims for ex gratia payments for cultural objects that have been spoliated but not for the return of the objects themselves.

We want to ensure that full justice is done in these circumstances. The proposals are modest and it is efficient to ensure that the matter is dealt with in a single bill—I would not necessarily say that in different circumstances. I therefore commend the legislative consent motion, which will be moved in the First Minister's name, and I hope that members will find it possible to support it. I am happy to answer questions.

12:00

**The Convener:** I thank the minister for that brief but thorough explanation of the legislative consent memorandum. Members can now ask questions.

**Ken Macintosh:** I, too, welcome the minister's remarks and the support for and endorsement of the legislative consent memorandum. It sounds as if museums have very few items for which the provenance is not known. Is the minister aware of any outstanding claims that might be pursued under the bill?

**Michael Russell:** No, not in Scotland. The situation in the UK as a whole is that there have been eight cases to date—six claims have been upheld and two have been rejected. Next Wednesday, 24 June, there will be a ninth report from the panel, which concerns eight drawings in the collection of the Courtauld Institute of Art in

London. In Scotland there has been only a single instance, which related to a single painting in the Burrell collection.

It is fair to say that there is an issue outwith the national institutions, but the Burrell collection would not be touched on by the bill, because it is a collection outwith the national institutions with which the bill deals. Specific legislation would be required to deal with bequests. The difficulty was that the Burrell bequest prevented any part of the collection from being taken from the collection. That is a big issue, and it would require a great deal of consideration, because a wide variety of issues in law would have to be addressed. As there has been only a single case in Scotland, I am not that concerned, but if there were other cases, I would welcome a discussion with the committee about how we should legislate. No claims are pending in the area that the bill addresses, but the legislation will tidy things up and ensure that there is an ability to deal with cases should they arise. It is inevitable that, as the years pass, there will be fewer issues, but we should be prepared to act when we can act, and the bill allows us to do so.

**The Convener:** The committee has no further questions. I am sure that the minister will not get off so lightly when he returns in future. There is a fair degree of political consensus on the issue and willingness to ensure that progress is made as quickly as possible.

**Michael Russell:** Can I address that specific point in conclusion, convener? Because of the Scottish Parliament's recess dates and Westminster's recess dates, the timescale is very tight. The committee's clerk will undoubtedly keep you right on the matter, but I hope that you can make progress within the required timescale to progress the issue for the desired effect.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to give evidence—I will not be lulled into a false sense of security by the single question from Mr Macintosh.

**The Convener:** I am glad that you will not be lulled into a false sense of security, because that would be an unfair picture. Thank you for your attendance at committee.

I suspend the meeting to allow the minister and his official to leave.

12:03

*Meeting suspended.*

12:03

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** Item 3 is continued consideration of the legislative consent memorandum on which we have just taken evidence. The committee is required to report to the Parliament on the LCM. Such reports usually include comments on the merits of the policy, justification for the use of the LCM mechanism, any comments on the draft motion and a clear recommendation to the Parliament on whether to give consent. However, the committee need not make such a recommendation. I ask members to mention any points that they wish to make in the committee's report to Parliament.

**Ken Macintosh:** I make the point simply that the committee supports the LCM and that we agree that it should progress through Parliament as quickly as possible.

**The Convener:** There is strong consensus, and we are keen to support the motion and bring the matter to a conclusion. That will be recorded in our report, which will go before the Parliament.

That brings the public part of our meeting to a close. The committee's next meeting will be on Tuesday 23 June at 10 am. The change of day is due to the Parliament sitting in plenary session all day on Wednesday 24 June.

12:04

*Meeting continued in private until 12:10.*



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