

CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

7th Meeting, 2023, Session 6

2 March 2023

BBC: Impact of the Digital-first Agenda

1. The Committee agreed at its meeting on 26 January to take evidence on Radio Scotland's recently proposed schedule changes in relation to classical, jazz, and traditional music programmes, in the context of the wider question of the impact of the BBC's [digital-first agenda](#) on broadcasting output in Scotland. A briefing from SPICe is available [online](#).
2. Last week the Committee [heard](#) from representatives of some of those genres affected by the proposed changes.
3. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from—
 - Steve Carson, Director, BBC Scotland
 - Louise Thornton, Head of Multiplatform Commissioning, BBC Scotland.
4. Written updates from BBC Scotland to the Committee are attached at **Annexe A**.

CEEAC Committee Clerks
February 2023

Update from BBC Scotland – 16 January 2023

Thank you for getting in touch to ask for more information about the proposed schedule changes on BBC Radio Scotland. I hope the following information provides a helpful summary of the current challenges, strategy and proposals.

- The financial backdrop is a challenging one. Between 2010-2020 the BBC's income in real terms declined by 30% prior to the 2022 Licence Fee freeze. In addition, the two year freeze in the Licence Fee and current inflationary impacts mean we have approximately a £400m additional annual budget challenge for the BBC by 27/28. The Director General of the BBC has said efficiencies alone cannot make these savings.
- These financial challenges are themselves set against the demands of a changing media landscape with audiences consuming content, both audio and video, in new ways. Traditional linear services remain very important but the exponential growth lies in the area of on-demand, digital listening and digital viewing offerings.
- The BBC's Digital First and Value for All strategy aims to meet these challenges through savings and by changing content and services to be able to provide content to audiences where they want it; the BBC needs to be where its audience is and where it is going.
- Focusing on audio, across the whole audio market, while linear listening remains strong, the growth area is via a range of on-demand and digital formats, for example, on-demand listening to music has tripled in the last five years while live radio listening, across the board, has decreased over the same time period (2017-2022, Rajar). More and more people are listening to on-demand radio and the podcast market is seeing significant growth. In 2022 to date there were 618 million plays of podcasts and on-demand radio on BBC Sounds, with a 13% increase in on demand listening year-on-year. In addition, in Q3 of 2022, there were 256 million downloads of BBC podcasts and on demand radio programmes on third party platforms across the world.
- Music Streaming and podcast listening have grown fastest over the past year amongst the over 55s - all be it they started from a lower base - but this indicates older audiences are also changing. Live radio is more popular with an older audience than with 16-24s – the younger age group listen to less than a quarter of BBC radio than 55+ do; there is a value challenge with younger people in the audio space.
- The linear listening pattern for BBC Radio Scotland shows clear peaks in the morning but with significantly lower listening figures for evening programmes; during the weekend there are particular peaks for sports coverage but lower listening figures for evenings. In the digital space BBC Radio Scotland podcasts have been very successful with audiences. There were over one million UK downloads (on-platform & third party) of podcasts with a Scotland masterbrand. Three true crime titles featured in the top 10, including new

podcast *The Cruelty – A Child Unclaimed*. On Sounds, the top three by number of plays were *Good Ship BrewDog*, *Breaking the News* and *Scottish Football*. *The Cruelty – A Child Unclaimed* was a top five title.

- The BBC is in the position where it is not able to continue to deliver all of its current services while simultaneously attempting to refocus some of the BBC's content from broadcast to digital platforms. This has led to decisions which are difficult to make and difficult to hear and on BBC Radio Scotland includes the decommissioning of *Classics Unwrapped* and *Jazz Nights*. There are also changes to our piping offer but there will still be a pipe music programme as regularly as there is at present.
- BBC Scotland remains highly committed to supporting the world of classical music in Scotland, including through the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, but also in our arts-related content on the BBC Radio Scotland *Afternoon Show*, through our support for live music and through our multi-level partnership with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.
- BBC Scotland will still reflect our vibrant classical and jazz communities in Scotland on our schedules and platforms – online and on air. BBC Scotland commissioners are working on new and creative options for achieving this and audiences who enjoy this music can continue to access it across the BBC across our many platforms. BBC Commissioners are also always seeking proposals from BBC and independent producers which can deliver arts and music in accessible and dynamic ways for audiences which reflect and represent all aspects of the arts and music culture in Scotland and information on this is available online.
- BBC Scotland's production team currently produces two piping programmes at the moment, one for BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and one for BBC Radio Scotland and the proposed schedule change will deliver a more efficient way of serving both audiences, which will involve a different piping offer. This new programme will remain in the current *Pipeline* slot on a Saturday.

Update from BBC Scotland – 27 January 2023

[On 16 January] I was able to share the background to the changes announced to our Radio Scotland offer, decisions impacted by the Licence Fee freeze and a reallocation of some resources to digital content. At the time we were waiting for more detail on our future arts strategy and I can give some more detail on that now.

- We will broaden our Radio Scotland *Afternoon Show* remit to celebrate and cover all arts and culture communities across Scotland, and bring them to a large mainstream daytime radio audience for at least two hours a day, five days a week.
- In addition, we will take the key moments from the vibrant arts community and create a brand new podcast for the audience in Scotland and beyond.

- Pipe music will remain on our schedule – we’ve always said it would – in the exact same slot where *Pipeline* currently exists. We’re asking teams making pipe music programmes for Radio Scotland and Radio nan Gaidheal to collaborate much more closely to ensure we’re working most efficiently. We’ll also continue to cover live events such as the World Pipe Band Championships.
- Classical music also remains on the Radio Scotland schedule, but not via Classics Unwrapped. Currently, BBC Scotland invests £5million every year in the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, but the Orchestra’s concerts are not heard on BBC Radio Scotland. In future, they will be, ensuring classical music is part of our schedule every week.
- The BBC SSO will continue to perform in concert across the nation, and take classical music to younger audiences, such as the recent Tunes for Tots sessions.
- Jazz music is provided to our audiences by BBC Radio 2 and BBC Radio 3, and in future, new jazz releases and emerging Scottish artists can be covered in interviews on the *Afternoon Show*, which will also continue to cover news about jazz festivals in Scotland as it has done previously
- Radio Scotland already supports new traditional music talent through its Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition. We’re working with partners right now to see what opportunities there are for Radio Scotland to also support new talent in the jazz and classical genres in Scotland.¹
- Dozens of hours of great music programmes continue at the heart of our schedule every week – including *Travelling Folk*, *Take the Floor*, *Another Country*, *BBC Introducing in Scotland*, *Your Requests with Gary Innes*, *The Quay Session*, *Vic Galloway*, *Billy Sloan* and *Get It On with Bryan Burnett*.
- *BBC Introducing in Scotland*, in addition to radio content, will also support new talent with *BBC Introducing Scottish Act of the Year*, which we’ll broadcast on TV
- The BBC in Scotland – across TV, radio and online – will continue its coverage of a range of Scotland’s music and arts festivals, including Celtic Connections, TRNSMT, and the range of summer festivals in Edinburgh; and on radio only, HebCelt.

¹ The BBC has since confirmed that it will be launching two new competitions - for classical and jazz musicians - in a similar format to the BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year

- BBC Scotland News retains both an Arts Correspondent, Pauline McLean and an Entertainment Reporter, David Farrell, who continue to bring stories about arts, music and culture to all of our news programmes, and to strands such as *The Edit*.