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29<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Clare Adamson MSP  
Convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

By e-mail: [CEEAC.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:CEEAC.committee@parliament.scot)

Dear Ms Adamson,

Thank you for your letter dated 9 March 2023 and your request for further information regarding matters that remain of concern to the Committee.

As you acknowledge, these programme changes are set against a challenging financial background and also changing audience habits, but I would like to assure you that there is creative ambition behind these decisions, with the aim of promoting Scotland's music and talented musicians to a wider audience across all our platforms and services.

We are confident that the BBC fulfils the Charter obligations to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of Scotland, with particular regard to underrepresented communities and to support the creative economy. Our public service broadcasting obligations are given more detail in the Operating Licence, for which the BBC is held to account by the regulator, Ofcom. In respect of BBC Radio Scotland, the BBC must ensure that: in each week at least 50 hours are allocated to news and current affairs (including repeats); it provides several regional opt-outs each weekday, offering news, sport and information, and some regional opt-out community programming in the evenings; and it provides content and music of particular relevance to Scotland.

Our specialist music programmes operate in a media landscape that has changed beyond recognition since they were first broadcast. These programmes served audiences before the existence of the BBC iPlayer, BBC Sounds, the BBC Scotland channel and BBC ALBA and in the wider media context, before the existence of social media networks, video-sharing apps, instant messaging sites, and commercial DAB stations which themselves offer specialist music programmes and podcasting. We want to deliver our public service obligations in the most effective and efficient ways by developing creative ideas, launching new opportunities to find and promote talent in Scotland and by reaching more people on the platforms where our audiences are moving to.

At the Committee meeting, we summarised these plans, but they are worth re-stating here:

- There will still be a classical music programme on BBC Radio Scotland every week. We will hear the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's concerts much more frequently on BBC Radio Scotland as part of this. We're also looking at how we can work with other orchestras in Scotland to share their music more widely on our new classics programme on Sunday evenings – which will now be focused entirely on Scottish classical content.

- We are launching two new national competitions – one for classical and one for jazz musicians, along the lines of the extremely successful *BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year* and *BBC Introducing Scottish Act of the Year*. Our strategy is focussed here on our role in developing new talent in Scotland. In total, BBC Scotland will now have four targeted development programmes for Scottish music alone, in addition to our work in other genres.

- These competitions will ensure that emerging artists will receive cross-platform BBC promotion, publicity and support, raising the profile of each music genre more widely among Scottish audiences, and will benefit from significant interest from the press and the music industry.

- We are expanding the remit of *The Afternoon Show* to include interviews and features about the jazz community in Scotland and jazz music will be part of the mix of live music on *The Quay Sessions*.

- We are launching a new culture podcast

- We will have a piping programme in the current slot on BBC Radio Scotland, made in collaboration with the team making the equivalent programme for BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and we are also commissioning a new piping podcast which will take Scotland's music to a wider, hopefully global, audience.

Beyond these new plans, we will continue to deliver our very wide range of distinctive content which represents Scotland's arts, culture and music across all our platforms in English and Gaelic including, but not restricted to:

- A large range of specialist and non-specialist music programmes on BBC Radio Scotland every day.

- Content from music, culture and book festivals across Scotland from *The Mòd* to *TRNSMT*, *Celtic Connections* to *Belladrum*, the Paisley Book Festival to Edinburgh's summer festivals.

- BBC Scotland programmes including: *The Big Scottish Book Club*; *The Edit*; *Edinburgh Unlocked*; *Radio 1's Big Weekend* in Dundee in May; Hogmanay and Burns celebrations and documentaries such as *Eye of the Storm*, *Glasgow Mela*, *The Women Who Changed Modern Scotland*, *Dale Barclay: All on Black*, *Changing Landscapes* and many, many more.

- Investment in new talent with Screen Scotland to commission digital dramas; the BBC Writersroom and the BBC-Screen Scotland Emerging TV Director Talent Initiative.

- Gaelic music, arts, culture and drama showcased across the schedules on BBC ALBA, in partnership with MG ALBA, and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal.

- Music, arts and books on community programmes on BBC Radio Orkney and BBC Radio Shetland.

- Arts Correspondent, Pauline McLean, at the core of the BBC Scotland News team.

- Content on music across the genres linked to the Scottish curriculum on *Bitesize* and cultural content on BBC Learning including stories in Scots, Doric and Orcadian.
- £5million annual investment in the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra including an extensive outreach programme taking music, coaching and mentoring opportunities into communities and schools across Scotland, with a focus on diversity.

We understand that changes to radio schedules are difficult and we appreciate the concerns expressed. You write of a possible “disconnect” noted by Members between those in support of the petitions and the approach by BBC Scotland. We made the decision to speak with our production teams first, to ensure we were engaging with the people directly involved with these programmes.

We believe that the overall plans, including new on-demand programming as well as including specialist music within a wider range of strands, will enable us to bring Scottish music and talent to the widest possible audience. We value and are working to enhance our partnerships with other vital institutions in the creative sector, including the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and our long-standing relationships with festivals across Scotland.

We have listened to concerns expressed about an archive of piping music and it has raised questions for us about our own collection. Small collections of our library have been posted online through projects like *BBC Rewind* and, of course, some back catalogues are available on iPlayer and BBC Sounds, but we do not have the resources or the permissions to make the full collection open in the way a national archive might be. We are aware, however, of the concerns around capturing live pipe music and in response we have commissioned a podcast which will focus on some of the key events in the piping calendar which will give us the opportunity to gather new piping music. Alongside this we will provide TV coverage of *The World Pipe Band Championships*, broadcast on BBC One Scotland. More broadly in terms of BBC content, we are working with the National Library of Scotland, through our partnership with them, to enable more general access to BBC archives. This is work-in-progress as we navigate the many constraints of sharing copyright material.

Finally, with regard to the question in your letter about the financial background to these changes, the BBC’s licence fee has been frozen at a time of production costs being impacted by high inflation. The BBC’s income in real terms has dropped by over 30% since 2010. In order to deliver Value for All for audiences in that environment, it is not possible for the BBC to continue to commission all existing content in the same way while also investing in newer digital services, to meet the changing demands of our audiences. These scheduling decisions are informed by the need to spend the Commissioning budget for BBC Scotland’s services in a way that uses the full range of our services to ensure that our distinctive content remains accessible to audiences in Scotland and beyond.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Carson  
Director, Scotland