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Christine Chapman AM
Chair
Communities, Local Government and Equalities Committee
The National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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Annwyl Cadeirydd

We would like once again to thank the Committee for asking TAC to give evidence on the 12th November, in relation to BBC Charter Review.

In response to the Committee's request that TAC forward information relating to the funding of BBC Alba, we contacted MG Alba, which runs the service.

They have forwarded us the information below, and if it fits with Committee protocol are more than happy to deal with any other queries the Committee may have regarding their operations.

You can contact MG Alba using the following details:

Donald Campbell – Chief Executive: Domhnall.Caimbeul@mgalba.com

Iseabail Mactaggart - Director of Development and Partnerships: Iseabail.Mactaggart@mgalba.com

I hope this information is satisfactory, and please do let us know if there is any more assistance we can give.

Yn gywir

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Iestyn Garlick'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Iestyn Garlick

Chair

Information provided to TAC by MG Alba for the benefit of the Welsh Assembly Communities, Local Government and Equalities Committee, November 2015

Background

MG ALBA is short for Meadhanan Gàidhlig Alba (Gaelic Media Scotland) and is the operating name of Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig or Gaelic Media Service.

MG ALBA delivers **BBC ALBA** (the Gaelic language television channel) in partnership with the BBC. BBC ALBA is the first partnership television service to operate under a BBC licence.

BBC ALBA is a success. Audience figures are strong, with over 700,000 average weekly reach (MG ALBA, 2015). BBC iPlayer augments viewing – 7.43m views in 2014 (MG ALBA, 2015).

The channel is funded as follows: £13.8m of MG ALBA funding, of which £12.8m is provided by the Scottish Government and £1m by the UK Government; and £8m of BBC funding, of which £5.2m was spent on content produced in-house, and the remaining balance on distribution, infrastructure and support (BBC Annual Report, 2013/14).

Charter Renewal

In our submission to the Department of Culture Media and Sport on Charter Renewal, MG ALBA has stated its position as follows:

- (i) the current funding of BBC ALBA creates significant audience deficits; and
- (ii) as part of the charter renewal review, MG ALBA asks that the BBC in-house programming contribution to BBC ALBA's output should be increased to match that made by the BBC to S4C, on the basis of a consistent BBC philosophy on supporting its autochthonous language services.

On current funding, only 1.7 hours of originations per day, including News, are possible. This compares to other autochthonous language services in the UK and Ireland as follows: almost 8 hours of originations per day on the Welsh channel, S4C, and 5 hours of originations on the Irish language channel, TG4.

The effect of a lack of originations is a high repeat rate. BBC ALBA's current repeat rate is 73%.

In addition to an unsustainable repeat rate, this funding gap creates significant deficiencies for BBC ALBA audiences:

- there is no weekend news available in Gaelic;
- there is a significant lack of original programming for children and young people;
- there are gaps in comedy, entertainment and programming for learners.

Specifically, we have asked that the current 230 hours pa of content that the BBC contributes to BBC ALBA's output is increased, to match that made by the BBC to S4C, i.e. 520 hours pa, or 10 hours of high quality programmes per week.