

**Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd  
The Highland Council**

**Buidheann Buileachaidh na Gàidhlig 12 Samhain 2015  
Gaelic Implementation Group 12 November 2015**

Agenda Item	<b>8</b>
Report No	<b>GIG 13-15</b>

**UK Government Public Consultation on the BBC Royal Charter Review  
Scottish Gaelic Broadcasting**

**Report by the Head of Policy and Reform**

**Summary**

This report asks Members to homologate the response that the Highland Council submitted to the UK Government Public Consultation on the BBC Royal Charter Review; specifically the section relating to Scottish Gaelic Broadcasting.

**1. Background**

- 1.1** On 30 September 2015, The Chief Executive of MG ALBA contacted the Chair of the Gaelic Implementation Group and the Chief Executive of the Highland Council in relation to submitting a response to the UK Government Public Consultation on the BBC Royal Charter Review, relating to Scottish Gaelic Broadcasting.
- 1.2** The following link <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/bbc-charter-review-public-consultation> includes the consultation document. The closing date for responses was 8 October 2015 so, given the tight timeframe, and the Chair of the Gaelic Implementation Group submitted a response from the Council.

**2. Response**

- 2.1** **Appendix 1** attached, is the response submitted by the Chairperson of the Gaelic Implementation Group.

**3. Implications**

- 3.1** There are no implications associated with this report at present.

**Recommendation**

Members are asked to homologate the response at Appendix 1.

**Designation:** Head of Policy and Reform  
**Date:** 2 November 2015  
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## Appendix 1



Please Ask for: Kenny Murray  
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Our Ref:  
Date: 4 November 2015

**Dear Sir/Madam**

### **UK Government Public Consultation on the BBC Royal Charter Review: Scottish Gaelic Broadcasting.**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Government's Public Consultation on the Review of the BBC's Royal Charter.

#### **Context**

The Highland Council is a firm and long-standing supporter of Gaelic media in its many forms. We are therefore pleased to have the opportunity to comment on a particular element of this Public Consultation; that being **Box 6: Supporting the different native languages within the British Isles**; and specifically in relation to developing and expanding Gaelic Broadcasting to support our young people and our communities.

The Highland Council is the lead Authority in Scotland in delivering Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learner Education in Primary and Secondary Schools. Over 3,000 of our young people are either taught through the medium of Gaelic or are learning the language at school. BBC Alba has been a crucial part of the engagement of young people with Gaelic; providing programming and resources that have been of tremendous support both in the classroom and at home.

We also acknowledge that BBC ALBA, given its current level of resource, is trying its utmost to deliver a fresh, captivating and imaginative service. However, this is within the context of limited broadcasting hours and other shortcomings in programming opportunities and funding.

## Quick Hits

The Highland Council believes that there are a few critical and very reasonable elements which, if delivered swiftly, would support significant growth for Gaelic Medium education; would increase the number of learners; would heighten the profile of Gaelic and would provide a well-timed fillip for Gaelic linguistic and cultural development. The Council therefore proposes that the renewed BBC Charter should ensure improved and well-earned support for BBC Alba by providing for:

- The weekly investment in programming from the BBC to BBC Alba being **increased to 10 hours per week**, from the current level of just over 4 hours.
- The level of new or original programming being **increased to 3 hours per day** from the current level of under 2 hours per day. It is interesting to note that BBC ALBA has less new or original output (1.7 hours per day), than Irish language TG4 (5 hours per day) or Welsh language S4C (8 hours per day).
- **A fairer proportion of the licence fee being allocated to Gaelic Radio and TV.** The current licence costs £12.13 per month and the proportion that BBC Radio nan Gàidheal receives is equivalent to 2p (BBC Radio Cymru receives 6p). On the television side, BBC Alba receives 3p and S4C receives 35p; figures that suggest the need for reviewing and increasing the investment commitment for Gaelic.

## Behind the urgent need for Change

After seven years in existence and having developed a solid reputation for quality, this is a singular opportunity to make a step change in Gaelic language broadcasting. From a standing start, BBC Alba has now got an impressive 700,000 viewer Scotland-wide reach and, with Radio nan Gàidheal now hits 70% of Scotland's Gaelic community.

With an over reliance on repeats, no weekend news bulletins, a lack of new programmes for young people and with difficult gaps in areas such as entertainment and comedy, the time has come for BBC Alba to be given the support and resources it needs and which it has earned.

The Highland Council provides support and resources to the development of the Gaelic Arts, Media and Heritage; which we view as crucial to the linguistic development and promotion of the language. However, BBC Alba plays a significant role across Scotland by directly and indirectly facilitating a greater understanding and appreciation of Gaelic language and culture; and this is critical to the future growth of Gaelic.

We strongly recommend that the new Charter stipulates a commitment to Scottish Gaelic broadcasting; and that Gaelic broadcasting funding and resources are embedded within the strategic vision and policy of the Charter. In addition, however, if BBC Scotland increases its contribution of original programming to the BBC Alba, this must be supported by an additional funding stream; and not at the expense of BBC Scotland's English language programming for audiences in Scotland.

The Highlands and Islands of Scotland are unique and it is therefore imperative to have productions from these areas which will initiate and support a creative talent pool that will produce alternative perspectives. We believe that the BBC should actively seek to contribute to the growth of the creative industries sector through the existing networks within the Highlands and Islands. The rapid growth in media technologies offer huge opportunities for developing international audiences in relation to Gaelic broadcasting, especially in Canada, America, Australia, and New Zealand.

Finally, the Highland Council is also keen to stress the direct economic benefits relating to increasing the daily output and the level of new programming. These would assist in developing demand for new skills and consequently provide education, training and employment opportunities in island, rural and urban communities across the Highlands.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Review of the BBC's Charter and I hope you will take our views on board. I would be happy to discuss further if that would be helpful.

Leis gach deagh dhùrachd – Best wishes

**Councillor Hamish Fraser**  
**Chair**  
**The Highland Council Gaelic Implementation Group**