

Edinburgh independent local radio licence applications

Questions and responses: Saga Radio

These are the responses from Saga Radio (Scotland) to the non-confidential questions asked by Ofcom regarding the group's application for the Edinburgh licence.

1. Please provide details of any changes to the information in the application by Saga (Radio) Scotland Ltd arising from the recent sale of Saga Group Ltd.

Saga Radio (Scotland) Ltd has kept Ofcom informed at all stages of the recent sale of Saga Group Ltd and I refer you to our letter of 5th November which summarises the present position. As you will see the proposed sale prompted by the Chairman and shareholder's retirement resulted in a management buyout which leaves all the key executives in both the parent company and in particular Saga's radio division in place. The structure of Saga Radio (Scotland) Ltd remains exactly as outlined in the application including Board, management and funding (100% Saga Group Ltd). There is, however, one change to the information provided. On page 14 reference is made to SAGA Radio (London) Ltd and PrimeTime Radio, these radio stations are no longer owned by the SAGA Group Ltd but have been retained by Roger De Haan, as the letter referred to above explains. (The services are, however, still operated by the same teams.)

2. What is the maximum extent to which you plan to automate programming?

As you know from our discussion on the telephone, I draw the distinction between automation and pre recorded (including voice-tracked) programmes.

a) Automation

By my definition, automated programming comprises simply back-to-back music with the occasional station voice announcement, e.g. "You're listening to XYZfm for Edinburgh", "XYZfm playing the world's most memorable songs", etc. All the liners are necessarily generic and it is clear to the listener that the programming is automated - there is no pretence or suggestion that a broadcaster is presenting a radio programme. It is simply sustaining material, usually broadcast overnight.

As far as Saga Radio Scotland's application for the Edinburgh licence is concerned I can confirm that none of the programming included in the proposed service will be automated.

b) Pre Recorded Programmes

Our schedule will include some pre recorded programming, some of which will be produced using the voice-tracking method. Voice-tracking is essentially an efficient way of pre recording programmes. It is a particularly useful technique which can be used by less experienced broadcasters to ensure that the quality of their programming meets the needs of the station, or by more experienced staff, for example members of the management team, to enable them to use their time more efficiently. We consider voice-tracking to be no different qualitatively from any other method of pre recording, and it avoids the need for editing.

Although one might argue that live presentation at all times is preferable as it permits more interaction with the listener, the counter argument is that some degree of pre recorded programming in the output ensures high quality, well considered broadcasting. A proportion of the output on the BBC's main networks is always pre recorded and considered to be the better for it.

Specifically, within the Saga schedule, The Collection, broadcast at noon and 1900 hours weekdays comprising nostalgic music sweeps, designed to provide musical buffers between more speech intensive sequences, will be voice tracked; and as stated in the application, David Hamilton's Million Sellers programme which is made in London and networked, will also be pre recorded, possibly voice-tracked.

The maximum amount of pre recorded programming included in our proposed Edinburgh programme schedule is, therefore, 12 hours per week.

All the specialist music programmes, soul, rock'n'roll, country, nostalgia, songs from the shows, jazz and big bands, are presented live at present on our Glasgow station and (as outlined in the application) it is intended that most of these programmes would be simulcast in Edinburgh (with information content expanded to address specialist music interests across Central Scotland). Whilst it is intended that the present arrangements will continue for the foreseeable future, we would like to reserve the right to pre record specialist music shows, in the interests of quality, should this become necessary.