

## **Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review Phase Two: Preparing for the Digital Future Consultation**

### **Comunn na Gàidhlig Submission**

Comunn na Gàidhlig (CnaG) welcomes the opportunity to have input into Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review. CnaG supports the right of all of the Gaelic-speaking community to have access to the new Gaelic channel and, as the Gaelic development agency with a remit to promote the Gaelic language and culture, our comments will be restricted to the issues which we feel are relevant to Gaelic broadcasting.

Over many years CnaG, along with many other Gaelic organisations, campaigned for the establishment of a dedicated Gaelic Service and we are now delighted that this has come to fruition. The new BBC Alba channel, a partnership arrangement between BBC Scotland and MG Alba, was launched on 19<sup>th</sup> September and it has been highly successful. Viewing figures have hugely exceeded expectations and the quality of programming has been excellent. Yet again, audience figures exceed the recorded number of Gaelic-speakers in Scotland, providing evidence that high quality Gaelic programmes attract audiences which are non-Gaelic speakers. However, it is a source of huge disappointment and of great concern that the new channel is currently only available on satellite and broadband, leaving a large number of the Gaelic-speaking community with no access to it. We understand that the channel will shortly be made available on cable and we welcome this. However, given that the massive majority of digital television viewers receive their service through Freeview, it is imperative that the new channel is made available on Freeview with no further delay and we urge Ofcom to make the strongest possible representations to the BBC Trust to ensure that this will happen. We understand that the BBC Trust intends to undertake a further assessment of public value, before making a decision on whether or not the new channel will be carried on digital terrestrial television, i.e. Freeview and, if this is a prerequisite to the channel being made available on Freeview, it is essential that this is done immediately and not in 2010, as originally planned.

CnaG remains convinced of the continuing importance and relevance of quality public service broadcasting, particularly and crucially for cultural, social and democratic reasons. This is particularly important in terms of minority languages such as Gaelic, to help ensure a sustainable future for the Gaelic-speaking community. It would appear to CnaG that the recently launched Gaelic channel has all the hallmarks of public service broadcasting but has not been accorded the status of PSB. CnaG would urge Ofcom to examine this anomaly, as the designation of the new Gaelic channel as a PSB would enable the Service to be carried on all platforms, including Freeview.

CnaG also urges Ofcom to ensure that adequate funding is made available to BBC Alba to not only ensure that the current high quality of programming is maintained but that there is sufficient funding made available to enable a full Service to be delivered. CnaG believes that with appropriate government interventions and adequate financial support, there are huge opportunities for the new Gaelic channel to play a significant role in raising the profile of the language and complementing initiatives within education, the arts, and social and economic development to secure the future of the language.

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