

S E I R B H E I S
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G À I D H L I G



Gaelic
Media
Service

**The future of children's television programming
Response by Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig (Gaelic Media Service)**

Gaelic Media Service's work and remit

Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig (Gaelic Media Service or GMS) is a publicly funded body, established by statute and regulated by Ofcom. Its remit is to secure that a wide and diverse range of high quality programmes in Gaelic are broadcast or otherwise transmitted so as to be available for persons in Scotland. GMS is currently working in partnership with the BBC to establish a dedicated Gaelic television service on digital platforms, which is to launch in 2008.

Since its establishment in 1992, GMS has expended £24.5 million on 683 hours of television programmes broadcast on STV Central and STV North, BBC Alba and TeleG. This equates to 22% of total production funding. The programming genres within the overall mix include studio and location-based magazine shows, versioned cartoons, drama and studio-based pre-school formats. In addition, GMS has spent £4 million on 70 hours of education programmes designed to support the Scottish curriculum.

Children's programming is a key genre for GMS and will continue to account for a significant proportion of the GMS-funded television content on the new Gaelic Digital Service.

Question 1: Do you have any comments on the general analysis and conclusions of the report?

GMS notes the comprehensive description of the children's television production sector and the history of children's programming in the UK, and agrees that Ofcom is right to highlight the importance of diversity and plurality in children's programming, particularly from a cultural perspective.

Gaelic programmes produced in Scotland fulfil two important objectives of public service broadcasting, as set out on page 8 of the discussion paper: a) to reflect and strengthen our cultural identity through original programming at UK, national and regional level; and b) to make us aware of different cultures and alternative viewpoints through programmes that reflect the lives of other people and other communities.

Question 2: Of the policy approaches suggested by stakeholders, which, if any, do you consider the most appropriate to address the conclusions made in this report?

GMS's unique funding position allows it to support the production of a wide range of children's programmes from the production departments of broadcasters and from the independent production sector, and the Gaelic television fund has been an important catalyst for growth in the independent production sector in Scotland.

GMS also recognises that it operates in a wider industry that is affected by the market, and that the health and sustainability of the production sector throughout the UK has an impact on the television production sector in Scotland, including the Gaelic production sector.

Given the decline in home-grown children's television production highlighted by the discussion paper, GMS does not see the status quo as an appropriate approach to addressing the conclusions in the report. There could be merit in extending the remit of existing PSB institutions or in the creation of a new institution for children's programming, and GMS would welcome the opportunity to be involved in further discussions on the proposed Public Service Publisher and other debates on the remit and purposes of public service broadcasting.

Question 3: If they are appropriate, should any of the policy approaches be tailored to different age groups (for example to pre-school, younger children, older children and young teenagers), or to different types of children's programming (like drama, factual, entertainment and animation)?

GMS believes that public service broadcasters should continue to provide a variety of content to viewers in all age groups. The purposes and characteristics of public service broadcasting apply equally to children's programming and to other genres, and GMS believes that public service broadcasters should have a responsibility to achieve an appropriate mix of genres and sub-genres. The specific obligations on a PSBs are a matter for their licences/charter, and any appropriate policy approach should take account of the full range of PSB obligations.

GMS does not have PSB status, but the content that it funds has the characteristics of public service broadcast content and is carried by broadcasters in Scotland to fulfil Gaelic broadcasting obligations. GMS would be concerned by any changes in the regulatory and policy landscape that would reduce GMS's ability to serve the Gaelic audience and to participate in the provision of Gaelic content. GMS believes that any policy approach pursued for public service broadcasting in future should take cognisance of the unique role of indigenous language broadcasting in the UK's diverse media culture.

Question 4: What is the role and importance of UK-originated programming for children?

It is essential for children's development, learning and language skills that they should be able to watch television programmes that reflect their own national/regional and linguistic culture and the other cultures of the country they live in.

Gaelic television programmes provide a valuable resource for children who are being brought up in Gaelic-speaking homes, are in Gaelic-medium education or are learning Gaelic as a second language, and for parents who want to create and strengthen a Gaelic-medium environment in the home. Children and young people are a key demographic sector for language development, and a key audience group for Gaelic programming.

Most Gaelic-speaking children are bilingual. Gaelic nurseries provide immersion in the language for children from all linguistic backgrounds, and the Gaelic-medium primary education model is designed to bring children to equal fluency in English and in Gaelic by the end of primary school.

Original, Scottish-produced programmes such as *Na Bonnachain* (SMG Productions) provide children with content specifically conceived as a Gaelic offering and targeted to a young Gaelic-speaking audience, while reversioned cartoons such as *Charlie & Lola*, *Pàdraig Post* (*Postman Pat*) and *Sam Smàlaidh* (*Fireman Sam*) give a Gaelic voice to familiar children's characters, contributing to Gaelic development by normalising the language in a media context.

Given their bilingualism, Gaelic-speaking children also watch programmes in English, and GMS believes that it is important that English-language programming that reflects the English-speaking cultures of the UK should also be available to this audience.

Question 5: What is the role and importance of plurality in the provision of children's programming?

GMS recognises the importance of plurality in the provision of children's programming and of a thriving production sector for UK-originated children's programmes in English and Welsh as well as in Gaelic.

A vibrant production sector allows for development and sharing of creative, performance and technical expertise among producers and broadcasters using all of the UK's indigenous languages, providing opportunities for co-productions and co-working.

See also response to Question 3 above.

Question 6: Should further consideration be given to provision of public service content for children over platforms other than linear television?

GMS recognises the increasing popularity of media platforms other than linear television among children and young people accessing Gaelic content, and the Gaelic Digital Service will seek to provide its online content (both TV spin-off and designed

specifically for online) on all appropriate platforms, including clips and trails on video-sharing and networking websites.

GMS funds the www.sgleog.com and www.airsplaid.co.uk websites, and will continue to support the development of this kind of online media content. Sgleog (including www.youtube.com/sgleog) provides multimedia content for school-age fluent Gaelic speakers, and Air Splaid! provides Gaelic learners of all ages with a fun way to kick-start their journey to fluency.

GMS also recognises the increasing importance of the internet for young viewers for educational purposes, and the Gaelic Digital Service will support formal and informal learning through online content both for curriculum support and for language acquisition.

In addition to non-linear platforms, however, there is still a clear desire among younger viewers for linear television. Research commissioned by GMS and conducted by Lèirsinn in 2006 among young people between the ages of 11 and 25 revealed that traditional television still accounted for a significant proportion of their media consumption and that they expected the Gaelic Digital Service to provide drama, news and other content suitable for viewers of all ages.

Question 7: Does the policy approach for children's programming need to be different to the policy approach taken to public service broadcasting overall?
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See response to Question 3 above.

Conclusion

GMS is pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the discussion paper and would like to participate in the on-going debate on the future of children's television programming. GMS is willing to provide any further information Ofcom requires on Gaelic broadcasting and would welcome further opportunities to contribute to the consultation process.

20 December 2007

Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig (Gaelic Media Service)