

# **Second Public Broadcasting Service Broadcasting Review**

## **RE ; Indigenous Language broadcasting in Ulster- Scots**

**Dear Sir,**

**Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the recent consultation document in regard to the future of PSB.**

**I am primarily concerned about the matters surrounding the future of indigenous languages and in particular the impact that any conclusions in relation to changes to PSB may have on the position of the Ulster-Scots language. While I generally welcome the tone of some of the comments made in the consultation document relating to Ulster Scots, I retain a number of concerns regarding the accuracy of much that is contained in paragraphs 5.91 – 5.93, in regard to the current and future broadcasting commitment to Ulster-Scots.**

**In particular I would take issue with the conclusions that are contained on page 85 where Ofcom states that ‘Viewers of Indigenous language programmes have access to more and higher quality content than ever before...’ In terms of what is available to Ulster-Scots viewers in Northern Ireland, this is simply not the case. Broadcasting in Ulster-Scots is almost non-existent and continues to be very poorly served by the broadcasting media in Northern Ireland. Evidence for this is contained in your own report on page 83 where it is recorded that for the whole of 2007, Ulster Scots content amounted to only 5 hours. This is clearly an insufficient level of programming, and while 5 hours is better than none, I wonder to what extent Ofcom has muddied their own waters [See paras 5.91 and 5.93] by assuming that 5 hours of Ulster-Scots cultural or historically based programming is the same as programmes in, or even about the Ulster-Scots language. I am personally unaware of even one hour of programming in 2007 or 2008 that was broadcast in the indigenous language that is Ulster-Scots. Indigenous language broadcasting should be about programmes that are made and broadcast in that language and programmes about bagpipes and drumming simply do not fit the bill. While it is true to say that the Ulster Scots community welcomes programming about the Ulster-Scots cultural identity, this in itself should not be misrepresented by Ofcom or others as ‘Indigenous language broadcasting.’ Simply put, we need more language activity in all areas of broadcasting.**

**In paragraph 5.93, reference is made to Ofcom’s Advisory Committee who have certain beliefs regarding coverage of Ulster-Scots broadcasting. It is suggested that ‘coverage of Ulster-Scots cultural**

activities should be acknowledged as Ulster-Scots content.’ To the best of my knowledge, the Ulster-Scots speaking community has yet to be represented in decision making bodies such as the Advisory Committee and the absence of meaningful contact with Ulster-Scots speakers at this level has not helped the case for Ulster-Scots language programmes at a time when the future of PSB in the UK is being considered.

While I may have concerns about how the Ulster-Scots language is represented in this document in terms of the actual content and indeed the hours of broadcasting made available in 2007, I would also question the need to make distinctions in the document between indigenous languages carrying part III status as defined by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and Ulster Scots, which has a status under ECRML at Part II. I believe that this is an unnecessary distinction for Ofcom to make as it should have little impact on the desirability of Ulster Scots broadcasting in general or of the need for broadcasters to represent all indigenous language traditions that exist within Northern Ireland. Given that we are entering a new era in broadcasting, this type of distinction is unwelcome and unhelpful at this time.

The conclusions that appear in the report in paragraph 5.94 make reference to a “ ‘perceived’ concern at the lack of consistency and equity, and sometimes certainty, in the current arrangements for funding and delivery which are in place in different parts of the UK.” I would wish to dispel any perceived notions that may exist in Ofcom about how Ulster-Scots is represented in the media. The figures relating to comparative spend in indigenous languages in the UK [page 83] is not a perception but is indeed a fact. Ulster-Scots is poorly served in terms of the funding and delivery of indigenous language programming in Northern Ireland and this situation continues unabated as other indigenous languages are increasingly better served by the broadcasting industry.

Finally, given the current debate surrounding the models now under review for PSB in the coming period, and Ofcom’s request for others to consider what might be a best fit for the years ahead, I wonder if Ofcom itself, has a greater role to play in defining just how indigenous languages can benefit from the transition to digital. It is suggested in page 82, paragraph 5.77 that ‘Indigenous language broadcasting forms an important part of the public service broadcasting ecology of the nations of the UK.’ If this is the case, is it not rational to assume that Ofcom might establish its own analysis in regard to programming in Ulster-Scots and in particular, what can be done to safeguard and strengthen its position for the future. There is no evidence of any such conclusions or recommendations in this report and I would consider that comments of this nature would be helpful.

Yours aye,

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