Glenn Preston
Director, Scotland

Màiri McAllan MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic
Scottish Government
BY EMAIL

6 November 2026

Dear Ms McAllan,

BBC Scotland

Thank you for your letter of 26 October setting out your concerns regarding the BBC's plans to close the BBC Scotland television channel. As you know, the BBC's decision is part of a wider series of cost-saving measures and associated changes to television, radio and online services as the BBC looks to make an initial £200m of savings towards its target of £500m by 2028.

I recognise your concerns regarding the impact the BBC's proposals could have on audiences in Scotland and I thought it might be helpful to set out Ofcom's role in this process. Specifically, I can share how we are engaging with the BBC to inform our position as to how we hold the BBC to account on behalf of audiences in response to its cost-savings plans.

Background

In your letter you are clear the Scottish Government considers the proposed closure to be unacceptable, noting you are opposed to it.

Ofcom's role, as the independent regulator, is to hold the BBC to account on how it is delivering its Mission and Public Purposes, and to ensure that audiences across the UK are well served. It is the role of the BBC Board to take responsibility for BBC's governance, budgets, editorial policy and strategic and creative direction. The regulatory framework therefore does not permit Ofcom to stop the closure of a linear service such as BBC Scotland.

The context for the BBC Board's decisions – including the planned closure of the BBC Scotland channel – is the challenging financial environment the UK's Public Service Broadcasters are facing. You are aware of the changes STV made to its news provision earlier in the year to put it on a more sustainable footing while Channel 4 is implementing a transformation strategy and there is a live process ongoing on the anticipated acquisition of ITV by Sky.[1] At the same time, the UK Government is in the process of reviewing the BBC Charter that will inform its future regulatory framework.[2]

Serving audiences in Scotland

While we recognise that the BBC must make difficult decisions, it is important for Ofcom – and even more important for the audience the BBC serves – to understand how they will be impacted by the changes and what mitigations the BBC proposes to put in place to ensure it continues to deliver its Mission and Public Purposes.

In the case of the BBC Scotland Channel, we agreed with the BBC's public value case that its launch in 2019 would both create a greater Scottish focus in its news coverage and deliver more content

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-anticipated-acquisition-of-itv-media-and-entertainment-holdings-limited-by-sky-uk-limited
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/britains-story-the-next-chapter-the-bbc-royal-charter-review-green-paper-and-public-consultation

designed to reflect the lives of people in Scotland.[3] While we recognise that audience habits and the wider broadcasting landscape have shifted significantly in the period since then, Ofcom does want the BBC to provide further information and transparency on their decision and I outline the next steps on this below.

On news, the BBC's Operating Licence requires that the BBC Scotland channel must provide 125 hours of news at peak viewing time. This is currently provided by *Reporting Scotland: News at Seven* and the BBC has confirmed this will not continue following the closure of the channel. When the BBC introduced this programme in 2025 – as part of a broader suite of changes to reflect changing audience habits – it noted that the programme would have a different editorial to the main *Reporting Scotland* programme "to connect better to different audiences" and expected it to skew towards the C2DE demographic.[4] As such, we will be seeking information from the BBC on how it plans to ensure its news provision across all platforms continues to serve audiences in Scotland.

A further point relates to content spend for audiences in Scotland, particularly on output that represents and portrays the nation. Data published in Ofcom's *Media Nations: Scotland* report shows that the launch of the channel in 2019 led to an increase in spend on content for audiences in Scotland[5] and although that had declined by 2025[6], it remained higher than it was in 2018. We recognise that commissioning spend no longer needs to be tied to a particular platform, with the BBC committed to delivery of BBC Scotland content across BBC iPlayer, BBC One Scotland and the returning BBC Two Scotland while also increasingly using other platforms such as YouTube. We also recognise that the BBC's co-commissioning model has led to a greater focus on high-impact programming that portrays Scotland while also resonating with UK-wide audiences in recent years. However, we will be seeking more clarity from the BBC on how its plans will impact the amount and range of output commissioned for audiences in Scotland.

Next steps

We have this week written to the BBC to ask them to share with us a consolidated picture of the BBC's plans to date as soon as possible.[7] We have also asked them to assess the expected impact on audiences with a particular focus on the Nations and Regions of the UK, the mitigations it plans to put in place and detail on how it intends to monitor whether audience needs continue to be met. As part of this process, we will be engaging directly with BBC Scotland to ensure these questions are considered in a Scottish context.

Once we have a clearer picture from the BBC, we will consider whether changes should be made to the Operating Licence to ensure the BBC continues to deliver its Mission and Public Purposes for audiences across the UK and I will ensure you and your officials are kept up to date with that work as it progresses. I intend to publish this letter and share a copy with the Convener of the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee at the Scottish Parliament.

Yours sincerely,



Glenn Preston

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[3] BBC Scotland Competition Assessment, June 2018 (Para 1.4)
[4] BBC response to Ofcom's provisional determination on BBC Scotland Channel, June 2024
[5] Media Nations: Scotland 2025, Figure 21 (£43.3m in 2018 v £71.4m in 2019)
[6] Media Nations: Scotland 2026, Figure 25 (£58.4m)
[7] Ofcom's letter to the BBC on BBC cost-saving measures - 2 November 2026