



Ofcom
Strategic Review of Digital Communication

MG ALBA Response

7th October 2015

1. 1. Introduction

MG ALBA is short for Meadhanan Gàidhlig Alba (Gaelic Media Scotland) and is the operating name of Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig or Gaelic Media Service.

MG ALBA delivers **BBC ALBA** (the Gaelic language television channel) in partnership with the BBC. BBC ALBA is the first partnership television service to operate under a BBC licence.

BBC ALBA is a success. Audience figures are strong, with over 700,000 average weekly reach (MG ALBA, 2015). BBC iPlayer augments viewing – 7.43m views in 2014 (MG ALBA, 2015).

2. 2. Response to Discussion Document

MG ALBA makes three observations under **the Investment and Innovation** heading of Ofcom's Discussion Document:

2.1 Universally available broadband access of sufficiently high quality is necessary for consumers of BBC ALBA through the BBC iPlayer, an increasingly important element of BBC ALBA's consumption. This is particularly important across the Highland and Islands of Scotland, and especially the Western Isles, where broadband access is particularly poor, but where consumption of BBC ALBA is particularly high.

BBC iPlayer as a key form of consumption will increase rather than decrease. Currently the infrastructure deficiencies in these areas risk hampering consumer take up of these services.

2.2 One of MG ALBA's strategic priorities is to facilitate the use of Gaelic by young people in digital communication. The absence of a healthy social media ecology is a serious threat to the future of Gaelic and Gaelic media. It is MG ALBA's view that the lack of universally available broadband of sufficiently high quality, combined with weaknesses in mobile voice and data coverage, create a serious obstacle to such social media interaction in key Gaelic speaking areas such as the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

The infrastructure weaknesses raise general questions over citizens' ability to participate in digital society, but this has particular citizenship implications for the Gaelic language.

2.3 MG ALBA's most recent economic impact assessment found that the total impact of MG ALBA was 290 FTE jobs, and GVA of £12.5m (Matthew, 2015). Of this, around 100 jobs are based in the Outer Hebrides and Skye, with wages above average for the area.

Voice coverage is "poor" in significant parts of the Western Isles (this is the lowest categorisation possible); in other parts of the Highlands and Islands it is only slightly better – deemed to be "fair" (Scottish Government, 2013).

The lack of universally available broadband of sufficient speed, and the weaknesses of mobile voice and data coverage act as economic constraints on MG ALBA's existing suppliers, and constrain future growth. This has serious implications for the growth of the creative industries in one of the most economically peripheral areas of the UK.

References

Matthew, 2015, Economic Impact of MG ALBA, Reference Economic Consultants, 2015

MG ALBA, 2015, MG ALBA Annual Report 2014/15

Scottish Government, 2103, Mobile Performance and Coverage in Scotland, Report for the Scottish Government, retrieved 7th October 2015 from <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0043/00433910.pdf>