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CONSULTATION – OFCOM’S PROPOSED PLAN OF WORK 2020/21

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed Plan of Work for 2020-2021. This response covers my own portfolio interests, particularly in the creative industries, broadcasting and media. I am aware that other Scottish Ministers may also provide comments from the perspective of their portfolios.

The Scottish Government is committed to building strong and inclusive economic growth in Scotland and the creative sector is an essential asset for our future prosperity. While broadcasting is reserved to Westminster, public service broadcasters including the publicly-funded BBC are extremely important to developing our creative industries across Scotland and to nurturing and celebrating the culture of Scotland and all its diverse communities. For these reasons, I will continue to urge the BBC to deliver its public purposes in Scotland and ask Ofcom to hold the BBC to account on these.

We welcome Ofcom’s strategic priority to support broadcasting and the progress to date with its review of public service broadcasting, ‘Small Screen: Big Debate’, which we would intend to respond to at the consultation stage.

Likewise, we welcome Ofcom’s plans to continue delivering reports that have been published in previous years, including its annual report on diversity in the UK TV and radio industries, annual report on the BBC and reports on media use, attitudes and understanding of adults and children.

We welcome Ofcom’s commitment to improving diversity and would make a case for data on diversity and equal opportunities in television and radio to be broken down by nation to allow for better understanding of any concerns from a Scottish perspective.

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As part of its work following on from its review of guidance last year, we look forward to seeing how Ofcom's more rigorous monitoring of public service broadcasters' production outside of London might contribute to a stronger and more sustainable sector in Scotland.

We would continue to urge Ofcom to assess the BBC's performance in delivering for viewers in Scotland, particularly following the first full year of broadcast for BBC Scotland. We would urge Ofcom to ensure that audiences in Scotland receive a service that meets the standards audiences expect of the BBC, particularly in relation to authentic portrayal.

Ofcom has recommended that the BBC should better represent the whole of the UK with authentic news and current affairs content. We would urge Ofcom to ensure that the BBC responds to this recommendation, as well as all recommendations made to the broadcaster.

We would continue to urge Ofcom to continue to deliver its statutory duties in relation to MG ALBA and welcome plans to license new small-scale digital radio services in Scotland.

Broadcasting and Scotland's languages

The Scottish government recognises that media and broadcasting make a significant contribution to the health and welfare of the UK's minority languages. We would welcome a reference within the Ofcom work plan to Gaelic alongside the references made to Welsh.

For our part, the Scottish Government attaches particular importance to the support for the Gaelic language and how the language can continue to be sustained and grow. In this context the work of MG ALBA, in partnership with the BBC, is of real significance. The output being produced is a vital part of the fabric of what will serve and sustain the Gaelic speaking community in Scotland. It also providing an important bridge between the English speaking community and Gaelic.

The Scottish Government is alert to various strategic challenges which MG ALBA faces as it looks forward. A reference within the Ofcom annual plan which recognised the importance of MG ALBA and the strategic challenges it faces looking forward would be a helpful addition to the Ofcom annual plan.

This could be combined with a commitment to encourage and support MG ALBA in taking steps and planning actions it might need to take to address its strategic challenges.

The inclusion of a reference to support the UK's indigenous languages and the role of MG ALBA and others would signal a contemporary Ofcom interest and some measure of priority to do what it can in supporting the Gaelic language and others. This would be an important and continuing part of a diverse, pluralistic future broadcasting landscape in Scotland.

Such a commitment or reference to MG ALBA within the annual plan would sit comfortably alongside any reference to the importance of indigenous languages within Ofcom's forthcoming review of public service broadcasting, something the Scottish Government would also encourage.

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Online regulation

Given the UK Government's recent announcement that it is minded to make Ofcom the new internet regulator, we look forward to hearing how Ofcom plans to fulfil this new role. The Scottish Government is concerned about the harms which user generated content on internet platforms can cause as well as the detriment some unregulated services might cause to broadcasters and newspapers. We would be interested in how you would work to help maintain the integrity of news when audiences are being exposed to unverified and potentially malicious news reports.

I would like to thank Ofcom for its work in previous years and look forward to seeing your final plan and continuing to work in partnership with you.

*Kind regards
Fiona Hyslop*

FIONA HYSLOP

cc. Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands

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