

# OFCOM REVIEW OF PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION BROADCASTING PHASE 3

## Response to the consultation by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

### Introduction

1. Bòrd na Gàidhlig (the Bòrd) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Ofcom's Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting Phase 3, and to reinforce the case for a dedicated Gaelic television service as a part of the holistic development structure being created for the language in Scotland.
2. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB). It was established in 2003, and the Bòrd is appointed by, and accountable to, Scottish Ministers. The Bòrd will work closely with the Scottish Executive to advise Scottish Ministers on Gaelic issues, and it will take responsibility for the overall direction and management of the National Plan for Gaelic as proposed in the Gaelic Language Bill, which will complete its final stage in the Scottish Parliament on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2005. The National Plan will be open to public consultation and will be agreed with Scottish Ministers before final publication.
3. Bòrd na Gàidhlig's mission is to ensure a sustainable future for the Gaelic language and culture in Scotland, and it has established the following aims:
  - Increase the number of Gaelic speakers and users of Gaelic;
  - Strengthen Gaelic as a family and community language;
  - Facilitate access to Gaelic language and culture throughout Scotland;
  - Promote and celebrate Gaelic's contribution to Scottish cultural life;
  - Extend and enhance the use of Gaelic in all aspects of life in Scotland
4. As stipulated in section 209 of The Communications Act 2003, Bòrd na Gàidhlig is one of the specified bodies, which nominate a member to the board of Seirbhis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig (Gaelic Media Service - GMS). As such Bòrd na Gàidhlig is clearly aware of the strategic planning and thinking within the Gaelic Media Service, and the Bòrd totally supports the GMS submission to this OFCOM Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting - Phase 3.
5. The Bòrd is very clear that broadcasting is a vital tool in the process of sustaining all minority and lesser-used languages, and for this reason, although broadcasting is a reserved function under the terms of the Scotland Act 1998, the Bòrd intends to include reference to broadcasting and media services in the National Plan for Gaelic. The Bòrd will seek to ensure the best possible synergy between the implementation of the National Plan for Gaelic across Scotland, and the development of a comprehensive Gaelic broadcasting service. Where a linguistic community is scattered across a country, as Gaelic speakers are spread across Scotland (and indeed the rest of the UK, and the world), a dedicated and comprehensive broadcasting service takes on a uniquely significant importance as the cultural cement that binds that community together.
6. The Bòrd has always been very clear about the importance of broadcasting to the future of Gaelic and it confirmed, from the outset, its belief that broadcasting was one of the priority action and development areas. This was further reinforced in the Bòrd's 2005-7 Operational Plan, where the importance of the Gaelic media as a part of the energising and development process is emphasised across the entire range of development sectors. (For details see [www.bord-na-gaidhlig.org.uk](http://www.bord-na-gaidhlig.org.uk))
7. This philosophy is also reflected in the submission to Ofcom's Review by the GMS, "*Gaelic broadcasting has a vital role to play in sustaining the Gaelic language: raising its profile and complementing initiatives in the fields of education, the arts, social and economic development. Quality public service broadcasting provision is considered essential to the well being of the*

*citizen/consumer in the UK; securing quality Gaelic public service broadcasting provision is absolutely crucial to ensuring a sustainable future for the Gaelic-speaking community. “*

8. With such a strategic philosophy the Bòrd is greatly encouraged by Ofcom’s view that indigenous language services should be broadcast on dedicated channels. At the same time the Bòrd would argue that there is very strong evidence that any properly balanced coverage of Scottish affairs on mainstream television channels must include reporting on Gaelic issues (in English), and also some transmission of items in the Gaelic language itself. It is the Bòrd’s view that the recently published MORI research, coupled with the level of interest in such programmes as the BBC Eorpa series, clearly demonstrates an awareness and interest in Gaelic language and culture across Scotland, which is vastly (and encouragingly) greater than the recorded number of people able to speak, read, or understand Gaelic.
9. This view is further supported by attitudinal research carried out for the Bòrd and BBC Scotland by MRUK in August 2002, which found that 60% of the population of Scotland regard Gaelic as very important /important. (compared to 40% in 1981.) The Bòrd firmly believes that Gaelic broadcasting has contributed significantly to this raised awareness of, and attitude to Gaelic. The Bòrd is equally convinced that the considerable and expanding input of quality Gaelic broadcasting by the BBC has been an extremely important element in this attitudinal and awareness raising process. For this reason alone the Bòrd would wish to record its great disappointment at Ofcom’s failure to recognise the BBC’s role in Gaelic broadcasting to date, and its clear willingness to be an active participant in future development and expansion.
10. In its evidence to the Education Committee of the Scottish Parliament in support of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill, on 15 December 2004, Bòrd na Gàidhlig restated its commitment to a dedicated and comprehensive Gaelic broadcasting service:

*Allan Campbell: Tha a h-uile rìoghachd, mion-chànan is bòrd cànan ag aontachadh gum feum plana airson cànan a leasachadh agus a thoirt air adhart a bhith a' toirt a-steach dà rud a tha bunaiteach: foghlam agus craoladh. Tha iomadach rud eile ann cuideachd, ach tha an dà rud sin bunaiteach agus tha sin fìor airson Gàidhlig.*

*Feumaidh mi ràdh, às leth a' chànain agus às leth coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig, mura b' e na rinn leithid am BBC fad iomadach bliadhna airson a' chànain, is dòcha nach biodh an cànan cho làidir an-diugh 's a tha e. Mar sin, ged nach bi craoladh mar dhleastanas fon phlana nàiseanta a*

*Col 1965*

*bheir am bòrd air adhart fon bhile, ma tha am plana sin gu bhith dha-rìribh na phlana nàiseanta dhan Ghàidhlig, feumaidh sinn sealltainn ciamar a tha craoladh gu bhith a' cur ris a' phlana. Bidh sinn a' dèanamh sin le bhith ag obair cuide ri Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig.*

*Tha e cudthromach a ràdh aon rud eile. Tha am bòrd a' cur a làn thaic ri amas Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig airson seirbheis digiteach a bhith fo smachd coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig. Tha sinn a' faicinn sin mar rud a tha uabhasach bunaiteach ann a bhith a' toirt air adhart amasan a' bhile agus amasan coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig.*

***Following is the simultaneous interpretation:***

*Every minority language group and every language board would say that two things—education and broadcasting—are basic to developing the language. Many other things are involved, but those two things are important. I should say, on behalf of the language and the Gaelic community, that if it were not for what the likes of the BBC have done over many years, perhaps the language would not be as strong as it is. Therefore, although broadcasting is not part of the national plan for Gaelic that the board will develop as a result of the bill, I envisage that, if the plan is indeed to be national, we will have to consider how broadcasting adds to it. We will do that by working with the Gaelic services committee.*

*The board fully supports the Gaelic services committee's aim for digital services. We see such services as important in meeting the objectives of the bill and the Gaelic community.”*

11. Although the Bòrd supports the GMS submission to this OFCOM review unequivocally, it also wishes to take this opportunity to re-emphasise some aspects of the GMS responses to the OFCOM review questionnaire.

#### Q1.

- The MORI research for Phase 3 of Ofcom's PSB Review "Programmes in the Nations" demonstrates the support in Scotland for Gaelic broadcasting, and also the demand for a dedicated channel.
- Gaelic is in the top four genre priorities after comedy, sport bulletins and social documentary. Gaelic programmes are obviously valued as a National/Regional phenomenon, whilst the Gaelic community seeks a service on a dedicated channel, delivering a wide range of quality Gaelic programmes.
- The audience for Gaelic programmes must be served on analogue channels in the transition period to switchover, and a significant Gaelic broadcasting presence must be maintained in the public service broadcasting system beyond switchover.
- Scottish TV and Grampian TV should continue to produce and broadcast one hour of Gaelic television each week until switchover in the Scottish TV and Grampian TV regions – not when the first UK region switches to digital.
- The Bòrd support the GMS argument that compensation for the loss of these hours in ITV future schedules, reflecting the value of the exposure to Gaelic, should be in place before Scottish Media Group ceases to produce and broadcast Gaelic programmes.

#### Q2

- The Bòrd supports the proposal to require the ITV Network Centre to take account of the higher level of regional programmes in the three Nations when devising its network schedule, as this should benefit Gaelic broadcasting, and thus the development of the language.

#### Q3

- The Bòrd supports the idea of sub-regional opt-outs within the ITV regional news service in Grampian and Scottish Television regions, both for the benefit of the wider ITV audiences and also because such an initiative could provide an opportunity to re-establish a Gaelic news insert on these ITV networks. Such an insert would however require being of sufficient duration and quality to make an impact with its audience, if it was to have any benefit for Gaelic.

#### Q4

- As stated earlier the Bòrd fully supports the OFCOM proposal that a Gaelic language service should be broadcast on a dedicated channel. However the Bòrd would reiterate the concerns expressed by GMS and others, about the OFCOM proposal options for the shape and management of a future dedicated Gaelic channel.
- The proposals to remove Gaelic from peak-time on Grampian TV and Scottish TV analogue channels, and to relieve their obligation to produce and broadcast an agreed number of hours of Gaelic programmes, is at odds with the findings of the MORI research referred to earlier. SMG's proposals will result in a loss of about 52 hours of Gaelic programmes a year. At a time when the Scottish Parliament is about to bring forward historic legislation to secure the future of Gaelic, and when awareness and support for Gaelic is apparently growing, it seems extraordinary that this kind of proposal could be ventured, let alone accepted. The Bòrd strongly oppose SMG's request and would ask Ofcom to give regard to the views of the viewers as demonstrated by MORI and others, and to

reject this request. In this regard the Bòrd agrees with Ofcom Chair and Chief Executive's observation that *“the forces of change are approaching more rapidly than the understanding of the consequences.”* The Bòrd believes that much of the change in store for Gaelic will be positive and beneficial, and it believes that all partners in this process wish such progress, but the Bòrd also believes that this process must be monitored and managed with skill and sensitivity.

- As in so many other genre of programming on both radio and television, the BBC has been central to the development of Gaelic broadcasting, and simultaneously hugely important to the very survival of the Gaelic language, and the awareness and celebration of its culture. It would be difficult to conceive, and worrying to contemplate, the revival and development of Gaelic including the enactment of the Gaelic Language Bill, without a firm and positive commitment and involvement by the BBC. Its past laudable contribution to Gaelic entitles it to that involvement, and our belief in the case for public service broadcasting entitles the Gaelic community to the Corporation's continuing and growing investment in Gaelic.

***BnaG - 12.04.05***