

Blair Jenkins
Chairman
Scottish Broadcasting Commission
5 Atlantic Quay
Glasgow
G2 8LU

5 December 2007

Dear Mr Jenkins

SCOTTISH BROADCASTING COMMISSION

I am writing to you as Chairman of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission to provide you with some preliminary comments on behalf of Equity, which may be helpful as you develop your recommendations.

As I am sure are aware Equity is a trade union that represents 37,000 performers and creative personnel who work across the whole spectrum of entertainment throughout the UK. We have approximately 2,000 members who live in Scotland.

Due to the geographical concentration of work in the entertainment industry a significant number of our Scottish members will spend some of their career based in London. The need to pursue work in London has often been driven by the lack of work on offer in Scotland, which has been exacerbated by the level of television production. The public service broadcasters spend on production in Scotland has always been below what you would expect as a pro rata proportion based on either revenue raised in Scotland as a proportion of a UK whole, or on a per capita basis.

This problem is demonstrated in figures from Ofcom on the recent fall in the proportion of network budgets spent in Scotland, which fell from 6 per cent to 3 per cent between 2004 and 2006, despite the fact that Scots make up 9 per cent of the population.

KEY GENRES

Equity welcomed the comments you made in November before the Scottish Parliament's Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee regarding the importance of top-quality drama production in Scotland. As you have quite rightly asserted drama is the highest-value genre, both in terms of production funding

and for developing the skills, talent and infrastructure required for a sustainable television production sector. Moreover, drama production is most often the genre which can be sold or exported overseas in order to generate secondary revenue for the Scottish economy and for the performers involved.

Consequently, Equity believes that the biggest boost for Scottish television production would be for broadcasters to establish and commission returning drama series for the UK network that are set and shot in Scotland. This could build on the successful production of a programme like *River City*, which did not benefit from nationwide transmission, but had a positive impact by providing opportunities for local talent and demonstrating the ability of Scotland to produce continuing drama.

An example of the impact of returning drama of this nature outside London, which has been widely quoted in recent years, is *Dr Who* and its spin-off programmes including *Torchwood* (both produced in Cardiff). This has had a positive impact on ongoing investment and in boosting the creative sector in Wales and there is no doubt that this approach has had a real and lasting effect.

However, if the Commission is minded to promote such a similar approach amongst broadcasters and producers in Scotland, Equity would stress the need to ensure that there are real opportunities for local talent. The production itself must be truly embedded within Scotland and those involved must not always “parachuted in”. While inward investment is vital to sustaining film and television production, there must be methods of ensuring the involvement of local writers, actors, performers and creative talent (see below).

Equity would also stress the importance of comedy production as another key genre in which Scottish performers have an excellent track record. From Billy Connolly to Armando Iannucci to Frankie Boyle, Scotland has proved an excellent breeding ground for original comedy performances.

In recent years this has also led to a number of successful commissions for the BBC, from the creation of *Rab C. Nesbitt* to more recent production of *Chewin’ the Fat* and its spin-off programme *Still Game*, as well as programmes like *Dear Green Place* and *Legit*.

However, all channels need to do more to encourage a greater spread of commissioning and explore long-term methods of developing and sustaining the talent and original ideas generated in Scotland. It should also be noted that many of these new and original ideas are developed as radio series. Therefore continued support for comedy and drama both on BBC Scotland and nationally on BBC Radio 4 are essential, notwithstanding the significant financial pressures faced by the BBC following its disappointing licence fee settlement.

CASTING PROCESS

On the occasions where programmes are produced in Scotland, Equity believes that the broadcasters and independent production companies should seek to ensure that actors, performers and creative talent from Scotland get a fair chance to be involved. In practice this has to involve measures to spread the employment opportunities and casting sessions more widely than at present.

It is insufficient for broadcasters and producers to insist that casting and recruitment for their programmes must always take place in London alone. This practice only acts as a further disincentive for talented performers to stay in Scotland and work within the creative and cultural sector. This can be damaging creatively and economically, as it can further diminish the small but talented network of creative individuals working in Scottish television.

As a result Equity's view is that at least some of the casting sessions should take in or near to the production location. This is a tangible measure that could be taken by broadcasters and producers at minimal cost, but will maximise the involvement and engagement of the local creative community. This will ensure that the net is cast more widely, in order to ensure that the best and most appropriate performing talent is involved in the production.

INCENTIVES AND INVESTMENT

The imbalance in television production outside of London undoubtedly points to a market failure. This is demonstrated by the fact that Ofcom found 63 per cent of all original television productions are made in London or the M25. Therefore Equity continues to support intervention to ensure that television production is able to prosper across all parts of the UK. In order to be effective, this intervention must be focussed on the broadcasters, but it may come in a number of different forms depending on the circumstances facing the broadcaster in each case.

For example, the 50 per cent target for out of London network production by volume and value, which Ofcom has introduced for ITV1, could also be used as a suitable long-term target for the BBC. However, the way in which the broad quotas for national and regional production are defined currently is not helpful, as they do not guarantee a level of production spending or output from Scotland. Therefore it may also be necessary to consider the encouragement of production in individual nations and regions, as well as specific genre commissioning, in order to incentivise the production of specific high value genres out of London.

Clearly there should be a regulatory, institutional and financial mix of options designed with the objective of securing production in Scotland. It is an unfortunate fact the Scotland fared poorly following the BBC's "Out of London Review". As a result the broadcaster now has a state of the art building at Pacific Quay in Glasgow but a limited commitment to ongoing investment in programme making.

A bolder move would have been to examine the possibility of a major transferral of commissioning power and decision-making involved in moving a whole channel to Scotland. This approach would be somewhat different to the BBC's prospective move to Manchester for particular elements of its programming and would involve the headquarters of a channel being located in a different part of the UK.

Equity also believes that greater efforts should be made to ensure that monitoring of production activity is properly able to reflect the amount of activity taking place in Scotland. In particular, regional production should only be claimed for a nation

or region where it reflects a real impact or benefit for that area. It is unhelpful and misleading for a programme to be labelled as a BBC Scotland production if it was actually produced elsewhere, providing no benefit to Scotland economically or culturally.

PUBLIC SERVICE/COMMERCIAL

Plurality in the provision of public service broadcasting is important for all parts of the UK. Therefore Equity believes that it is vital to maintain STV as a viable ITV company in Scotland, both as a producer and commissioner of programming.

The provision of public service broadcasting and production cannot be left only to the public sector in the form of a shrinking BBC and occasional commissions for Channel 4. There must also be a genuine commercial competitor in Scotland in order to maintain a mixed economy. For Equity members this also means that there will be more work opportunities and a better chance of investment from STV in Scotland only drama like *High Times* as well as in network productions like *Taggart*, which is now longest running detective series anywhere in world.

GAELIC BROADCASTING

Equity notes the importance of the Gaelic language to a small but significant community of people in Scotland. As a result the future of Gaelic broadcasting is important economically as well as socially and culturally. Equity has previously supported the efforts of SMG, the Gaelic Media Service and Ofcom to develop a Gaelic digital channel. Consequently we would urge the BBC Trust to approve proposals to introduce a Gaelic channel.

I hope you find these comments helpful in making your deliberations. If you have any further questions or comments regarding Equity's response please contact Lorne Boswell, Equity Scottish Secretary on 0141 248 2472 or lboswell@equity.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine Payne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'C' and a distinct 'P'.

Christine Payne
General Secretary