Scottish Broadcasting — what now?

Plans to transform broadcasting services in Scotland — providing new opportunities to develop talent, ideas and the creative economy — came a step closer according to an announcement by The Scottish Government.

Culture Minister Fiona Hyslop has asked former chair of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission (SBC) Blair Jenkins to lead an independent panel of experts which will investigate options for establishing and funding a new Scottish digital network providing public service broadcasting.

The SBC's 2008 report concluded that a digital network of broadcast and online content would be the most effective way both to address the deficit of public service broadcasting in Scotland, and to provide secure and sustainable competition to the BBC. The panel will take the conclusions of the SBC's report Platform for Success as its starting point.

Recommendations are expected to be with Ministers early in 2011 and will include consideration of findings on the viability of local television expected to come from the UK Government-commissioned Shott Review in December 2010.

Ms Hyslop said:

"After more than 50 years of opt-out television services, a dedicated Scottish digital network would completely transform our perspective.

"There is unanimous support for the network in the Scottish Parliament, and recognition of its potential to develop Scotland's broadcasting sector, provide more high-quality programmes for Scottish audiences, and create much-needed competition for the BBC.

"The key difficulty in establishing it has been agreeing how it should be funded. That is why I have asked the panel to explore that issue and come up with proposals by the middle of January 2011.

"It is estimated that the network, alongside the increased commitments from existing public service broadcasters which we are starting to see, would double the economic impact of the broadcasting industry and the number of jobs supported in Scotland.

"Scottish audiences deserve their own network, embracing television, online and interactive content. Research for the Commission showed more than 80 per cent of viewers were interested in a new Scottish digital TV channel.

"UK Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt complained at the Edinburgh International Television Festival about the 'chronic over-centralisation' of broadcasting in the UK. I want the independent panel to make recommendations which can help the UK Government address this problem by coming up with proposals for how a digital network – with scope for local opt-outs – could be established in Scotland.

"A new public service broadcasting network would, of course, have to be demonstrably independent of Government in its editorial polices and management, and I have also asked the Panel to take account of that in their recommendations."

Blair Jenkins added:

"I'm delighted to be chairing the panel and to be working with such distinguished and talented people. The creation of a new Scottish Digital Network was the most important recommendation made by the SBC and it was singled out for support in the motion backed by all the parties in the Scottish Parliament. We now need to build on the very wide public and political enthusiasm for this initiative and come up with the best options for funding. The case for the network has been made;

now the investment has to be secured."

The members of the Scottish Digital Network Panel are:

* Blair Jenkins (Chair); former Chair of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission
* Professor Neil Blain; Head of Film, Media and Journalism at Stirling University
* Judith Mackenzie; Investment Director at Downing Corporate Finance
* Charles McGhee; media consultant and former Editor of The Herald
* David Wightman; former member of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission and founder and former CEO of Creative Edge Software

The panel's remit:

"Taking as a starting point the conclusions of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission, to conduct an independent investigation into different options and models for establishing and funding a Scottish Digital Network which would be able to provide a sustainable source of competition to the BBC for public service broadcasting within Scotland. The panel should produce recommendations on how such a network could be established and funded. In doing so, the panel should take account of:

* The need for any new public service broadcasting network to be demonstrably independent of Government in its editorial policies and management
* The economic, cultural and democratic importance of broadcasting to a modern, outward-looking Scotland and its creative industries
* Relevant findings on the viability of local television as they emerge from Nicholas Shott's review, which has been commissioned by the UK Government
* The potential market impact on other Scottish media

organisations of any proposed funding sources
* The impact of technological convergence on the way in which
media content is consumed