
Education and Culture Committee

Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future

Equity

Introductory Comments

1. Equity is the trade union representing actors, performers and other creative professionals working in Scotland and the rest of the UK across the arts sectors and the creative industries including in drama, comedy and entertainment productions, opera, musical theatre and dance.
2. The nature and adequacy of public support for the broadcasting and the cultural industries in Scotland is a core concern for our members. It is a critical issue for our members who usually work across all media, (theatre whether subsidised or in the commercial sector, television, film, radio and on line).
3. Equity, as an organisation, is non party political and is not making any recommendation to its members about the forthcoming referendum on Scottish Independence. However, we recognise that, irrespective of the result, there is liable to be change following the referendum. We believe that broadcasting will be an area of likely change and therefore have framed policies that promote our members' best interests. These policies are equally robust before the referendum as they will be after it, irrespective of the result.
4. Equity members take a particular interest in the availability of work in the broadcast sector in Scotland and we welcome this inquiry. We would also welcome the opportunity to provide additional oral evidence to the Committee

Scope of Equity's response

5. Equity's specific interests in FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION are outwith the remit of this enquiry so we will limit ourselves to brief comment EARLY YEARS, CHILDCARE AND EMPLOYABLITY but will concentrate our submission BROADCASTING AND CULTURE.

Early Years, Childcare and Employability

6. Whilst literacy and numeracy are essential targets of any formal educational system, the confidence and communication skills that children gain from involvement in 'the expressive arts' is of lifelong benefit to pupils. Under the Curriculum for Excellence, we hope that involvement in 'the expressive arts' is prioritised and adequately funded. The old 5-14 Expressive Arts Guidelines were very positive but they were not universally resourced. Confident school leavers are much more likely to find employment than those lacking in communication skills.

Broadcasting and Culture

7. Equity believes that

- Scotland should have a National Broadcaster and that it should be created by open competition.

- the BBC should continue to operate in Scotland after the referendum but that it should adopt a policy of fairer production spend-proportionate to population.

- the BBC should be more accountable to the people of Scotland

- Government policy should be designed to secure greater investment in film and television production in Scotland

8. Equity supports calls for a National Broadcaster for Scotland. However the obligations on the National Broadcaster need to be thought through and developed as well as the resources that will be offered to it. Once this is done, we call on the present and future Scottish Governments to invite applications for the role of National Broadcaster and to make the appointment through an open competition for a specific period of time. Equity would like to stress to the committee that broadcasting and media are about more than news and current affairs. The most watched and culturally significant programming is entertainment and drama. It is vital to Scotland's cultural landscape that investment in quality drama is not an afterthought.
9. Existing broadcasters, as well as others should be encouraged to apply to become the National Broadcaster. The Scottish Government should

actively encourage plurality in broadcasting and be open to the best ideas wherever they come from.

10. After much debate Equity believes the BBC should continue to operate in Scotland after the referendum as part of the social union that will continue to exist across these islands, whatever the result.
11. The BBC is the jewel in the crown of British broadcasting. It is a major part of the richest heritage of public service broadcasting in any country in the world.
12. From a performer's point of view, the exposure that can be achieved through the BBC is essential in the English Speaking World market. BBC Worldwide, BBC America, the iplayer and a sophisticated sales and commissioning network all combine to give unparalleled exposure to BBC productions. Performers' careers depend on such exposure. It would be almost impossible to recreate this distribution system from scratch.
13. However the balance of BBC expenditure is unfair. The BBC is too London-centric. Equity calls for a redistribution of the BBC's production expenditure to ensure that it is proportionate to population. It might be easier to achieve this if the control on commissioning within the BBC is also de-centralised. This is as much an issue for parts of England as it is for Scotland.
14. Equity has long supported the idea that at least one of the BBC's television Channels and one of its radio networks should be based in Scotland.
15. However the BBC has been under attack from every UK government for the last 35 years. The BBC Charter is exclusively determined by Westminster. In order to protect the BBC from the pressure and interference from Westminster politicians, the BBC should become more answerable to the people of Scotland (and by implication of Wales and Northern Ireland).
16. Television and film are high tech, high reward industries. Television exports from the UK as a whole amounted to £1.22bn in 2012. It is crucial that Scotland is competitive in attracting inward investment in film and television production. Competition from London, South Wales, Belfast and the Isle of Man is already fierce. Equity calls on the Scottish Government to accelerate plans increase investment in the production capacity of Scotland.

