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BBC Scotland 2020

The BBC is at the heart of life in Scotland, just as it is in the UK: the dominant cultural force and the biggest cultural asset. Through commissioning for Scotland it reflects Scotland back to itself. But BBC Scotland remains too much of the branch office of an empire, subject to the imperial rule of the centre in London.

Let's imagine how it could be if things were different, the revolution and flowering that could follow with a simple change: **the money raised for the BBC in Scotland should be spent from Scotland.** It is shocking that it is otherwise. Scotland would still be paying its fair share towards the programmes that are made elsewhere and screened in Scotland. But Scotland would decide what is made here. Money gives power.

An example from history: up until the mid 1990s the budget for network drama made from Scotland was in Scotland. Head of Drama Scotland proposed how it was spent, and commissioning was a discussion. There were many network dramas made in Scotland, telling Scottish stories in Scottish voices. But then the money was centralised (ie went to London). TV drama from Scotland has been in decline ever since. Scotland needs to regain responsibility for that spend. Just as it is inconceivable that the judiciary or education could be outwith Scotland's control, so it should be with the BBC.

Lets envision an independent or devomax BBC Scotland for 2020 that is trusted to make its own decisions. It would be a huge cultural and economic boost to Scotland. This could be achieved through the plan of a channel for Scotland, making its own programmes and buying in from elsewhere. In the digital world this would be available to - and benefit - all of the UK. An authentic and real BBC One Scotland at last.

I'm writing this on the train back from London. I went down on the sleeper last night for a two hour meeting at New Broadcasting House for a new project. It went well and I was in time to catch the 12.30 back home....

It's Scotland 2020. Viewers have ownership of a channel that reflects their modern country back to them, whose concerns and interests they share. They probably have to switch to BBC England to watch Eastenders, but that is easy enough in this digital age. Producers of drama and documentaries, like their counterparts in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Ireland, go to the international market place to sell their ideas, and to coproduce, knowing that they had the backing of their home country. And once again they host market events in Scotland, bringing in producers from around the world to share their stories.

As part of the settlement with the BBC the CBeebies channel and BBC Children's commissioning came to Scotland in 2017, adding a specialist genre to the range of production in Scotland and providing a nursery slope for new factual and drama talent and production companies.

BBC Scotland, in partnership with Creative Scotland and the new commercial feature film fund underwritten by the Scottish Government, has become a major player in film production, using the new studio and almost rivaling Outlander in recognising and exploiting the potential for great stories from this landscape, this culture. It was a huge feather in their cap when in 2019 Sigma Films won a contract for a drama series from the Starz network in the US, following their six part drama for BBC Scotland. Alongside the contemporary stories, the new genre of Scottish historical 'westerns' with Tartan, claymore, dirk and pistol has come of age.

Companies of scale across all genres feed this demand. Some are owned elsewhere, many owned and run from here, with branch offices in other territories, like London. The decision in Scotland in 2016 not to create a BBC Scotland Production Studio, but to become purely a commissioning body, while retaining news, radio and learning, freed up money to support the new channel. And, after a tough period of transition, renewed the creativity of the recently released production staff, a successful wake-up call. This bold decision was copied in other areas of the BBC in 2019, when it is recognised that the experiment to launch BBC Studios as the largest production outfit in the land, with the biggest overhead and no guaranteed output was doomed to failure from the start. It merely delayed the inevitable.

The bonus in Scotland is that we have the most vibrant production sector in the UK, boosted by the collaboration between BBC Scotland, Creative Scotland, Highland and Island Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise, together with input from Scottish Development International which has created the best conditions in which production in Scotland can thrive. The producer growth programme launched by Scottish Enterprise with Creative Scotland in 2017 has poured £5 million into the sector, and attracted another £5 million in match funding from investors. In 2020 Scotland at last rivals Northern Ireland in taking its producers seriously, and is reaching that target of half a billion pounds worth of production a year. This is boosted by Scotland's share of income from BBC Worldwide, with BBC Digital now established as a global online brand to rival Netflix and Amazon Prime.

True, the airlines and some London hotels bemoan the lack of Scottish producers visiting for half the week, cruising around the commissioners cap in hand. But the traffic in the other direction has more than made up the difference for the airlines. And hotel rooms in Cumbernauld are at a premium.....

That's us pulling into Glasgow Central. Last night's sleeper caught up with me. Must have been dreaming...

John Archer