

Letter from Paul Holleran, NUJ

1 October 2012

I have been made aware that Messrs McQuarrie and Entwistle have declined your invitation to attend the Culture committee to answer questions about BBC Scotland and feel that I must inform you of the NUJ's concerns regarding that organisation.

The unions NUJ and BECTU are involved in a major consultation on the latest round of job cuts and savings under the heading Delivering Quality First (DQF) at BBC Scotland. A target of 35 job reductions has been set, including 17 in News and Current Affairs.

It is clear that there will not be enough volunteers for redundancy in this area as only one person has so far come forward to accept the deal. This inevitably means we are heading towards a conflict with industrial action a real possibility if any compulsory redundancies are announced.

In an attempt to prevent this scenario the joint unions have called for a moratorium on the move to select people for redundancy (set to start October 15th). At a meeting last Thursday we told management that we believed the selection process was flawed and unfair and called for a halt.

We had been informed the day before that management were "working on a bid" for funding from London to cover the Commonwealth games and Independence referendum. However they could not tell us

- how much they were asking for
- what the timescale was for submitting the bid
- when they expected the extra funding to be available in Scotland.

We requested formally that they fast track the relevant decisions and make that information available to the joint unions. We asked them then to enter into meaningful talks with the unions on how that money would be spent in resourcing these important issues.

It would be fair to say the response shocked those present on the union side of the table. Among the management statements were suggestions that

- this additional funding would not affect the BBC Scotland business plans up to 2016-17;
- that both the Commonwealth Games and Independence referendum were "one-off events";
- "the referendum would be over in one night";
- "the Commonwealth Games won't be like the Olympics";
- "it will just be business as usual".

The comments give us major concerns as to the management attitude towards resourcing BBC Scotland. This is an opportunity to negotiate meaningful funding packages at a time when jobs are being cut. We believe there is a real prospect to ensure financing to

- save jobs at risk;

- prevent a serious industrial conflict;
- resource coverage of the Commonwealth Games to have a similar impact to the Olympics;
- set up and resource a political/news and current affairs unit to ensure a quality journalistic reportage and analysis of the Independence referendum.

I have written to Ken McQuarrie expressing our concerns and I would ask your committee to look at this serious abrogation of responsibility by BBC management and come to your own conclusions.