

# BBC ALBA review

# Public consultation

October 2009



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## Introduction

BBC ALBA is a Gaelic language television channel currently available on satellite and via BBC iPlayer. It aims to serve Gaelic speakers, those learning the language, those that might wish to learn, and those interested in the language and culture. It aims to reflect and support Gaelic culture, identity and heritage.

At the BBC Trust it's our responsibility to get the best out of the BBC for licence fee payers. One of the ways of ensuring that we do this is through the Public Value Test. Following a Public Value Test, the Trust approved the launch of BBC ALBA last year. One of the conditions we set was that after a year of operation we should examine how well the channel is performing. We are now beginning this review.

The review is in two parts. Part 1 will look at two key areas: whether the channel is achieving wide appeal to viewers beyond existing Gaelic speakers and contributing to the broader educational strategy for the language.

Part 2 of the review will consider whether to make the channel available to more people by putting it on Freeview. The BBC Executive has suggested a way this could be done. It would mean removing the BBC's network radio stations from Freeview in Scotland-only when BBC ALBA was on air. This is usually between the hours of 17:00 and 23:30 each weekday and after 4pm at the weekend. This would allow the television channel to be on air at this time instead.

The stations that would be affected are BBC Radios 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 live, 5 live Sports Extra, BBC 1Xtra, BBC Asian Network, BBC 6 Music, BBC Radio 7, BBC Radio Scotland, BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and BBC World Service. These stations would still be available as usual via a combination of FM/AM/LW, DAB and online.

We will also decide whether the current Gaelic zone on BBC Two should remain in place.

To help inform your thoughts this document explains why we are carrying out the review, what we are trying to find out, and the specific questions we would like your views on. Alongside this document we have also published a submission by the BBC Executive which sets out what it thinks of the channel so far, and what it would like to do in the future.

The closing date for responses to our consultation is 18 January 2010. You can respond online or, if you would prefer, email or post:

BBC Trust (BBC ALBA review), 180 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5QZ or [trust.consultations@bbc.co.uk](mailto:trust.consultations@bbc.co.uk)

## What is BBC ALBA?

The BBC Trust licensed BBC ALBA in August 2008 and the channel launched on 19 September 2008 on digital satellite. The channel is available on Sky 168 and Freesat 110.

BBC ALBA is the first BBC licence fee funded television service to operate as a partnership, the basis for which is a legal agreement reached between the BBC and MG ALBA in 2007

BBC ALBA aims to serve Gaelic speakers, those learning the language, those that might wish to learn, and those interested in the language and culture. It aims to reflect and support Gaelic culture, identity and heritage.

BBC ALBA seeks to serve:

- Existing Gaelic speakers and learners – providing a credible, relevant service for Gaelic speakers and learners
- Non-Gaelic speakers within the wider UK population – providing content which offers alternative viewing to audiences and communities of interest across Scotland and the rest of the UK

BBC ALBA aims to:

- Help attract new speakers to the language
- Deliver a better service to the Gaelic audience
- Offer alternative content and more choice to the Scottish audience
- Offer an international perspective involving other languages and cultures

The channel is on air from 17:00 – 23.30pm on weekdays and after 16:00 at weekends. When the TV service is not on air a sustaining service is provided by Radio nan Gàidheal with accompanying text and information.

## Why are we doing a review?

BBC ALBA was approved by the Trust following a full Public Value Test (More details on the PVT process can be found on our website at [www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust)).

The approval was subject to a number of conditions. Two of those conditions were:

- The service's progress towards its aims, particularly around education and achieving wider appeal beyond existing speakers, should be evaluated in a review by the Trust, alongside consideration of the most appropriate methods of distribution (including DTT), before digital switchover commences in central and northern Scotland in 2010. The continuation of the Service Licence will be subject to the review providing the Trust with sufficient evidence of the service's performance.
- The future removal of the opt-out from BBC Two should also be subject to the review before digital switchover commences in central and northern Scotland in 2010.

The Trust is now carrying out this review, which we aim to complete before switchover begins in 2010.

## What are we trying to find out?

The review will consist of two parts:

### Part One: Assessment of public value

As well as assessing how well the channel is serving Gaelic speakers there are three main areas for review following from the PVT:

#### 1. Is sufficient emphasis being placed on attracting new speakers to the Gaelic language?

This element of the review will focus on whether links with partner organisations are delivering public value, the use and effectiveness of subtitling, and the degree to which the service is targeting learners of all ages and abilities, and how iPlayer capacity is being used to support the educational strategy.

#### 2. Is the service appealing more widely beyond Gaelic speakers?

When considering the degree to which BBC ALBA is able to appeal more widely than simply Gaelic speakers, the Trust will look at the current viewing figures, which programmes are driving them and how this affects content selection. We will look at the profile of users and whether audiences believe the channel to be high quality, innovative, engaging and challenging. We will also look at the channel's marketing strategy, and assess the degree to which the lack of carriage on cable has restricted use.

#### 3. Is the service operating effectively?

The Trust will want to be satisfied that the management structure of BBC ALBA is working effectively on a daily basis and that there are good working relations between the BBC and MG ALBA. We will also want to understand how the channel is ensuring editorial compliance.

### Part Two: Future strategy and funding

#### 4. How should the BBC's Gaelic provision be delivered in the future?

On the basis of the evidence collected in the three elements above, the Trust will decide whether the service currently represents good value for money for licence fee payers. Should sufficient public value have been demonstrated, the Trust will then examine how greater public value could be created in the future. This part of the review will examine the most suitable forms of distribution, including whether the service should be carried on DTT (at the expense of network radio for the stated hours), how crucial cable carriage is for success, whether there is potential for broadband expansion and whether the Gaelic zones should remain on BBC Two. The Executive's proposal to remove a number of radio stations from Freeview in Scotland-only did not form part of the original PVT. We currently remain open on the question as to whether a PVT would be required on the proposal to remove the BBC's network radio stations from Freeview in Scotland-only when BBC ALBA was on air (currently between the hours of 17:00 and 23:30 each weekday and after 16:00 at weekends<sup>1</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> The BBC Agreement (available on the Trust's website) states that a Public Value Test must be applied before a decision is taken to make any significant change to the UK Public Services. Whether any proposals for change meet this criterion of

## What have the BBC Executive told us?

Alongside our consultation we are publishing a detailed assessment from the BBC Executive as to how the channel has performed so far, and what they would like to do in the future. The following extract is taken from their Executive Summary, and sets out their view on the areas we are considering:

### Performance

BBC ALBA, the first BBC-licensed service to be managed in partnership, launched on 19 September 2008 and was welcomed by a broad cross-section of society in Scotland as well as many of the country's political parties. MG ALBA (Gaelic Media Service), a funder of Gaelic television programming in Scotland since 1993, now co-manage BBC ALBA supplying the partnership with circa £10m of its £14m annual content budget. MG ALBA is funded by the Scottish Government. BBC ALBA is distributed on digital satellite (Sky and Freesat) only, which is currently available to 43% of adults in Scotland.

The Gaelic-speaking population welcomed BBC ALBA, appreciating the quality and variety of the BBC ALBA offering. Viewing is highest in peaktime and for an average of 6 hours per week. The most appreciated programmes in quarter one 2009 had an Appreciation Index<sup>2</sup> of 90% or over.

BBC ALBA has demonstrated an ability to attract ordinary Scots towards Gaelic television. For every Gaelic speaker it has drawn since launch, BBC ALBA has attracted at least three non-Gaelic speakers with a weekly reach of 600,000 at launch and an average 15+ minute reach of over 220,000 since (5% of the Scottish population). The service has the greatest reach in the Highlands and Islands (11% reach) and appeals to a broad range of demographics. Music, sport and factual programmes have attracted non-Gaelic speakers to BBC ALBA.

In Scotland, BBC ALBA has a higher approval score than BBC Two, BBC Three and BBC Four. 45% of adults in Scotland agree that BBC ALBA is a worthwhile thing for the BBC to be spending the licence fee on, while only 30% disagree.

BBC ALBA makes a strong contribution to the delivery of the BBC's public purposes in Scotland. ALBA provides a home for Gaelic speakers and helps represent this community to the rest of the Nation. ALBA broadcasts the only televised Gaelic news service, as well as a wide range of other programming which showcases Gaelic culture. It has an explicit role in encouraging and supporting those learning the Gaelic language.

Increased interest is already being shown in learning the language. The partnership is working with a forum of organisations leading Gaelic language learning development to ensure the strategic provision of learning resources across BBC media platforms.

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significance is a matter for the judgment of the Trust. In exercising that judgment, the Trust must have regard to the following considerations:

- (a) impact – the extent to which the change is likely to affect relevant users and others
- (b) the financial implications of the change
- (c) novelty – the extent to which the change would involve the BBC in a new area of activity for the BBC, as yet untested
- (d) duration – how long the activity will last

<sup>2</sup> An Appreciation Index (AI) is a score between 0 and 100 which is used as an indicator of the public's approval for a particular television programme

BBC ALBA has a range of new programme brands with young and new personalities emerging, promising to make Gaelic more attractive to new audiences. BBC ALBA's content strategy for children and young people is mainly directed at those in Gaelic-speaking households or those in Gaelic-medium schools.

The independent production sector has engaged with BBC ALBA benefitting from the greater volume needed to sustain a channel. Supply contracts have been awarded to three independents allowing for stability, skill-building and cost-effective production. BBC ALBA holds regular commissioning rounds and has worked with 28 companies in 2008 (26 independents, STV and BBC). MG ALBA spent 74% of its content budget in 2008/09 on suppliers outside the BBC. There is evidence that both production capability and quality of programme ideas amongst producers seeking to supply BBC ALBA exceeds current investment.

## Future channel strategy

Investment from the BBC and Government would be prioritised on content which will attract the wider Scotland-wide audience e.g. factual, music and sport; programming which will better serve the Gaelic-speaking community, in news, drama and general entertainment; and the development of BBC ALBA's cross platform offering for Gaelic language learners and for children. As noted in the Collaboration Agreement between the BBC and MG ALBA the service has ambition to grow originated output aiming for similar levels to S4C and TG4 by the end of the current charter, subject to available funding.

BBC ALBA will work with partners and, using [bbcalba.co.uk](http://bbcalba.co.uk) as a destination for learners, it will provide a world-class non-linear home for Gaelic learning. A clear demand is emerging for a non-linear audiovisual learning environment with scaled and varied language-learning tools to match personal needs.

MG ALBA and the BBC believe that their partnership has served Gaelic and Scottish broadcasting better than options of collaboration. The continuous affirmation of co-ownership is key to keeping the partnership strong and focused on future achievements.

By pooling people, resources and skills the partnership is enabling a new confidence in Gaelic language broadcasting which may allow the language to gain status in society, grow, and move towards the mainstream of Scottish life. BBC ALBA enhances plurality within Scottish public service television broadcasting and is well positioned to cater for underserved niches of Scottish life. The first year of operation demonstrates significant progress. BBC Management has reaffirmed its commitment to the service.

## Distribution options

BBC Management believes there is a strong RQIV case for DTT distribution of BBC ALBA. We estimate that DTT distribution would increase reach by a further 150,000-180,000 individuals in Scotland, generating an additional 250,000 viewing hours, by the end of Scottish DSO (mid-2011).

Capacity and financial constraints mean that in order to distribute BBC ALBA on DTT another BBC service would have to be taken down in Scotland. Three services, eTV, BBC Parliament and BBC's radio services, were considered as candidates for removal.

Although removing BBC Radio services from DTT would carry material risks, it is the view of BBC Management that removing them from DTT during ALBA hours of broadcast (1700-2300) would have the lowest RQIV impact. Removing BBC Radio from DTT could affect between 60,000-90,000 listeners during ALBA broadcast hours, following digital switchover. We estimate this could lead to a loss of up to 130,000 listening hours. The majority (120,000 hours) of these lost listening hours would relate to the BBC's analogue radio services (Radios 1-5 live, BBC Radio Scotland and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal).

## **Our approach**

In conducting our review of BBC ALBA, we will gather data and evidence from stakeholders within and outside the BBC and MG ALBA including:

### **Audiences**

We will be undertaking a public consultation to gain views from the public and other stakeholders including Audience Councils, particularly Audience Council Scotland, Ofcom and relevant Gaelic Organisations.

### **Audience Council Scotland**

The Council's remit is to engage with licence payers and report to the BBC Trust on the BBC's performance in Scotland, advising on issues arising and assessing how well the BBC is meeting the needs of licence payers in Scotland. It is consulted on relevant proposals for new services, and on reviews of BBC service licences.

### **Ofcom**

Ofcom is the regulator for the UK communications industries, with responsibilities across television, radio, telecommunications and wireless communications services. Ofcom was involved in the original PVT, which resulted in the approval of BBC ALBA, providing the Market Impact Assessment.

### **The BBC Executive and MG ALBA**

We will examine current performance of the BBC ALBA in terms of operational responsibilities and the experience of audiences. We will also analyse the various research undertaken by the BBC and MG ALBA into the performance of the channel.

We will interview staff within both BBC management and MG ALBA.

### **External stakeholders**

We will also conduct a number of interviews with stakeholders.

### **The Media**

We will consider press coverage and public debate about BBC ALBA.

### **Additional bespoke research**

We may also undertake some additional quantitative and qualitative research in order to fill any evidence gaps from the audience perspective.

## How can you be involved?

As part of the Trust's review we are holding a 12 week public consultation; we want to hear from you. Although respondents are open to submit their views and comments on any aspect of the Trust's review, we welcome views on the questions set out below.

### Consultation questions

#### Part 1: How well is the channel performing?

1. BBC ALBA aims to serve Gaelic speakers, those learning the language, those that might wish to learn, and those interested in the language and culture. It aims to reflect and support Gaelic culture, identity and heritage. How well is BBC ALBA meeting these aims?
2. BBC ALBA is supposed to appeal beyond existing Gaelic speakers to those who are learning the language, or who are interested in the culture. Do you think the channel appeals beyond just Gaelic speakers?
3. BBC ALBA is supposed to work with other Gaelic organisations to help raise awareness of the language and support plans to get more people learning the language. What evidence do you have that the channel is contributing to the wider educational strategy for the language?
4. Is enough emphasis being placed on attracting new speakers to the Gaelic language by the channel?
5. Is the channel successfully working in partnership with other organisations?
6. What is the impact of these partnerships?
7. What more could the channel do to work in partnership?
8. BBC ALBA is the first BBC television channel to be delivered in partnership with another organisation. MG ALBA, the BBC's partner, is funded by the Government to provide television channels in the Gaelic language. Do you think the partnership is working well? How do you believe the partnership could be enhanced?
9. Do you believe the commissioning structures are working well?
10. Does the BBC/MG ALBA partnership have good relationships with stakeholders and industry?
11. What areas could enhance the relationships?
12. Do you think the service is good value for money?

**Part 2: How should the channel be made available in the future?**

1. Would you like to see BBC ALBA on Freeview?
2. In Scotland, on Freeview only, when BBC ALBA is on air (usually between the hours of 17:00 and 23:30 each weekday and after 16:00 at weekends), would you prefer to have either:
  - a) BBC ALBA or;
  - b) BBC Radios 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 live, 5 live Sports Extra, BBC 1Xtra, BBC Asian Network, BBC 6 Music, BBC Radio 7, BBC Radio Scotland, BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and BBC World Service

In the event that option a) is chosen the radio stations would still be available on a combination of FM/AM/LW, DAB and online. In the event that option b) is chosen BBC ALBA would still be available via satellite and online through BBC iPlayer.

3. Do you currently listen to BBC Radio stations on Freeview?
4. Should Gaelic programming continue to be shown on BBC Two in Scotland instead of the programming received in the rest of the UK?
5. Are there other ways in which we could put the channel on Freeview that you believe we should consider?
6. Do you think distribution via broadband is an alternative to Freeview?
7. How could the service develop to provide better value for licence fee payers?
8. Any other comments?

**Deadline for responses**

The consultation is open from Monday 26 October 2009 until Monday 18 January 2010.

You can respond to this consultation in the following ways:

Online: [www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/consultations](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/consultations)

Email: [trust.consultations@bbc.co.uk](mailto:trust.consultations@bbc.co.uk)

Post: BBC Trust (BBC ALBA Review), 180 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5QZ

Your response will form part of the evidence we publish.