



ENLIGHTENING THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATE



The sixth in a series of discussion events to enlighten the public debate on Scotland's constitutional future.

Culture and Broadcasting

24 August 2013 at the Scottish Parliament

Introduction

The public discussion on culture and broadcasting was the sixth in a series of ten events intended to Enlighten the Constitutional Debate in advance of the Referendum on Scotland's future relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom on 18 September 2014. The series is organised by the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the British Academy.

The speakers were invited to discuss the impact of constitutional change on the culture of Scotland, asking how Scotland's artistic, literary and cultural contribution would be affected by the outcome of the Referendum. The speakers were also asked to discuss the impact that there might be on the media in Scotland, whether broadcasting, the traditional print media or new outlets that have emerged in recent years through the rapid growth of digital communications.

The subject of Culture and Broadcasting was addressed by a panel of four speakers:

- James Boyle, Chairman of the National Library of Scotland and former Head of Radio Scotland and Controller of Radio Four;
- David Elstein, Chair of Open Democracy;
- Ruth Wishart, Journalist and Commentator; and
- Rt Hon Brian Wilson, former MP, former Minister for Energy and the Founding Editor and Publisher of the *West Highland Free Press*.

The discussion was chaired by Magnus Linklater CBE FRSE, former Editor of *The Scotsman* and also the Scottish edition of *The Times*.

The seminar was conducted as an open, public discussion seminar. This report provides a summary of the positions outlined by the speakers, and of the subsequent discussion.

James Boyle, Chairman of the National Library of Scotland and former Head of Radio Scotland and Controller of Radio Four

Mr Boyle addressed a series of issues, including people's engagement with culture in general, social stratification and literacy, as well as the arguments for and against creating a new TV network in Scotland, and the need to invest in new talent and higher-quality content creation.

He said that successive governments have been "good to the arts," particularly when it comes to the performing arts, our national companies and the national collections. The last Labour Government, for example, pumped an extra £20 million into the arts, and the overall performance of government is "what one would wish." He then discussed some headline statistics relating to culture. About 500,000

tickets were sold for performances by our national companies two years ago, dropping to 430,000 last year. But if you drill into this data, looking at people not tickets, only 2–3 % of the whole population engages with the "higher end" of the arts – older, better educated and wealthier people.

The broader definition of "cultural engagement," including going to the cinema, shows that the percentage of people actively involved is almost 90 %. Excluding visits to the cinema, this figure drops to about 66 %. But this may be a misleading indicator, because there is a huge gap between the higher arts and other activities, such as watching television and going to libraries. This gap is something that "obsesses" Boyle, who added that these figures don't begin to tell us what people's "life experience" is.



He also suggested that independence would not necessarily make a big difference to spending on the arts, since successive governments in Scotland since devolution have “both done well by culture.”

Mr Boyle also stressed the need to engage with pre-school children and early primary school-age children, educating people through the arts to “build confidence, performance and presentational skills, to build skills and capacity,” rather than simply focusing on the “admittedly very costly” funding of the “rarefied and other-worldly” high arts. The question is, however, where to find the resources to “prime” people to enjoy a broader cultural life, as well as to become well-educated citizens.

Mr Boyle then turned to the issues of social class and literacy, saying that the Government has been “brave” to admit that 20 % of Scotland’s population are functionally illiterate; which means, for example, being unable to follow simple medical instructions. Mr Boyle described this as “a colossal drag on the economy, as well as a personal tragedy” for all those affected, and suggested that although the devolved Government is addressing the problem, more could be done. When it comes to culture, we should also think more broadly about social stratification, because illiteracy is a blight on our society. We should focus on teaching people basic reading skills, so they can “go to the library, not just go along to hear the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.” We have the power now to do something about it, but not the resources. But we have identified the problem, and people will need to support this, he added.

Turning to broadcasting, Mr Boyle focused on the issue of whether or not to spend Scotland’s £75 million broadcasting budget on creating a new TV network, or investing in talent and content creation. The Broadcasting Commission has not recommended devolving broadcasting, but Mr Boyle said he is still “at right angles” to its conclusions, particularly the idea of broadcasting “more about Scotland for Scotland,” exploiting the potential of new digital channels. He is also sceptical about broadcasting being “accountable” to government, and said that since the 1990s, he has become increasingly worried about the trend towards “aggravated rebuttal” by successive governments – their over-vigorous defence at the first sign of any attack, including attempts to “censor” jokes at government expense.

Mr Boyle agrees that the priority in broadcasting should be to produce more high-quality programmes – taking risks and linking it to higher education. But do we want a new TV network about Scotland for Scotland – for ourselves by ourselves? “That is not nearly ambitious enough,” Mr Boyle continued. We should be sending our message out to the world, taking advantage of our “technological brilliance” and innovation. The £75 million budget is also not enough to create a quality channel (broadcasting four hours per day) and compares unfavourably with the £122 million budget of BBC Radio Four. It would be better to “throw the money at talent,” said Boyle, enabling the creative community to come up with new content, including new digital content – not just for transmission in Scotland but all around the world.

Broadcasting is like every other industry in Scotland. We are a small to medium-sized country and we need to put more money into research and development. “Be more ambitious. Throw the money at talent and let them go for it,” he said.

**David Elstein,
Chair of Open Democracy**

Mr Elstein focused on broadcasting, suggesting it was time to create a new TV channel for Scotland, run by Scotland for Scotland and funded by Scotland. He also suggested that in the period leading up to the Referendum, the devolved Scottish Government should negotiate a new deal with the BBC, using the threat of a fully independent new channel and the loss of £300 million in licence fees as leverage.

He opened by saying that he has no special knowledge of Scotland and is only an occasional visitor. He also has no links with any political party and has nothing to offer in the debate about Scottish independence. But he does know something about broadcasting, after 40 years in the industry.

There are two key issues with regard to broadcasting, he said. First, there is the question of spectrum. And second, the structure of finance. To understand this, it is essential to understand the early history of broadcasting and the role of the BBC, which “must be at the heart of the debate,” as a public corporation, run from London, just the same as central government. Broadcasting “follows the money,” he added, and the BBC grew up in an era when the British Empire was still a major influence on how people thought.

About £3.6 billion comes to the BBC in licence fees, plus about another £1.65 billion in commercial revenues (overseas sales, etc.), and it’s all controlled from London, apart from BBC Alba. “Even when the chairman lives in Edinburgh,” he added, “board meetings still take place in London.”

The BBC has invested about £100 million in “an impressive series of fortresses” in the regions – e.g. Glasgow’s Pacific Quay, Cardiff, Birmingham and Manchester – and promised to devolve about 60 % of production to these new facilities, as well as editorial decision making. But this is more “an expression of power,” he said, than devolving real power to the regions.

Mr Elstein then argued that greater independence for BBC news would lead to greater plurality and greater democracy. And he then declared that a channel run by Scotland for Scotland and funded by Scotland was “overwhelmingly overdue,” as an expression of the Scots nation. The concept of a Scottish digital network needs to be broadened, he added, to deal with the talent base in Scotland. But the concept appears to be stuck because of an unwillingness to countenance such a new channel. About £300 million is raised in Scotland from licence fees, but far less comes back in return in terms of broadcast commissions, he suggested. Spending an extra £75 million in Scotland compares favourably with the £95 million already spent on the S4C Welsh-language channel, serving 500,000 Welsh speakers as compared to roughly six million people in Scotland.

The Scottish Government currently spends about £12 million a year on BBC Alba, without having any direct broadcasting powers or control of spectrum, but this should come from licence fees, he argued, rather than being an extra.

The issue of spectrum is less of an issue today than it used to be, now that we are in the digital age, but nonetheless Scotland should pre-empt any future discussion to negotiate spectrum, ahead of next year's Referendum, so that spectrum becomes a non-issue. Online channels are not the answer and Scottish Television would struggle to deliver a new Scottish channel because it is still dominated by ITV. Scotland should "confront the BBC" and demand a new Scottish channel by winning concessions from Westminster now. In Wales, some people went on hunger strike to demand a new Welsh-language channel. Mr Elstein said, however, that Scotland and First Minister Alex Salmond didn't need to go that far to "attack the BBC's soft underbelly."

The BBC is coming under increasing pressure, and three years ago it made significant concessions on the BBC World Service and local TV, spending an extra £400 million in order to prevent the loss of £600 million in revenue. Charter renewal is also a threat to the BBC's future, so the time is ripe for Scotland to "reach a concordat" with the BBC over the next 12 months, using the potential loss of £300 million in licence fees to leverage the discussion and take broadcasting off the agenda before the vote is held on independence. This would win real editorial independence rather than simply new digital channels.

"The BBC's mindset is resistant to real change," he continued, "never mind constitutional upheaval." But the BBC is also vulnerable. There is already pressure on BBC news, so more independence for BBC Scotland could be achieved by a "determined campaign." The prospect of a fully independent broadcaster in Scotland – and the subsequent loss of revenues from Scotland – could be used as a lever to deliver more spectrum and increase the budget for BBC Scotland. Scotland already controls education and law, so why not broadcasting? A successful negotiation may mean "leaving unharvested some of the fruits of independence, should it be voted through," he concluded, "but I'm a great believer in the bird in hand."

**Ruth Wishart,
Journalist and Commentator**

Ms Wishart emphasised the flowering of talent in Scotland in recent years and said that independence would be "a golden opportunity" for the creative community in Scotland to do even better in future, as part of a wider international community – the kind of opportunity that everyone living in Scotland should have.

She began by recounting how thirty years ago, a literary critic in Scotland vowed to review every single new publication in Scotland, and pointed out that this would now be virtually impossible because of the number of new works released every year, and "the explosion of confident voices."

She then heaped praise on Scotland's diverse literary talent – highlighting various novelists, poets and playwrights such as Liz Lochhead, the late Iain Banks, Ian Rankin, Janice Galloway and David Greig.

Ms Wishart said that as we enter the last year of the vital debate and contemplate our constitutional future, the most thoughtful contribution has come from our writers and the rest of the creative community in Scotland, rather than from the conventional print media, who are "still dominated by the tribal warhorses" and seem "more intent on wounding political enemies" than on constructive debate about the future of our country. She compared this to the lead-up to the 1979 Referendum debate, when the creative voices, especially musicians, were ahead of everyone else, according to political commentator Iain Macwhirter. In those days, there was also a new confidence in Scotland – for example, the successful singing duo the Proclaimers proudly sang with Scottish accents. And once again, she said, the country is alive with debate, even though it can sometimes be inhibited by "the stifling garment of party loyalty."

Ms Wishart then addressed the controversy over novelist Alasdair Gray's "now infamous" remarks about "settlers and colonists" dominating the arts institutions in Scotland, saying many critics missed the point by dismissing it as "nationalism in the raw." She said that even though nationalists may believe that the solutions to our problems lie within our own borders, we are also enriched, nourished and inspired by importing people and influences from abroad. For example, Celtic Connections started off as a relatively modest affair and is now "a glorious festival of interconnected traditions" from all around the world.

"Internationalism will always have at its core the belief that Scotland's identity and traditions can only benefit from an infusion of the exciting and the exotic," she added. "The building block of that internationalism is a self-confidence born of the pride and knowledge of your own cultural traditions."

She then defended non-Scots taking charge of our national arts institutions, saying she has "no difficulty" with incomers as long as they have the credentials, the right motivation and the right attitude. For example, when Vicky Featherstone was appointed the first Director of the "shiny new" National Theatre of Scotland, she encountered a lot of scepticism, but her vision of a "theatre without walls" has been a big success. She also commissioned some of our best young writers and, when she left, she emphasised the importance of respecting and understanding the culture in which you come to work.

Not everyone appointed to senior positions in Creative Scotland has understood that imperative, but the artistic community has been quick to point out any failings, and the new Director, Janet Archer, has declared the needs and aspirations of artists in Scotland should shape Scotland's cultural future. At the same time, importing and exporting talent is a "two-way street," and cross-fertilisation is good for all of us.

The Broadcasting Commission is broadly right about the need for the creation of a dedicated digital channel for Scotland, she said, but the whole debate about broadcasting

has changed a lot since digitalisation. A new digital channel could deliver what's needed. It is "not a big ask," she said. We have come a long way since the earlier debate about a separate national news bulletin (the so-called "Scottish Six"). After devolution, BBC visitors to Scotland used to think they were coming to the "dark side of the moon," and needed to be told about the powers of the parliament, but nowadays, BBC Radio is careful to point out that some issues affect only England and Wales.

What difference would a 'Yes' or a 'No' vote make? "To be honest, the current vibrancy would continue," she said. "But I am convinced we have a golden opportunity to build new values. I think we can do better."

Ms Wishart then compared two recent statements from the respective culture secretaries in the UK and Scotland which illustrate the "cultural divide" between the countries. In Westminster, Maria Miller said "the arts should pay their own way," while in Holyrood, Fiona Hyslop said that the most important function of the arts should be to "enable and inspire." Ms Wishart said the creative community on both sides of the border would sign up to Fiona Hyslop's view rather than Maria Miller's, and she also believes that Scotland has different political values.

Ms Wishart said that "creativity should be at the heart of education," to produce collaborative, enquiring and curious minds," rather than placing the emphasis on how to decline Latin verbs and write in immaculate copperplate script.

Finally, Ms Wishart held up Venezuela's Simon Bolivar Orchestra as a great example of what can be achieved in the arts, with its influence extending to Stirling and, more recently, to Glasgow, where young people have been following a similar formula (El Sistema), and achieving the same remarkable results. "That is the kind of visionary thinking I want to see applied throughout our cultural policy," Ms Wishart concluded. "Talent is not a postcode lottery but too often opportunity is."

**Brian Wilson,
former MP, former Minister for Energy and the Founding
Editor and Publisher of the *West Highland Free Press***

Mr Wilson believes that the constitutional debate is getting in the way of the debate about culture and broadcasting. There is always room for improvement, but independence is not the critical factor and we already have the means to make things better. "We should change our priorities, not the constitution," he said.

In the debate about culture and broadcasting, the burden of proof is on those who want to separate. We all know what we have and all of us are proud of it, but supporters of independence say they want to change it. What has the constitution got to do with it? For example, the Edinburgh Festival has flourished for well over 60 years, attracting people from all around the world, "without inhibition from the constitution or the political status of Scotland." So what is to change? Our national institutions and galleries have also

flourished during that period, not necessarily because of the Union but while we are part of it and not inhibited by it. Many people quote the names of all the painters, writers and composers who have plied their talent in Scotland under the *status quo*, but these artists have succeeded regardless of the constitutional set-up. There is no *a priori* evidence that a different constitution would produce a great flowering of talent, but there is a lot of evidence that talent has flourished over the last 300 years, and there are many other examples. The new Victoria & Albert Museum planned for Dundee is another example of how the arts can continue to flourish "without inhibition," just like the Celtic Connections Festival, before and after devolution. Mr Wilson also said he believes El Sistema is a good example of young people being given the opportunity to develop their talent, and that this is in line with his own Socialist principles rather than anything to do with nationalism. The difference is that he wants to extend those opportunities to children everywhere, not just in Scotland.

Those who support independence should be able to prove that the current constitution has inhibited the arts and that somehow "what's on offer is going to make things better," taking into account the cross-border and cross-cultural benefits which Scotland now enjoys and also exports to the rest of the UK and beyond. If independence can't be proved to offer an advantage, then culture and broadcasting should be treated as a separate subject and discussed on their own merits, not as part of the constitutional debate. If there is anything wrong with our culture, then whose fault is it? All powers relating to the arts are already devolved. When artists don't like how the arts are being run here, they don't complain about London or Westminster or the Union, but they do complain about Creative Scotland, he added, and that is Scotland's own responsibility, appointed and funded by the Government. "So why don't we just do things differently here instead of worrying about the constitution as a kind of alibi for everything that's wrong?" he asked.

Mr Wilson then echoed Mr Boyle's words, saying that Scotland's literacy rates are "appalling." But to solve this and other problems, we should change our priorities, not the constitution. We create opportunities through economic and social policies, including early education, "not by pretending that everything changes when we change the constitution," he added.

"It would be an act of wanton vandalism to break up the BBC," he continued. The BBC is a good example of a national institution that has benefited from scale, and it has been and still is disproportionately influenced by Scots. If we vote for independence, we will lose that. It is all very well to say we should leverage the debate, as David Elstein suggests, but if we vote 'yes,' we are no longer part of the Union or part of the BBC.

We should invest the £75 million in excellence and creating new content, not in talking to each other about each other. Take away 10 % of the BBC's revenues, and there would be a big drop in standards. In Scotland, we would still be tuning in, as "a nation of eavesdroppers," but we would not be part

of it. It wouldn't be our state broadcaster any more but working to another state's agenda. So what would we get in exchange? RTE in Ireland is the equivalent of Scottish Television, but its output is mainly cheap programmes and imports, funded by advertising. Our small share of the BBC adds up to bigger benefits.

"I would love to have a rational debate about these issues, but the debate about broadcasting is obfuscated by everything being fed into the constitutional debate. We should focus on creating content, and stop seeing everything through the prism of the national question and the constitution," he concluded. "After thirty years of talking about nothing but the constitution, we have to get back to real politics and talk about real economic policies to make Scotland a better place."

Discussion

Chairman Magnus Linklater then led a discussion, asking each of the speakers in turn to expand on particular points.

First, he asked **David Elstein** if broadcasting has an obligation to culture or entertainment, and how that fits in with the BBC's guidelines. Mr Elstein said the argument has raged for 90 years. When spectrum was scarce (because the Ministry of Defence had over-riding requirements), there was a trade-off between culture and entertainment. The BBC got spectrum in return for delivering the benefits of public broadcasting, while also entertaining its audience, as part of Lord Reith's dictum for the BBC to "inform, educate and entertain." Does this mean documentaries, the arts, children's programmes or religion? There is also a very high cost associated with regionalism, and over the last 15 years, ITV has virtually abandoned its commitment to public broadcasting because its share of the spectrum has diminished with the launch of so many new channels and alternative media. ITV now spends only £100 million of its total budget on non-commercial programmes, while Channel 4, which is publicly owned, spends the vast majority of its budget on entertainment. "Privileged broadcasters are required to give something back," said Mr Elstein, who then suggested that Sky Arts was doing an "impressive" job compared to the BBC. "My concern here is not whether broadcasting owes a duty to culture but that broadcasting is part of culture."

Mr Elstein then expressed "mild Sassenach wonderment" at everyone's caution and "nervousness" with regard to a separate channel for Scotland, as if the choice is giving up the BBC or being forced to continue as part of an unequal relationship. Also a small country, Denmark is doing a very good job with its broadcasting output, with very little money, but why would it want to be part of the BBC hierarchy, and become a junior partner?

Magnus Linklater then turned to **James Boyle**, suggesting that the output of BBC Scotland was "pretty poor," and that a new channel may be an opportunity to unleash new talent. A budget of £40–50 million would not go very far, said

Mr Boyle, and when it comes to news and current affairs, the suggestion of an "opt-out" system for BBC Scotland would be hard to schedule because of the "yawn factor" and the need for mixed programming, including entertaining content as well as more serious programmes. We also have an obligation to diversity and the needs of different audiences. Fragmentation is a problem. For example, young people tend to engage more with music channels, and that is a pity. "We have all the resources and talent," said Mr Boyle. "Broadcasting is part of the economy as well as part of culture, and it needs to be properly funded." We should get all the money we can and "leave behind the old-fashioned models." We should focus on creating new content, including new apps, whether we opt for independence or not. "Take the risks instead of same old thing, same old thing," he concluded.

Rush Wishart was then asked what is being denied to the creative community by the current system, and what would be the cultural "add-on" of Scottish independence. "What are we being deprived of by the current broadcasting system?" Mr Linklater asked.

"Quite a lot," Ms Wishart responded. There is not very much Scottish material being broadcast today. We could do better. And whether we vote for independence or not, we will still be able to view content on the BBC and continue to have access to hundreds of digital channels. She also held up the documentary programme *Eorpa*, which is produced by BBC Alba, as an example of what can be achieved, "with the money and the political will."

Magnus Linklater then suggested to **Brian Wilson** that Radio Scotland has "a very low standard of cultural output" which he described as "very feeble." Mr Wilson said he would not defend Radio Scotland but wanted to discuss it in a broadcasting context, not as part of the independence debate. There should be far more serious programmes, more serious discussions and documentaries, but policy decisions are the problem, not the constitution. He also said he did not want to lose the "very substantial" Scottish input to BBC Radio Four, which he described as "excellent." It is not an economic or financial argument but a domestic issue, said Wilson. Ms Wishart questioned Mr Wilson on the Scottish contribution to BBC Radio 4, and Mr Wilson cited several examples. Mr Linklater then begged to differ from Ms Wishart and added his personal view that Scottish input to Radio 4 was indeed "very good." What Mr Linklater questioned was the fact that regardless of the Scottish contribution, all decisions on BBC Radio 4 were made in London, not in Scotland or in any other region.

Mr Boyle then suggested that the decision to fund Radio Scotland now belongs in Scotland and should be an entirely Scottish responsibility, adding "we can restore Radio Scotland to strength with higher-quality content," including mixed programming. Does every programme made in Scotland have to be "identifiably Scottish?" Many radio programmes produced in Scotland are simply brilliant, said Mr Boyle, and they are produced without "the skirl of the pipes." Their strength comes from our unique selling points – thinking and science.

Questions & Answers

Magnus Linklater then invited the audience to pose three questions.

Question 1: Does the Scots language have a place in Scottish culture, and does the neglect of the Scots language in education have an adverse effect on literacy because people feel their own language is not valued? **Question 2** concerned the consumption of cultural output and spending priorities, observing that the Gaelic-language channel BBC Alba has much higher viewing figures and a higher penetration than the Welsh-language channel in Wales, despite the fact that BBC Alba has a much lower budget – about £15 million compared to S4C's more than £100 million. The same questioner also asked if culture which reaches the audience via the medium of radio or television has a “lesser value” than the collective experience of going to the theatre or musical festivals, etc. **Question 3** was about the performance of BBC Scotland and a recent BBC Trust survey which suggested that half the population of Scotland is dissatisfied with BBC Scotland's overall output, asking if the made-in-Scotland programme *Mrs Brown's Boys* satisfies the quota for Scottish cultural output.

Turning to Brian Wilson, Magnus Linklater asked if broadcasters have a responsibility to keep the Scots language alive. Mr Wilson wondered if the Scots language was in fact neglected, and commented that he used many Scots words and spoke English with a Scottish flavour, like many other people in Scotland, rather than “Scots,” adding that in Northern Ireland, “Ulster Scots” was an invented language, used politically to balance native Gaelic. Wilson is more concerned about the neglect of localism and regionalism, believing that more children should be educated in the history of how their own environment around them was created – e.g. how the Outer Isles was influenced by the land struggle, or the industrial heritage of the central belt.

Rush Wishart commented that Scottish history was just as important as regional history and should not be an afterthought in education, complaining she knew more about the Corn Laws than the Covenanters, because Scottish history was not taught at all in school in her day. She also said we only have ourselves to blame for neglecting the Scots language, unlike the effort we have made to keep Gaelic alive. She then praised attempts to create more educational materials in Scots and use more Scots content in children's books – e.g. Itchy Coos books who, according to their website, publish “braw books for bairns o aw ages.”

Is television of less value than the high arts? David Elstein said that many programmes, even from the BBC, were “not worth bothering about,” but also said that broadcasting was the best way we know to distribute culture – for example, the BBC had built its reputation by changing England into a musical nation by broadcasting concerts, etc. He also praised the distinctive character of the Scots, and “the rhythms and musicality” of the Scots language, urging Scots to make more of their “fantastic” cultural assets, including their language and their great “ability to be themselves.”

“It's great to hear a lot of really strong Scots accents in a drama produced here,” he added, “even if it isn't a very good drama.” With £300 million to spend, a Scottish network could create a lot of “proudly Scottish” content for Scottish consumption, properly packaged and presented, at the same time as making a greater impression abroad. When he was running Sky, he would have loved to have a Scottish channel to draw from. A distinctly Scottish channel would be a great way to “nourish, enrich and transmit the culture.”

Mr Elstein also cited the example of *The Fall*, a BBC drama produced by a Welshman in Northern Ireland, directed by a Belgian and written by an Englishman – a good example of what Lord Reith meant when he said that “nation shall speak unto nation.” Then Mr Elstein added: “Scotland is a nation. Let it speak.”

Magnus Linklater then said that the “angry” audience reaction to a number of points reflected the wider belief that BBC Scotland is not living up to its potential, and that there is a problem with funding as well as with quality of output. Brian Wilson then defended the production in Glasgow of *Mrs Brown's Boys*, pointing out that it was a good example of a UK network programme made in Glasgow, watched by millions of people, which created jobs in Scotland without using up any of BBC Scotland's regional budget, as intended by creating the Pacific Quay facility. He did not attempt to defend the quality of the specific programme, but questioned whether BBC Scotland should only make programmes which are “icons” of Scotland: “I want to see all sorts of programmes made in Scotland. We should concentrate on excellence and speak out to the world.” Just because some people in Scotland don't like a programme like *Mrs Brown's Boys*, he asked, is it “beneath our dignity” to make it here? It simply meets the BBC's objective to make more networked programmes in regional centres.

Rush Wishart said that everyone welcomes the creation of new jobs at the “shiny new” headquarters, but also wants BBC Scotland to do a lot more than “put a brass plate on imported programmes.” Much as she enjoys the programmes made there, she would prefer the new facility to be used to make more Scottish programmes and encourage more indigenous drama, rather than being tacked on to the end of existing programmes. “There is not enough happening,” Mr Linklater added, and Mr Wilson agreed there was not enough good Scottish drama produced here.

James Boyle then said there is a lot that we could criticise about both STV and BBC Scotland, and that the idea that *Mrs Brown's Boys* is “the triumph of the year” is absurd. He then compared assembling programmes here to the car assembly plant at Linwood, which closed in 1981 and is now widely regarded as a national failure. More creative input is needed.

Mr Boyle then commented that BBC Scotland has failed to introduce the rest of Scotland to the Edinburgh Festival, describing this as “a disgrace.” Could we use new digital channels, and the extra money, to promote our own culture and do new things which were not possible until now,

Magnus Linklater asked. "What in the system is holding that back?" Mr Boyle replied that the broadcasting network in Scotland is "an old fashioned and sclerotic system," and said that it is hard to talk about return on investment when you only reach one, two or three % of the whole population. "If you want something to change, you have to do more than just bolster the existing system," he said. BBC Alba may appear to be successful, but the audience figures are being distorted by the popularity of 'live' football.

Magnus Linklater then invited three more questions.

Question 4 concerned David Elstein, praising him for having "more vision than some of the Scots," when it came to broadcasting, and asking him if he would like to come here to run a new national network. The questioner also expressed concern about the "dreadful" propaganda in the media as a whole. **Question 5** was: "What actually is culture?" Can we expand our idea of culture beyond elitism – e.g. including folk culture? **Question 6** focused on the "regrettable" loss of regional channels, including Grampian TV, and asked how we could foster greater regionalism – including a channel for Orkney, where the questioner lives.

David Elstein declined the invitation to move up to Scotland, and said that Scotland had produced a lot of "superb broadcasting talent," including Stuart Hood and Alistair Milne – as well as the inventor of television, John Logie Baird. He said that there are many opportunities for talent in Scotland. He also said he wouldn't want to appear to be an "English carpet-bagger" by accepting a job as Controller, but that he is willing to help the Scottish Government negotiate a better deal with the BBC to "deliver real value to the people of Scotland." Brian Wilson commented that all the best talent in Scotland has tended to move on to UK national positions, to perform on "a bigger stage." Is it not a good thing that the most talented people run the national networks, thus spreading their talent nationwide instead of limiting themselves to the regions? "Would they have stayed to run BBC Scotland?" he asked. Mr Elstein said there is plenty of traffic in both directions and that this is the way it should be. Talented Scots will always have something to give back to Scotland, he added.

Ruth Wishart then suggested that the issue is that London and the South-East of England are "over-heated," and that talent has no choice except to move there. "That is why we

must create more opportunities here," she said. It would be good if more talent opted to stay here and build here, she added. "People go away because they want to broaden their experience," said Brian Wilson, and that is a good thing. Scots continue to play a major role at the BBC. Many of them also come back. Surely, he continued, it is better to add to the overall quality of programming for the benefit of broadcasting and a much larger audience, rather than stay in a Scottish broadcasting service forever, especially one which is no longer part of the BBC as we know it today.

David Elstein repeated that Scotland has "the opportunity to leverage a better deal for Scots broadcasting which is not possible under the present structure," suggesting that "the BBC responds to pressure." The BBC has spent £65 million "disposing of unnecessary managers," he added, with a third of them being rehired. It has also lost £100 million on a failed IT project, so £75 million for BBC Scotland is actually a trivial amount by comparison. What the BBC currently offers is not good value for money. "There is an opportunity. You should not let it pass," he concluded.

James Boyle suggested that the break-up of the BBC has always been David Elstein's main point in such debates, adding: "Be careful what you wish for." Mr Boyle believes that it is more important to focus on finance and on improving the quality of programmes made in Scotland. We all want to make BBC Scotland better, but not at the price of breaking the whole thing up. "It is all about determination, ambition and vision," he added, rather than simply money.

Magnus Linklater then asked Rush Wishart why STV and BBC Scotland has retreated from the regions, and she said she is all in favour of restoring localism in Scottish broadcasting.

Magnus Linklater summed up by saying that the speakers had raised many critical points, not only about broadcasting and culture but also wider issues, as we embark upon the last year of the debate about independence for Scotland. "I would argue that culture must be right at the heart of it," he said. Everyone agrees there is huge room for improvement, even though there may be disagreement on how to achieve this.

The debate continues in Scotland at the RSE on 25 September with a discussion on Borders, Immigration and Citizenship.



Reports of this and other events in the series
are available at:
www.royalsoced.org.uk

Opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of the RSE or the BA, nor of their Fellowships

The Royal Society of Edinburgh, Scotland's National Academy, is Scottish Charity No. SC000470
The British Academy is Registered Charity No. 233176