

**Speech made by Alex Salmond at the launch of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission on 8 August 2007:**

August is a wonderful month in Scotland, a month in which we welcome people from many other countries to the major festivals in our capital city. It's a time of year when you feel that the cultural conversation of the world echoes through the streets of Edinburgh and this great city becomes the international capital of creativity and communication ... And it is creativity and communication that I want to speak about today.

Of course, they say the art of government - rather than the substance - is all about communication, but as far as this country is concerned I would go even further than that. I would say that *Scotland* is all about communication.

This is a nation that loves to express itself, to retell old stories and share new ideas, to pass on information, to hear what's happening. We communicate passionately with each other as friends, as citizens, as family. It's a very deep human need and we feel it particularly strongly in Scotland ... It's perhaps not surprising that we couldn't wait for somebody else to invent the telephone or television.

But while we might always have enjoyed self-expression, we have perhaps at times lacked a little bit of self-belief. And in some measure, I think the broadcasting arrangements for Scotland have played a part in that incomplete sense of national self-confidence. I believe we have to transform that main framework for communications to become the truly ambitious and creative country we would all wish to be.

Broadcasting has a crucial and central role in our democracy, but also in obtaining the full cultural and economic benefits of our creative industries. That's why my government supports the devolution of broadcasting powers to the Scottish Parliament. We see the policy as a means to an end, not just as an end in itself. We want to ensure the principle of editorial and creative control being exercised in Scotland on behalf of Scottish audiences. And we want to create thriving production businesses taking Scottish talent onto an international stage. We want proper public service broadcasting for this exciting and energised nation. That includes television news and current affairs, which seems to have been shrinking to an alarming degree in Scotland if the industry regulator, Ofcom, is to be believed.

The debate around the 'Scottish Six' for example - which has been discussed for a full decade now - is really just a shorthand for the much broader debate we need to have in Scotland about achieving a more relevant and informing blend of television news and current affairs across the output in Scotland.

I want to speak mainly today about the opportunities associated with broadcasting and television production, which are at the very heart of our creative industries. A recent report by The Work Foundation for the UK government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport, makes clear just how important the creative industries are. They now rival in terms of scale and growth even the financial services sector as a powerhouse industry, a major employer and a huge generator of wealth, one of the keys to the future prosperity of all economies.

One of the things that struck me in the report, apart from the sheer scale and potential of the creative sector, was a short contribution from the writer and producer Richard Curtis, the man behind movies like *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Notting Hill* and events like *Comic*

Relief and Live 8. Curtis, who has enormous experience and success in this area, is convinced of what he calls the "interconnectedness" of the four key areas of Theatre, Radio, Television and Film. And what he says is:

"Every section of theatre and radio and TV and film feed each other. Each depends upon the other - without four strong industries, the others would suffer dramatically."

I believe he's right that these activities are interconnected and interdependent. So what can we do to ensure that these four pillars of creativity are in place and solid and secure in Scotland?

I think we can have a high degree of optimism about our Theatre. I pay full tribute to my predecessor, Jack McConnell, for establishing the National Theatre of Scotland. Even this early in its existence, we can see how it has brought energy and excitement to its performances around Scotland.

Most notably, Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* is winning major awards and attracting sell-out audiences. It is that rare combination - a smash hit and a critical triumph, now with the support of this government heading to the United States, Australia and New Zealand. The success of the NTS will benefit every other theatre company in Scotland, as audiences up and down the country rediscover their enthusiasm for live performance and well-written drama.

In keeping with the Curtis formula, I do personally wish that Radio Scotland could find room for more drama in its schedules. I know the drama department at BBC Scotland produces many fine single plays and series for the BBC's UK-wide radio networks, but I do believe that Scottish audiences should get the chance to hear more Scottish drama on their own national service. Could there perhaps be more of a partnership between Radio Scotland and our theatre companies, to develop together the writing and acting talent that benefits both? It is time for fresh thinking in this area.

And if we can get Theatre and Radio producing new work together, introducing new writers, experimenting with different approaches - that will feed into our success rate in developing powerful television drama. And also comedy, and all kinds of programmes. Recently, however, we've had some disturbing news about network television production from Scotland. First, a report from Ofcom showed that our share of total UK spending by the big networks had fallen to just 3 per cent, half of what it was a few years ago and even that wasn't very good.

The drop in investment here by the BBC alone was more than £20 million. Then, we had a simultaneous attack on Scottish producers by the BBC Director General, Mark Thompson, and his opposite number at ITV, the Executive Chairman Michael Grade. Instead of apologising for the reduction in spending, they said it was because of a lack of talent and ideas in Scotland. Not enough talent, they said, and not enough ideas.....This about a country which is achieving international success across the entire range of artistic and cultural endeavour. I don't believe it. Does anyone in Scotland believe it?

Not only is there talent - there is huge interest in Scottish-based broadcasting where the message is relevant and compelling. Let me give you the example of May 4 where Scottish Television took the decision that it was more important that events in Scotland were reflected in their news coverage - rather than the ITN Network - because of the pretty dramatic developments in terms of the count - and the result.

It goes without saying that it was an event I was watching closely, but that is beside the point!

More important is that by opting out of the ITN news on that day and delivering a dedicated 1 hour Scottish news programme, the audience share moved to 30 per cent or 427,000 people. Customers vote with their fingers in this digital age and there was no shortage of alternative viewing in that hour. That success is a good example of the value of being more responsive to Scotland and Scottish viewers. It also illustrates the continued desire of people in Scotland for substantial and quality analysis of the issues which affect their lives.

I will be speaking to the television networks about what we can do to ensure that they're getting the right kind of talent and ideas from Scotland, so they can start investing the right amounts of money in Scottish drama and entertainment and documentaries. I've been told that the target for the industry is to have 9 per cent of the network budgets spent here in Scotland - well, that'll do for a start, but we should regard that as a floor and not as a ceiling. We will work with the broadcasters to pursue the objective of more programmes from Scotland. And we will be looking for immediate signs of progress. It's just not acceptable that networks which purport to serve the whole of the UK should marginalise the creative community in Scotland.

It was a previous BBC Director General, Greg Dyke, who championed the cause of greater ethnic diversity at the BBC, an organisation which he described famously and controversially as 'hideously white'. Now Greg Dyke was absolutely right to identify that issue and begin to deal with it. The challenge now facing Mark Thompson, his successor, is not just whether the BBC is hideously white, but whether it is also 'hideously White City' - believing that talent and wisdom reside only in west London. And of course we ourselves must never come to believe that talent and wisdom reside only around Byres Road!

The truth is that Scots succeed at the highest levels in television and film all around the world. We produce very talented writers, directors and producers. But they don't just discover their talent in the departure lounge at the airport. So why do so many have to leave Scotland to find success? What is wrong with the commissioning practices of the UK networks and the framework for broadcasting in Scotland that denies our creative talent the chance to be successful while still living and working in their own country? Let me make it clear that finding answers to that question is a priority for this government and we will expect others to respond accordingly.

And of course, moving on to the fourth pillar of Richard Curtis's interconnected industries, a successful and sustainable production base for television drama would in turn help to stimulate Scottish feature films. It is sometimes easy to forget just how many outstanding and successful films have been made by Scots or made in Scotland - from Local Hero to The Last King of Scotland, from Rob Roy to Red Road, from Whisky Galore to Hallam Foe.... You see, I didn't even mention Braveheart.

A healthy and thriving television production sector in Scotland can act as a stimulant and a showcase for all the arts - especially Film and Theatre. Broadcasting can truly be Scotland's Window on the World, at once bringing us the best of content from every other country and allowing us to show the world what Scotland is capable of creating. ....As in so many other areas of policy, I believe it can be helpful to look at what has worked elsewhere.

In Canada, for example, a nation with which Scotland has many close connections of family and friendship, they have adopted some imaginative and far-sighted measures to ensure that they get to see excellent Canadian programmes as well as programmes from the United States and elsewhere. They have tried to balance cultural priorities with industrial development and their desire to see internationally-successful media based in Canada. We will be talking to them and to other countries to see if they can offer any insights as to how Scotland can excel.

Of course, we know that the media landscape is changing very quickly. The demand for creative content is increasing across different platforms, with faster broadband connections, new multimedia software and the launch of new digital channels. We know, for instance, that the switchover to digital television will release spectrum and create new opportunities for the production and distribution of Scottish programmes. What is also hugely important is staking our claim in the media of the future.

In order to have the ideas and the content that will build the next generation of media companies, we need to be successful in creating the kinds of intellectual property that will enable us to compete and create on a global level. The next Google, or Facebook, or Youtube, or eBay, could very well be being dreamt up by talented young Scots right now.

We need to ensure that they can bring their dreams to fruition. And that they can do it here and don't need to leave Scotland to make it happen.

If we're going to participate fully in that future, we need to put in place what software designers have called 'the architecture of participation'. That will mean our institutional structures and priorities may have to change.

I propose to establish a Scottish Broadcasting Commission to look into these issues and to define a strategic way forward for television production and broadcasting in Scotland, and I'll be announcing more details about that in the very near future.

Now, I don't think it's a good idea for politicians to design television programmes, but what we can do is design policies - and by implementing those policies we help to create an environment in which talented people can do great things, and significant and dynamic creative companies can be built for this generation and the next generation. That means having the infrastructure, the skills, and the education. We need a clear vision. We need to identify the opportunities and provide the resources. There is no shortage of issues and I intend that the new Commission will begin work in the autumn, and to report as soon as possible to me and indeed to the Parliament.

I am delighted therefore to be able to announce that Blair Jenkins - recently head of news and current affairs at BBC Scotland, and formerly Director of Broadcasting at Scottish Television - has agreed to chair this Commission.

After discussions with Blair, I will announce in the next few days the terms of reference and full membership of the Commission. But let me be clear that it will combine substantial industry expertise with a broad spectrum of political opinion - people united not just by a view that something needs to be done, but also with the knowledge to identify which initiatives will work.

We know from work done internationally that there are clear linkages between having a successful creative industries sector and having an innovative and successful modern economy. But it is about more than just that. It is about national confidence and self-expression, about Scotland being a vibrant centre for innovative and creative content.

There are great opportunities from emerging international markets, the internet, digitisation and convergence. In the end, television is about the generation and exploitation of intellectual property, and any genuinely knowledge-based economy has to be creating that kind of content. Scotland needs a new framework of investment and cooperation to grow our screen industries and make them world-class in their innovation and output. Scotland, as much as any other nation, needs to be a society dedicated to learning and communication.

If we have a national determination to encourage our creative talent, then we *can* build television services and production businesses which are genuinely world class. We need to galvanise not just our broadcasters, but also our schools and universities, our arts companies, our writers and producers, and our emerging talent. Broadcasting perhaps more than any other form of media reflects the sense a nation has of its communicative and expressive abilities.

There may indeed be those who lack confidence in Scotland's talent and creativity, but you won't find them in this government. We want to see Scottish-produced drama being successful nationally and internationally. We want agenda-setting documentaries and current affairs. We'd enjoy more great comedy - we could all do with more of that. We'd like some big televised debates on national and international issues. We'd love to capture the definitive performances by some of our exceptional musical talents. We can and must get great television programmes from Scotland to a global audience, just as we are so clearly doing in music and other arts. And we know that releasing that creativity connects to our wider social and economic objectives for Scotland.

We have a wide range of responsibilities to reflect the diversity of Scottish culture, not least in relation to Gaelic. Let me today restate my support for a dedicated Gaelic channel. The launch is planned for the coming year and will initially deliver 1.5 hours of new content every day. It will also, incidentally, be a shot in the arm for the independent production sector in Scotland. I know that previously there has been slippage in this project but I believe it is an area where the BBC is committed to this happening without further delay.

However, this welcome development is a vital and important part of our broadcasting architecture, not a substitute for the rest of the structure.

I acknowledge and look forward to the opening of BBC Scotland's new headquarters at Pacific Quay in Glasgow, but as well as the shiny new building we must also have the programme content to match.

We're keen to take action, but also to listen to the ideas of others on what this government can do to help. That shouldn't be too much of a problem. As I said when I began this speech, this is a nation that likes to talk. I have said that we need an architecture of participation, so I hope many will participate.

Together, let's talk about our ambition and our vision, and about how we transform Scotland all year round into a world-class centre of communication and creativity. Enjoy the festivals!