



Meeting of the BBC Northern Ireland Committee

MINUTES

Wednesday 11th June 2025

BBC Broadcasting House, Belfast

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- 1 Chair's introduction
- 2 Director, Northern Ireland, report
- 3 Director, Nations report
- 4 Audio
- 5 Audiences
- 6 Belfast Transformation Project
- 7 Finance
- 8 AOB

ATTENDANCE

Members:

- Michael Smyth, Non-executive Director, Member for Northern Ireland (Chair)
- Adam Smyth, Director, BBC Northern Ireland
- Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director, BBC Nations

With:

- Caroline Thomson, Non-Executive Director (*observer*)
- Mark Adair, Head of Corporate and Community Affairs
- Emma Dunseith, Senior Head of Content Production (*item 4*)
- Lesley Farquharson, Head of Audience Research (*item 5*)
- Shayne Glynn, Head of Change (*item 6*)
- Samantha Sing, Finance Director, Nations (*item 7*)
- Mark Grinnell, Executive Lead, BBC Nations (*Secretary*)

Apologies:

- Fiona Campbell, Channel Controller, BBC Three

1. Chair's introduction

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the Committee.
- 1.2 Caroline Thomson, Non-Executive Director, observed the Committee with a view to replacing Non-Executive Director, Nick Serota.
- 1.3 The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 20th March 2025 were approved with no conflicts.

2. Director Northern Ireland report

- 2.1 The Committee noted the Director's written report.
- 2.2 The Committee received an update on the outcome of the defamation case heard in Dublin and brought by Gerry Adams in relation to a *BBC Spotlight* broadcast. The BBC's loss of the case was obviously a set-back for the BBC and its journalism, but the Chair and Director Nations put on record their thanks to the Director Northern Ireland for his work on the case and for the support show by BBC Legal and the BBC's witnesses. The Committee noted that the BBC, in common with other broadcasters, has (subject to a deductible) insurance for the legal costs incurred in defending the BBC's journalism. In response to the case, the BBC has geo-blocked certain related online content and has added a note to two articles published in connection with the *Spotlight* claims.
- 2.3 The Committee discussed the results of the internal staff survey so far as effected Northern Ireland, for which there had been low participation amongst staff. An action plan following the staff survey would be discussed at the next Northern Ireland Committee meeting.
- 2.4 BBC Northern Ireland content has been recognised within the industry with a number of awards including a BAFTA for *Blue Lights*, and an ARIAS award for BBC Radio Ulster.
- 2.5 The Nolan Show team has successfully completed an internal move into News department.
- 2.6 The Committee noted plans for coverage of July 12th Parades in Northern Ireland.

3. Director Nations report

- 3.1 The Director Nations is taking a 12 month period of compassionate leave and the

committee wished him well. Rhuanedd Richards has been appointed as Interim Director of Nations for the 12 months starting from 13th June 2025.

- 3.2 The Committee heard about the forthcoming publication of the BBC's thematic review of Content commissioning.
- 3.3 New guidance to independent producers across the UK has been published. Future productions would require to meet at least two of the three OFCOM criteria.
- 3.4 Buying Model work has been undertaken between Nations and the Content division. This would result in Commissioning team changes.
- 3.5 The Committee heard about the work the Nations division is undertaking in the run-up to the end of the current Royal Charter.

4. Audio

- 4.1 The Committee heard about the implementation of the new presenter line-up on BBC Radio Ulster.
- 4.2 There is a Radio and Audio strategy working group to look at maintaining audiences on linear and digital platforms.
- 4.3 The Committee discussed the changes in music playlists on the station and welcomed them.
- 4.4 The Committee heard about recent industry awards, including a bronze ARIAS Award for Radio Station of the Year.
- 4.5 Indigenous language output remains part of the revised line-up on the radio station.
- 4.6 The Committee noted the changes to BBC.com subscriptions for those living outside the UK. Listeners to Radio Ulster outside of the UK will be able to hear content on the app, but no longer on the website.

5. Audiences

- 5.1 The committee noted the latest audience consumption figures for BBC Northern Ireland content on all platforms, which is outperforming the rest of the BBC.
- 5.2 The next Committee would receive an update on the performance of Freely.

6. Belfast Transformation Project

- 6.1 The Committee noted progress on the development of Broadcasting House, Belfast and heard that staff are now re-occupying refurbished floors.
- 6.2 Construction work on new studios would be complete in July 2025, which would be followed by a technical fit-out. Broadcasting in the new space would begin in October 2025.
- 6.3 The transformation programme remains within the revised budget but margins remain tight.
- 6.4 The completion of the programme is expected in September 2026.

7. Finance

- 7.1 The Committee reviewed financial performance of BBC content in Northern Ireland.
- 7.2 The Committee noted that BBC Northern Ireland is meeting all regulatory obligations.

8. AOB and close

- 8.1 The Committee discussed latest developments in attempts to put the relationship with the Ulster Orchestra on a more coherent and long-term footing.
- 8.2 There were no other matters arising.
- 8.3 Date of next meeting, October 2nd 2025.

Meeting ends.