

Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund Revised Programme Commissioning Guidance

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund Investment Committee (the 'Committee') has, with the assistance of an independent evaluation of the workings of the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund ('USBF'), revised and refined the workings of the USBF.
- 1.2 The primary theme of these revisions is to present greater clarity as to the content the USBF wishes to support, and to present a framework that will more effectively ensure the quality and appropriateness of the USBF supported content.
- 1.3 This guidance does not radically alter the structures in place for the USBF, it seeks to refine them. The Committee is positive about many of the relationships that have developed with production companies which have engaged with the USBF, and is grateful for the support of the broadcasters in pursuing the aims of the USBF.
- 1.4 In parallel to the process leading to this revised Guidance, the Committee is very encouraged by BBC NI's indication that it is to appoint a dedicated Ulster-Scots Commissioning Executive to work across television, radio and online content.
- 1.5 The overarching aim of the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund remains unchanged and is to ensure that the heritage, culture and language of Ulster-Scots are expressed through moving image.

2. Summary of the Changes

- 2.1 A number of significant changes are being introduced through this Revised Programme Commissioning Guidance.
- 2.2 There are 3 important changes to the Objectives and Targets for the USBF and a number of clarifications. The 3 changes are:
 - 2.2.1 The introduction of a specific target for the support of **Ulster-Scots Language Programming**. Despite continual highlighting of Language programming within the Ulster-Scots Priorities, the levels of Language programming supported have not been adequate;
 - 2.2.2 The introduction of limited support for **Ulster-Scots Radio Programming**;

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN

3rd Floor, Alfred House, 21 Alfred Street, Belfast BT2 8ED T: +44 28 9023 2444 F: +44 28 9023 9918 E: info@northernirelandscreen.co.uk

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- 2.2.3 The introduction of an **Ulster-Scots Trainee Scheme** designed to attract new researchers or aspiring assistant producers who are passionate and knowledgeable about Ulster-Scots language, heritage and/or culture.
- 2.3 There are also significant changes to the management and operation of the USBF. In practice, BBC NI's appointment of an Ulster-Scots Commissioning Executive may prove to be the most significant and welcome change to the management and operation of the USBF, but the USBF is also introducing a number of changes:
- 2.3.1 The USBF will seek greater information and clarity as to the contribution that any given proposal makes to the USBF's overarching aim;
- 2.3.2 The USBF will continue to require pre-agreed Consultants and may seek further direct engagement with them. The USBF will also wish to see that the Consultants are engaged during each of the 3 main phases of production – pre-production, production and post-production, as well as the development phase;
- 2.3.3 The Committee may require a number of updates throughout the pre-production and production periods rather than waiting until the later stages of post-production before reviewing projects;
- 2.3.4 The Committee will place greater weight on the strength of the links with Ulster-Scots sectoral and community groups that any given project demonstrates.
- 2.3.5 The USBF will seek to place its new Ulster-Scots Trainees with companies commissioned to produce significant USBF projects.
- 2.4 And there are changes in the USBF's editorial interests, primarily as a result of the carving out of a prescribed target for Ulster-Scots Language Programming and the introduction of Ulster-Scots radio programming as eligible for support.
- 2.4.1 The USBF will continue to present updated information on editorial priorities from time to time and continue to work with broadcasters and, in particular BBC NI, to agree common editorial priorities beginning with the new Language and radio interests.
- 2.4.2 The USBF has tended to be a little over dependent on the commissioning of history programmes albeit in many different forms. The Committee is keen to see a broadening of the USBF content. It is expected that this will include online education content and may include low budget single drama as well as more contemporary material.
- 2.4.3 The USBF will apply the guidance on the use of Ulster-Scots as an identifying term or descriptor provided at Appendix 1.

3. Amended USBF Objectives and Targets

3.1 The amended objectives and targets of the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund are therefore as follows:

- 3.1.1 To deliver 10 additional hours of Ulster-Scots moving image programming per annum in a range of genres conducive to the delivery of the heritage, culture and language aim;
- 3.1.2 To include Ulster-Scots Language Programming (including radio programming) to a minimum value of 20% of the available USBF production budget per annum;
- 3.1.3 To also deliver Ulster-Scots radio programming to a maximum of 10% of the available USBF production budget per annum – see radio note below;
- 3.1.4 And to deliver online projects consistent with the aim of the USBF to a maximum of 10% of the available USBF production budget per annum;
- 3.1.5 Consistent with the aim of the USBF, the Committee will place a higher priority on projects that have strong links with Ulster-Scots sectoral and community groups;
- 3.1.6 To achieve general audience satisfaction levels consistent with those for other local programmes broadcast in Northern Ireland of a similar genre in a similar broadcast slot;
- 3.1.7 To broadcast 90% of the USBF funded programming within 9 months of delivery;
- 3.1.8 To reach a significant Northern Ireland audience, primarily but not exclusively through broadcast television, with an average per programme audience target of 40,000 people in Northern Ireland. This target is an average across all the programming supported by the USBF applied to each 12 month period. It is fully accepted that some programming will attract audiences below this target and some above; for example, recent NVTV commissions will not attract audiences of this scale while recent prime time UTV broadcast content will far exceed this audience target. To address this issue, each commissioned project will be provided with a guide audience target to be established by the USBF in conjunction with the relevant broadcaster.
- 3.1.9 Whilst these are yearly objectives and targets it is recognised that on occasion where projects merit, it may be more beneficial to achieving the overarching aim of the USBF to spread targets across a 2 year period.

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN

3rd Floor, Alfred House, 21 Alfred Street, Belfast BT2 8ED T: +44 28 9023 2444 F: +44 28 9023 9918 E: info@northernirelandscreen.co.uk

W: www.northernirelandscreen.co.uk

4. Changes to the USBF's Operation

- 4.1 The USBF will seek greater information and clarity as to the contribution that any given proposal makes to the USBF's overarching aim. It is possible that this increased demand may lead to the USBF supporting more projects through development to ensure that the programme treatment fulfils the project's potential in furthering the aims of the USBF.
- 4.2 The use of a range of Consultants to underpin the Ulster-Scots themes has been well embedded within the USBF process. However, in the future the USBF will require that the pre-agreed Consultants are engaged during each of the 3 main phases of production – pre-production, production and post-production, as well as the development phase. This is in response to a sense on occasion that Consultants are often utilised during development and in post-production but less consistently during pre-production and production. Too often, opportunities to further the aim of the USBF are missed during pre-production and production and cannot be reinstated during post-production. A more constant use of Consultants seeks to address this issue.
- 4.3 As with the use of Consultants, it has been a fairly common experience for the USBF to view projects in post-production only to regret opportunities that have been missed during production. To address this issue, the Committee may require a number of updates throughout the pre-production and production periods rather than waiting until the later stages of post-production before reviewing projects.
- 4.4 The USBF will seek to place its new Ulster-Scots Trainees with companies commissioned to produce significant USBF projects.
- 4.5 The formal assessment criteria have been modified to read as follows:
 - 4.5.1 The project delivers against the aim of the USBF and contributes sufficiently to the USBF Objectives and Targets (Formal Additionality will be established through this criteria);
 - 4.5.2 The quality of the proposal and the audience appeal, including an indicative audience target and appropriate broadcaster commitment;
 - 4.5.3 Value for money/maximising the resources within the USBF;
 - 4.5.4 The quality of the links with appropriate Ulster-Scots sectoral and community groups;
 - 4.5.5 The opportunities provided for USBF trainees;

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5. Editorial Interests/Priorities

5.1 The following guidance should be noted:

- 5.1.1 Ulster-Scots Language Programming: the introduced minimum target for Ulster-Scots Language programming is the most significant shift in the USBF's editorial priorities. The USBF has prioritised Ulster-Scots Language programming for some time but the levels of Language programming supported have remained inadequate set against the USBF's aim. It is hoped that ring-fencing the budget for Ulster-Scots Language programming will address the issue. The Committee is seeking creative and contemporary presentation of Ulster-Scots Language and will consider approaches that target the fluent as well as learners and the general population. The USBF has covered the history of Ulster-Scots language. It is expected that some Language programming will be radio.
- 5.1.2 Ulster-Scots Radio: the USBF is open to supporting radio content produced for BBC Radio Ulster, other local commercial stations and/or community radio with assessment based on the standard USBF criteria. Content for Radio Ulster must be produced by an independent company. This requirement for separation between broadcaster and production company/USBF applicant does not apply to other radio applicants.
- 5.1.3 Online/Digital Content: the guidance for online or digital content remains unchanged and is attached – Appendix 2. The Committee is encouraged by the most recent USBF supported online production, *Our Innovators*, which complied strongly with 2 key criteria; that is, it was developed to be directly useful as a support tool for the school curriculum with input from CCEA and it had considerable support and direction provided by the Ulster-Scots Agency. The Committee will be keen to tease out how online programming might be developed in support of television programming especially given the potential of iPlayer to lengthen the life span of television programming.
- 5.1.4 As already stated in the summary of changes, the USBF wishes to reduce its dependency on historical subjects and to expand contemporary themes for programming. The cross border links between Northern Ireland and Scotland will remain a significant assessment criteria albeit not a critical one. Possibly an even more influential assessment criteria will be the weight that the Committee will place on the strength of the links with Ulster-Scots sectoral and community groups apparent and detailed in the proposals. These links may be in the form of portrayal or editorial guidance.
- 5.1.5 Compliance with the guidance on the use of Ulster-Scots as an identifying term or descriptor provided at Appendix 1 is essential to receiving support from the USBF.

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN

3rd Floor, Alfred House, 21 Alfred Street, Belfast BT2 8ED T: +44 28 9023 2444 F: +44 28 9023 9918 E: info@northernirelandscreen.co.uk

W: www.northernirelandscreen.co.uk



For further information, please contact:

Richard Williams or Suzanne Harrison

Northern Ireland Screen
3rd Floor, Alfred House
Alfred Street
Belfast
BT2 8ED

Email: usbf@northernirelandscreen.co.uk

Telephone: 028 9023 2444.

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN

3rd Floor, Alfred House, 21 Alfred Street, Belfast BT2 8ED T: +44 28 9023 2444 F: +44 28 9023 9918 E: info@northernirelandscreen.co.uk
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Appendix 1

Guidance on the use of Ulster-Scots as an identifying term and descriptor within content supported by the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

1. The aim of the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund is to ensure that the heritage, culture and language of Ulster-Scots are expressed through moving image. A key aspect in the delivery of that aim is to ensure that the audience for the supported content is given every opportunity to understand that the content being viewed is associated with and/or relevant to the heritage, culture and/or language of Ulster-Scots.
2. One simple signpost or marker for the audience is to use the term and descriptor 'Ulster-Scots' within the programming. While this is a very obvious point of guidance, it is clear from a review of the content supported by the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund that there has been an uneven use of the term 'Ulster-Scots' across the programming supported to date, including programmes where the term 'Ulster-Scots' is not used at all.
3. These guidelines do not seek to address all of the scenarios that will arise in programming and it is fully acknowledged that there is complexity and nuance around the potential use of the term 'Ulster-Scots'; for example, 'Scots-Irish' is a very similar identifier used much more freely across the USA, while any individual either historical or contemporary may or may not self-identify as Ulster-Scots. However, these guidelines do assert the need – particularly where programmes are presenter led – to use the term 'Ulster-Scots' to appropriately acknowledge the Ulster-Scots heritage, culture and/or language aim behind the programming and to assist the audiences' understanding.
4. A few basic guidelines:
 - 4.1 A presenter should always use the term 'Ulster-Scots' within their script. If other descriptors are being used, the presenter can make the link; for example, 'the Scotch-Irish more commonly referred to in Northern Ireland as the Ulster-Scots';
 - 4.2 Individuals, either contemporary or historical, should not be directly described as Ulster-Scots if it is known that they would not have self-identified as Ulster-Scots but reference can still be made to their Ulster-Scots roots or heritage. These connections and links should always be sought out;
 - 4.3 Many aspects of life – contemporary and historic – have multiple roots and influences and are not purely Ulster-Scots, Irish, imperial or whatever. However, it is almost always possible to highlight the Ulster-Scots elements of the influence; for example, the Scottish ecclesiastical architecture that dominates Presbyterian churches.

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Appendix 2

Additional Guidelines relating to the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund's support of Digital Content

Introduction

The guidelines for the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund ('USBF') allow for the possibility that the USBF may support the production of content which is not intended for television broadcast. The guidelines state that where content not for broadcast - that is digital content - is considered, all of the other criteria relating to the USBF still apply and, most importantly, evidence of audience reach still applies.

In effect, this means that the criteria for the support of digital content are set relatively high.

There are 2 key challenges for digital content applications. The first challenge is the need to explain how a digital content project will reach a substantial audience. The second is to evidence the necessary quality of the project without the benefit of a television broadcaster both ensuring and endorsing the standard of the content.

The USBF Investment Committee (the 'Committee') regards these as tough challenges and does not expect to support a large number of digital content proposals. However, the Committee does believe that the right digital content projects can be supported and these additional guidelines are designed to signpost potential applicants towards the right sort of projects.

Outlining the Assessment Criteria

1. Potential Audience

1.1 Applications for digital content projects often address the question of audience reach by reference to the accessibility and power of the internet. However, that any given website could potentially be viewed by an almost infinite audience is not a compelling argument to the USBF. Instead, the USBF will assess the real likelihood of viewers seeking out the content and the extent to which the proposition has built in drivers of audience. In Northern Ireland Screen's experience few digital content producers consider this issue sufficiently rigorously.

1.2 The Committee envisages that the following might represent compelling evidence that a substantial audience could be reached:

1.2.1 With education content, a commitment from CCEA to make the materials available and to distribute the materials to all interested schools. In contrast, the

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN

3rd Floor, Alfred House, 21 Alfred Street, Belfast BT2 8ED T: +44 28 9023 2444 F: +44 28 9023 9918 E: info@northernirelandscreen.co.uk

W: www.northernirelandscreen.co.uk

support of individual schools or a small group of schools does not represent compelling evidence that a substantial audience could be reached;

- 1.2.2 Digital or web-based content that has an association with long running radio or television content has the potential to reach a substantial audience utilising cross promotion where, for example, the web address is trailing on the end of the television programme or read out on the radio programme repeatedly and regularly. A good general example of this is www.4thought.tv;
- 1.2.3 There may be other ways to 'piggyback' significant other audiences. For example, through connecting and collaborating with other projects of scale being developed by substantial organisations with a Northern Ireland wide interest or remit. Again, the Committee would emphasise that it is not minded to support projects, however worthy, that cannot penetrate broadly across Northern Ireland.
- 1.3 There is no single fixed definition of a 'substantial audience' although for general audience content there is some guidance in noting that the audience requirement for television broadcast content is 40,000 viewers.
- 1.4 However, there are a number of scenarios where an audience target lower than 40,000 would still be compelling, and the appropriate audience target will be different for different types of content. For example, a content proposal that could evidence that it would be made available to every primary school in Northern Ireland, and could also evidence that it had reason to expect that more than half the primary schools would actively engage with the content, would be extremely compelling despite the fact that this audience number would be approximately 11,000.
- 1.5 Similarly, for example, projects that are of extremely high scholastic value may be considered despite the likelihood that they would not reach a large and general audience. In this scenario, the quality would become the more significant assessment criteria with the assessment of audience having more to do with the accessibility and availability of the content than the actual number of users.
- 1.6 In all instances, there will be 2 aspects to assessing the substantial audience criteria; that is, the level of availability of the content, and the actual number of people likely to be reached. Once again, the availability test will be assessed on rather more than the content's presence on a website but rather the extent to which an audience can be evidenced to be clearly made aware of the content.

2. Quality of the Project

- 2.1 Outside of the television broadcasting framework it is much more difficult for the USBF to satisfy itself that the quality of any given project will be of a sufficient standard. It is common knowledge that the quality of websites and apps for smart phones, tablets and other mobile devices varies considerably across a spectrum from very poor to excellent.

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN

3rd Floor, Alfred House, 21 Alfred Street, Belfast BT2 8ED T: +44 28 9023 2444 F: +44 28 9023 9918 E: info@northernirelandscreen.co.uk

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2.2 For a digital content-related application to the USBF to be successful, it must provide compelling evidence that the quality of the project or content will be of the highest level. There is no single prescribed way of illustrating the quality of a project, but the following list may provide some guidance;

2.2.1 the experience of the team involved in the project is an important factor;

2.2.2 a viewable prototype or pilot could provide the necessary assurance;

2.2.3 endorsement by other experienced assessors of the relevant content might also address this issue;

2.2.4 in formal education, programming endorsement by CCEA that the content was directly relevant to the curriculum in a manner consistent with the general priorities of the Fund would be helpful;

3. Policy Content

3.1 The extent to which a project is integrated into and designed to further other Northern Ireland wide government policies will also be considered. Particular consideration will be given to the extent to which digital content proposals are relevant and consistent with the policies of other Ulster-Scots stakeholders, including the Ulster-Scots Agency.

4. Additionality

4.1 As with all Northern Ireland Screen funding, the extent to which the funding being applied for can be shown to add value is critical.