

Arts and Culture

“We are community builders, part of the fabric” – A review of community radio

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Scotland has an active community radio infrastructure which primarily uses volunteers to deliver hours of specialist programming to local people across the country. This research was commissioned by the Broadcasting and Creative Industries Policy Team to provide an overview of community radio generally, but also to focus on the Scottish sector specifically. The research is intended to assist policy development in support of such services in Scotland.

Main Findings

- Independent audited listening figures and profiles are not available in the UK to assess the market share, advertising effectiveness or social impact of individual stations or of the sector as a whole
- Commentators maintain that maximising listenership is not a primary objective and that quality of engagement for participants and delivery of social gain objectives off-air is of principal importance
- Community radio creates broadcasting space which is free from commercial interests, and which also actively uses and promotes the arts
- Community radio in the UK provides over 12,500 volunteering opportunities and 15,000 hours of original programming per week
- Volunteer management and communication, listener data, marketing and public profile, equipment costs and failure, finance, and working with others were all highlighted as challenges by Scottish stations
- Most surveyed station managers in Scotland would consider sharing premises, equipment and resources with other stations and with arts, community, education or voluntary organisations
- The number of volunteers at Scottish stations varies between 31 to 85, and volunteer benefits include increased: confidence and self worth; companionship; sense of belonging; satisfaction from helping others; technical and social skills; knowledge and experience; enjoyment and improved mental and physical health, and; career development
- Just over half of Scottish volunteers indicated they would like to receive accredited training (none of the surveyed stations managers currently provide this), and improving training provision was also a leading priority in relation to course content, delivery, links with colleges and universities, monitoring, and progression into paid employment
- Community radio stations in Scotland do collaborate with each other and in a limited fashion with professional broadcasters, but it was felt that such links could be consolidated and improved
- The desire to work more closely with the arts sector in Scotland was repeatedly expressed

The research

The purpose of the research was to provide an overview of current community radio provision with a specific focus on the Scottish sector. The study consisted of two phases:

- A literature review looking at community radio in general
- Two surveys and two focus groups with station managers and volunteers on community radio in Scotland

Phase two looked at how community radio in Scotland operates, what the perceived benefits are, what works well or could be improved on, in what ways the sector collaborates with others, and future support requirements.

Conclusions

Although there is a surprising breadth of writing about community radio in Britain and abroad, very little is written about community radio in Scotland. Whilst there is evidence pointing towards the overall benefits of community radio, much of this is anecdotal. There is also a lack of systematic data on listener numbers, profiles and outcomes.

The literature review and primary research on community radio in Scotland do, however, suggest that the benefits for volunteers are far reaching. Station managers and volunteers talked passionately about community radio, the contribution it makes to community life and what they have gained from being involved with it.

Scottish station managers and volunteers also highlighted funding, spectrum coverage, training provision, sector profile, management and governance arrangements, the lack of listener data, and volunteer involvement in decision making as possible areas for improvement. Improving collaboration between

community radio and the arts was also identified as an important opportunity, particularly in relation to potential funding revenue, training and shared creative endeavour.

This review highlights a number of issues of relevance to wider discussions about how best to guide and support community radio provision in Scotland. For example, there is clear interest in receiving additional training and although Scottish stations have collaborated with training providers and education establishments, more could be done to improve these links and embed training provision within the wider qualifications framework.

Next steps

This research has identified the need for further consideration of the following strategic areas:

- The need for the community radio sector to develop a clear understanding of what community radio should consist of, what it should achieve, for whom, and how it can fulfil these aims
- A possible role for the Scottish Government and relevant public bodies in improving training provision and potentially seeking accreditation
- Following this, the community radio sector to identify and secure clear training and career pathways between community radio and professional broadcasters and other education providers
- The community radio sector to consider how to further support volunteers and improve management/governance skills
- The potential for various public bodies (i.e. local and national Government, the Scottish Community Broadcast Network and Creative Scotland) to work together to support and promote community radio

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or on 0131 244 7560.



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