



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Adam Smyth

Interim Director BBC NI Broadcasting House

Ormeau Avenue

Belfast

BT2 8HQ

16 January 2023

Dear Adam,

PROPOSED FUNDING CUTS, BBC RADIO FOYLE

On 4th January, I attended the NUJ's event in the Guildhall in Londonderry, where participants protested your proposed cuts to the output of Radio Foyle. I promised to write to you in terms similar to those I used that evening. My remarks that evening covered both my desire to stand in political solidarity and to reflect on my experiences as a broadcast journalist with both BBC NI and UTV.

POLITICAL OBJECTIONS

1. I believe your proposal flies in the face of the political / societal direction of travel, which is towards localism. In short, this means devolving powers beyond the traditional seats of decision-making, such as Westminster, on the basis that the closer you get informed decision-making to the domestic unit (whatever that unit's composition) the better the chance of affecting positive change in people's lives. I put an emphasis on "informed" decision-making and therefore suggest the role of the Radio Foyle newsroom, not least the Breakfast Show, performs a critical function. I further contend this role is exacerbated by the fact there is no functioning Northern Ireland Assembly or Executive, placing a greater than normal duty on journalists to hold to account those making decisions that affect the lives of the people you and I serve.
2. I am concerned that your consultation process lacks the rigour, reach and thoroughness that would be expected of a Northern Ireland Executive Minister proposing a change of similar significance. I would be grateful if you could point me to any document that details the consultation process you are undertaking. I am further concerned there is no Northern Ireland representative on the BBC Board to scrutinise and, if appropriate, challenge your proposals. I would be keen to understand why you believe what you are doing represents good governance.

## JOURNALISTIC OBJECTION

1. Having worked for BBC NI for a decade and maintained contact with many who have and continue to work for you since, my instinct is to support an alternative approach to cost savings. Rather than cutting cherished services under the current management framework, I suggest reducing management structures might yield the desired savings without such drastic and unpopular cuts to output.
2. I understand the BBC's desire to promote a "Digital First" strategy, but on that basis, why cut the Radio Foyle Breakfast Show, but not Good Morning Ulster? When I presented "GMU", I did so as a single-handed presenter, five days a week, when the programme ran from 7:00am to around 8:35. Today it runs 55 minutes longer than it did then. I think I could argue credibly that this is the wrong way around, given the comparative news agenda of today versus that of the 1980s.

Early in my time with BBC NI, I remember a drive to reduce headcount. An A4 sheet was posted on notice boards, detailing cuts by department – Newsroom, TV Current Affairs, Radio Current Affairs, Agriculture, Religion, Sport etc. Below all the minuses was a single plus: Administration was expanding by two to handle the changes. You will understand why I am submitting a FoI to understand the cost of your proposals.

I am copying your colleagues, Tim Davie and Rhodri Talfan Davies for their information.

Yours sincerely  
Mike Nesbitt

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