



MEDIA EVALUATION OF PRE-LAUNCH AND LAUNCH PUBLICITY CONCERNING BBC ALBA  
PREPARED ON BEHALF OF MEDIA HOUSE  
by  
McCallum Media Monitor

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# METHODOLOGY

The cuttings supplied were read for classification and were measured in column centimetres to allow an AVE (Advertising Value Equivalency) to be determined. The rates for the AVE were taken from BRAD.

During the measuring process two issues cropped up. The first was the presence of a significant number of duplicated clippings. These were edited out and amounted to 108 pages.

In the early months covered by the evaluation, all the cuttings were supplied by another

cuttings agency but the turn of year, further duplication began to appear as cuttings supplied by McCallum Media Monitor entered the equation. Eventually all duplicate cuttings were removed.

However, the presence of cuttings from two different agencies highlighted another problem. The cuttings from the other agency had headlines and photographs reduced, making them significantly smaller than the full size cuttings provided by

ourselves. By the time this was discovered, a large number of their cuttings had already been measured. Subsequent to the discovery of this disparity, allowance was made for the possibility of earlier cuttings being reduced in size.

The AVE has been calculated at exact parity with the published BRAD rate. Some evaluation agencies multiply the BRAD figures by a factor of up to 2.5 on the assumption that editorial is two and a half times more influential than advertising. This

has not been done in this instance, though it is a matter of simple arithmetic should you choose to do so.

All mentions of the keyword BBC ALBA were highlighted to assist in determining its frequency. It was noted that some journalists used the phrase “Alba TV”, so clarification was sought from Media House as to whether this should be counted in the keyword total. Following their instruction, it has been included. However, the phrase “MG ALBA” has not been counted towards the keyword total.

Additionally, the cuttings supplied by the other cuttings agency would appear to have been scanned using OCR, so every mention of the word Alba was picked up and included, whether relevant or not. The Scotsman Alba diary piece

appeared a few times along with stories about The Kings of Alba and numerous mentions of Alba in Gaelic language pieces that had no connection to BBC Alba. Items of this sort were all removed.

As requested by Media House, we looked at a number of key themes.

These were;

The general impact that the launch of BBC Alba had in the press.

The response to the initial viewing figures.

The response to the second set of viewing figures.

The amount and breakdown of sports coverage.

Coverage given to individual programmes, including the festive programming.

Music programme coverage

The effect of BBC ALBA on Gaelic education, language and culture.

It should be noted here that as part of our ongoing brief with MG ALBA, McCallum Media Monitor monitors and clips significant stories about Gaelic language, and many of these cuttings were included in the batch for evaluation.

However, where there was no mention whatsoever of BBC ALBA or even the broadcast media in general in relation to Gaelic, these stories were not included

in the evaluation. They number 25 cuttings in total. All cuttings, whether excluded on grounds of relevance or duplication have been returned.

In addition, we were asked to identify, where possible, any journalists who displayed antipathy towards BBC ALBA. Many of the stories are not by-lined, but a number of diarists fall into this category and have been identified.

In addition to measuring the cuttings for Advertising Equivalency, we also gave an indication of impact by counting the number of photographs that were used and, in terms of delivering the core message, we have provided a tally of the number of items that used

quotes from representatives from BBC ALBA, MG ALBA, relevant politicians and representatives from bodies working in partnership with BBC or MG ALBA. These include MOD organisers, SFL officials, music festival promoters etc. These figures are found in the raw data section in the columns PHOTOS, CORE MESSAGE and QUOTES.

As a further indicator of the profile the stories received, we looked at their position in the newspaper. The methodology here was to note down each individual page number, total them and divide them by the number of stories. This is not an exact science due to the fact that a newspaper running a significant number of sports stories will tend to have a higher average page

location number than one with fewer sports stories. It is, at best, an additional indicator of impact. The figures for the average position of BBC ALBA stories in the papers are found in the first column in the raw data.

Another indicator of public interest in BBC ALBA that we looked at was the number of letters published by the papers. Once again, this is not an exact measurement, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the papers will sometimes try to be even handed by publishing one letter each with opposing views, when they may have received twice as many letters for one particular view.

Secondly, there are a couple of inveterate letter writers whose identical missives wing their way

to newspapers the length and breadth of Scotland on an almost daily basis, and the launch of the new channel was certainly on their radar.

Many of the letters concerned the question of the lack of availability of BBC ALBA on Freeview. This was not mentioned specifically in the initial brief, but cropped up so regularly that we allocated it its own category and counted the number of items that it appeared in. This is the final column in the raw data. Note that, unlike BBC ALBA, where we have counted every individual mention, we have only indicated the number of stories or letters that Freeview was mentioned in.

The Freeview issue takes us neatly onto perhaps the most crucial aspect of the evaluation, the question of Tone, whether positive, negative or neutral.

Many of the letters and stories mentioning Freeview would appear to be negative in nature, with headlines such as “Is BBC ALBA being born to fail?” However, the negativity is being directed not at BBC ALBA per se, but at the BBC in general. Not all of these items were automatically judged to be negative for the purposes of this evaluation in which we drew a firm distinction between the BBC as an entity and BBC ALBA as a channel.

Further judgement calls had to be made regarding the tone of

many of the items regarding programming, and coverage of sports. Reviews in which the programme is described as “exhilarating”, “thought-provoking”, “deeply moving”, “beautifully acted” are easy to classify, but a large number of the stories were generated by pre-viewing press releases, which often adopted quite a neutral tone. In these cases we took the view that the fact that the paper had published the item, often with photographs for added impact as well as broadcast times, justified its categorisation as being positive in nature.

In the raw data, coverage of BBC ALBA is broken down for each individual paper on a monthly basis. In order to help establish patterns of coverage we have

also extracted and totalled coverage for local weekly newspapers, Sunday papers and daily papers. In this final category, though it was entirely possible to do so, we did not distinguish between indigenous Scottish newspapers and Scottish editions of national papers. The reason for this is that the “kilted” nationals are generally edited and printed in Scotland and are to all effects as Scottish as the Herald or Scotsman. There is always difficulty in determining the status of a paper. Is the Herald a Scottish National paper as opposed to a Scottish Regional paper, into which category many people would place the Press & Journal, despite it selling more copies than the Herald and with more geographical editions?

Had there been stories from National papers without specifically Scottish editions then we might have taken a different view, but there was a complete lack of coverage in the Financial Times and the Guardian, which are just about the only two papers that do not have a separate masthead for Scotland. The Independent, which does fly the saltire on its Scottish edition, carried one item. (a negative one!)

While making that point, we noticed that some of the clips referred to earlier items that were not among the batch delivered to us and we have instigated an online search using Lexis Nexis to try to identify these. So far we have seen that one or two of the Scottish

editions of the nationals may indeed have used different versions of the story in their English editions and we will endeavour to retrieve the online print-out of the text and include them in the evaluation.

## LAUNCH IMPACT

There was pre-launch publicity on August 14<sup>th</sup> as a teaser to the first broadcasts on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September.

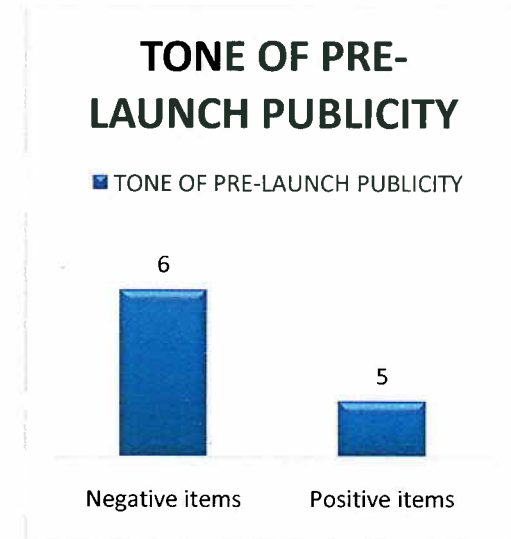
Reaction was mixed, with negative headlines in the Daily

Express – “Blast over Gaelic channel” “English pay £10m for Gaelic channel” and the Daily Mail “£11m BBC Gaelic channel may cost £365 per viewer.”

Within the bodies of the stories, the channel was described as “controversial”, with both publications concentrating on the cost “almost £400 per potential viewer, almost three times the £136 current licence fee” said the Express.

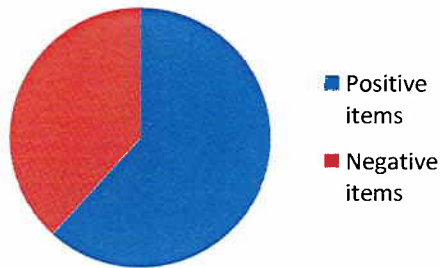
Tory MP John Whittingdale, chairman of the Commons media committee had “concerns” about the way in which money could be wasted, saying that the launch of the Gaelic channel “smacks of political correctness, trying to appease a very vocal minority.”

The issue of Freeview came into play from the start, though there were mixed messages. The Express said that the BBC would spend £1m on Freeview to make it available throughout England as well as Scotland, while the Courier and Advertiser, in a more welcoming item, said that after the digital switchover, Freeview would be available in Scotland only.



Although the negative pre-launch articles outnumbered the positive ones 6 to 5, the tables were turned when the amount of negative or positive column centimetres was calculated. The main reason for this was that a number of the negative items were in the form of small diary items by Hickey in the Express.

## **TONE OF LAUNCH PUBLICITY IN COLUMN CENTIMETRES**



As has already been mentioned, Freeview was a live issue from the very start, with opinion divided among those who said it would be too expensive to make BBC ALBA available on Freeview and those who believed that without access to Freeview, the channel would have little chance of succeeding. Of the 11 articles in August, 8 addressed the issue of Freeview to some extent.

# **THE LAUNCH.**

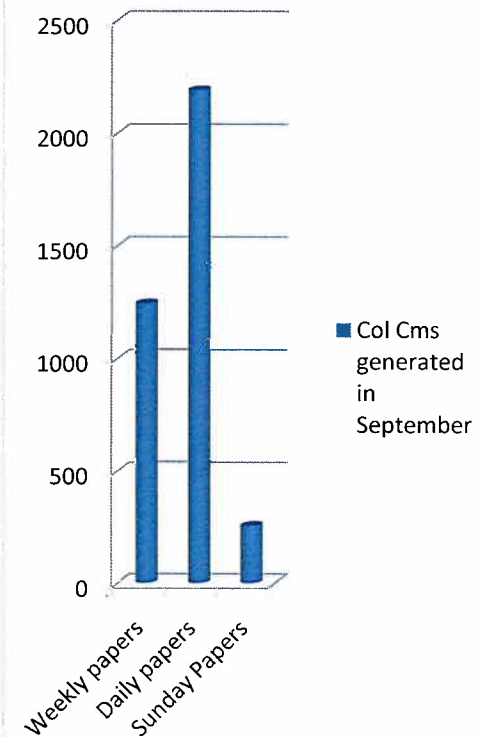
## **SEPTEMBER 19<sup>TH</sup> 2008**

The launch month of September saw a vast increase in coverage, up from 11 stories totalling 197 column centimetres the previous month, to 95 stories, generating 3,766.5 column centimetres and 235 references to BBC Alba.

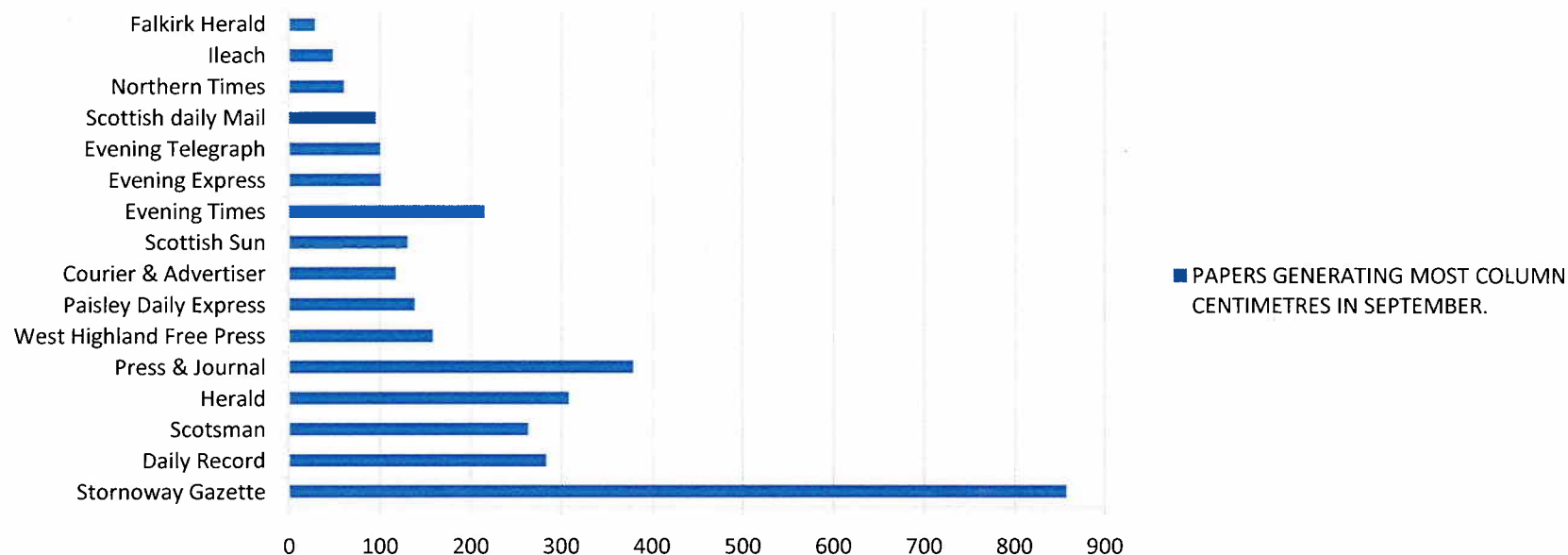
Another notable feature of September's coverage is the prominence given to the event by the local weekly press, particularly in the Gaeltachd. While not surprising that papers in this area should take an interest, it is a notable feature of September's coverage that the number of stories carried and the total col. cms. generated is

comparable to that of the daily papers, despite the disparity in frequency of publishing.

## **Col Cms generated in September**



## PAPERS GENERATING MOST COLUMN CENTIMETRES IN SEPTEMBER.



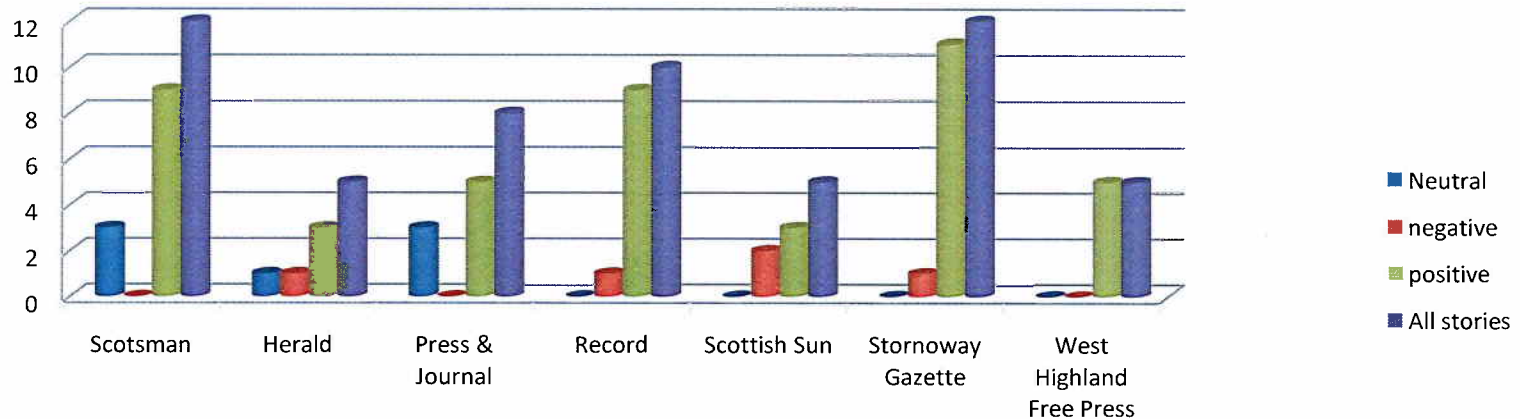
Local weekly papers also showed up well in terms of story prominence, and impact, with a high proportion of the articles appearing early in the paper, as the raw data on the following pages shows, with the Stornoway Gazette once again outstripping the field as being a

fertile field in which to plant the seeds of publicity for BBC ALBA. Out of a total of 28 stories carried by local weekly papers in September, it accounted for almost half of them, equalling the total of the best-performing daily paper, the Scotsman, with 12, and bettering it in terms of

prominence, by running stories nearer the start of the paper, averaging a story placement of page 12 as opposed to page 24. It also generated impact by illustrating the articles with 10 photographs, out of a total of 13 carried by the weekly papers and 41 by all papers combined.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the almost equal split between positive and negative articles in August, the launch publicity was very positive indeed as the tone of the articles in the papers that provided most publicity shows.

**TONE OF ARTICLES IN PAPERS CARRYING THE GREATEST NUMBER OF ITEMS**



The ratio of positive to neutral and negative stories in the leading papers was mirrored on a smaller scale throughout all publications. Out of a total of 95 articles, 68 were judged positive, 13 neutral and 14 negative. When the actual amount of column centimetres is used as a measure, the tone is even more positive, outstripping the negative content by a factor of ten as the chart on the right illustrates.

**Tone of launch month articles**



## THE RESPONSE TO THE INITIAL VIEWING FIGURES

When the TNS System Three results of the initial viewing figures for BBC ALBA were published, the reaction in the media was predominantly one of surprise.

“BBC’s Gaelic TV channel attracts 550,000 non-native speakers” said the Daily Telegraph on 28<sup>th</sup> October. But despite the slight tone of scepticism in the headline, the story itself was fairly positive, pointing out that research had showed that 82% of people with access to the service had tuned in at some point, and of those, more than 87% had continued to watch for more than two hours. BBC Alba’s head of service, Margaret Mary Murray,

was quoted as saying that the results reflected “an excellent start”

The Telegraph was also able to report more accurately what real situation regarding Freeview was, stating that BBC Alba would not automatically be available on that platform after the analogue switch-off, but that it would depend on the decision of the BBC Trust, and even then, it would be available only in Scotland and not throughout the UK as other papers had previously suggested.

Georgina Reid, writing in The Sun mirrored the positive tone of the Telegraph, saying that it was a “smash-hit first week” for

the station. As well as quoting an anonymous “Beeb insider” who said that the figures had “surpassed their wildest expectations”, the piece also carried the same quote from Margaret Mary Murray as the Telegraph. The Sun ascribed the success to the popularity of women’s international football and Cathy MacDonald’s celebrity lifestyle show. Indeed, in a box piece, John Morrison, described only as a native Gaelic speaker, told everyone that the Scottish Sun was leading support for the channel and for Gaelic and it looked as though it had backed a winner. As Alba is available on Sky (prop. R Murdoch esq.) though not yet on Freeview, it is perhaps not

too surprising that the Sun (prop. R Murdoch esq.) is backing Alba.

But, never one to toe the party line, columnist Rikki Brown questioned the viewing figures in a box story of his own, pointing out that 60,000 people each tuning in ten times did not equate to 600,000 viewers, just 60,000 whose remotes were jammed on the one button.

Under the headline, “Gaelic TV is a surprise hit with viewers,” The Independent quoted Margaret Mary Murray, and also Alasdair Morrison of MG Alba and Calum Macleod of Comunn na Gaidhlig, who praised the quality of the programming and added his voice to calls for the channel to be available on Freeview. The Independent

noted the channel’s “modest budget” and restricted availability, both in terms of broadcast hours and platforms, but said that plays such as Eilbheas, though unorthodox, seemed to be working in attracting viewers.

In the Daily Mail, John Macleod provided his assessment of how the channel was doing, writing about the opening night a month after the event. Nonetheless, he had kind words for some of the programmes—the “excellent documentary” on Peter Manuel, the “outstanding” Rowing Man, the “excellent” An Latha. There were programmes he couldn’t thole – Elvis, and a “self congratulatory” ceilidh at the Gaelic College on Skye, but admitted that on any channel on

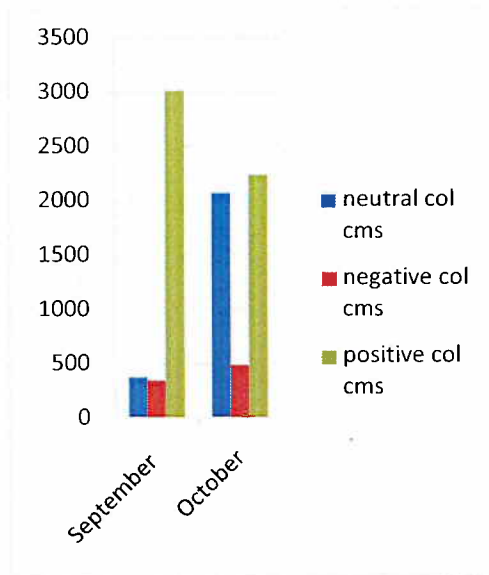
any given night there would be a mixture of “majestic programming” and “sheer dreck” and that BBC Alba was no worse than anywhere else in that respect.

He too addressed the question of Freeview, claiming that many of the “best and wisest” Gaelic speakers are unlikely to have cable or satellite tv and wondered if the lack of Freeview availability meant that someone was “deliberately setting this venture up to fail”

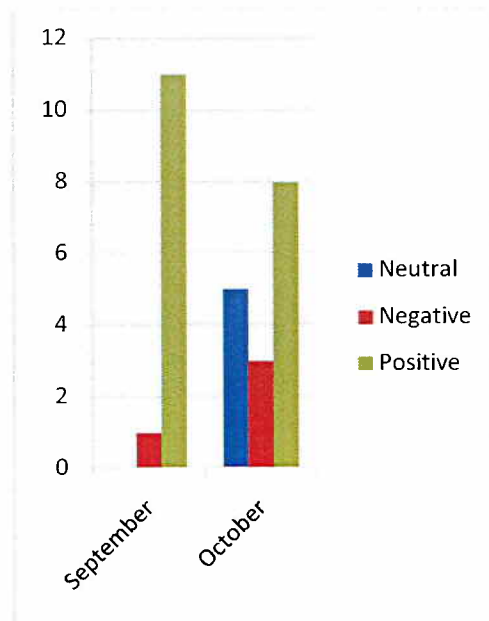
Meanwhile, Express columnist Hickey, and John Gibson of the Evening News continued their campaign of Gael bashing with barbs about Alba’s “382 viewers” and the “avalanche of our money on to additional TV services for the Gaels.”

## OCTOBER COVERAGE

Despite the euphoria of the better-than-expected audience figures, and though coverage for the channel increased, both in terms of articles and column centimetres, there was a convergence of ratios in respect to the tone of the pieces.

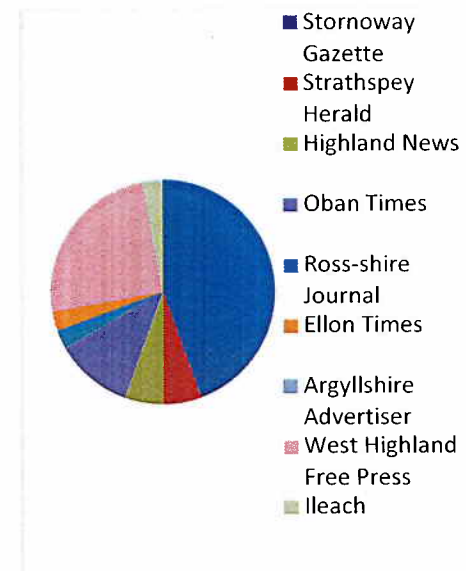


This trend was apparent even in the coverage provided by the Stornoway Gazette, BBC Alba’s flag-waver in the north.



Despite this trend, the Stornoway Gazette remained by far the most positive promoter of BBC Alba among all

newspapers, whether weekly or daily. In October, coverage of BBC Alba by the weekly papers was very firmly based in the Highlands, whereas in September, papers in Airdrie, Largs and Falkirk had carried stories.



**Proportion of coverage from local papers in October.**

## RESPONSE TO THE SECOND SET OF VIEWING FIGURES

The second set of viewing figures for BBC ALBA were announced at the beginning of February 2009 and showed a drop of 200,000 viewers in the four months since the channel went on air.

The response from the BBC Trust was that it had a realistic target in its own mind of 250,000 viewers and that the latest available figures, though down to 400,000 from an initial high of 610,000, were still exceeding expectations.

The headlines highlighted the cost of the service for what they saw as an already small, and now dwindling, body of viewers. “£21m Gaelic TV turn-off” said the Daily Mail. It also quoted the

most recent Census figures, from 2001, showing that just less than 59,000 people spoke Gaelic. It did balance this, however, by saying that over 3,000 children are being educated in Gaelic across the country and a further 3,641 are studying Gaelic at secondary school level.

Alasdair Morrison, MG Alba chairman, was reported as being keen to have Alba on Freeview as quickly as possible to allow greater access.

News that BBC Alba had signed a deal to screen 10 Scottish Football League matches in full just a few hours after they had been played met with a mixed reaction with some letter

writers accusing the station of just trying to “bulk up” its viewing figures by attracting non-Gaelic viewers. Donald Campbell responded to this accusation by Stephen McGinty in the Scotsman, the following day, 4<sup>th</sup> February, pointing out the illogicality of wanting a TV channel to disbar itself from showing popular sport. The alacrity with which BBC Alba and MG Alba rebut what they regard as unfounded criticism has been a feature of the press coverage. More often than not their letter appears the following day.

There was some good publicity to be had with the football stories, a number of papers running pieces on the Gaelic

phrases for such football standards as “Who ate all the pies?” and “That was never a penalty, ref.”

In the Sunday Mail, columnist Andy Bollen was starting to rival Hickey as a Gael basher with jibes about the station.

Following the news of the drop in viewers he suggested that it should be called BBC Alba-tross.

The Sunday Times ran a piece on the declining figures, following it up in The Times the next day with a smaller item summarising the salient points. Both stories ran the BBC line that it expected viewing figures to fall to 250,000.

In the West Highland Free Press, Alex O’Henley defended BBC Alba’s sports policy at some

length, taking issue with prominent Alba critic, historian Michael Fry, who sees the televising of football games as an example of Alba “cheating” its way to better viewing figures. O’Henley claims that the coverage has been “well received by Gaels and non-Gaels alike, with many remarking that the quality is on a par with or even better than existing sports channels.

Perhaps a little surprisingly, the Highland News carried a piece highly critical of the screening of football with Gaelic commentary, calling it “blatant, indefensible discrimination against the overwhelming majority of viewers who don’t speak Gaelic” by the “Gaelic

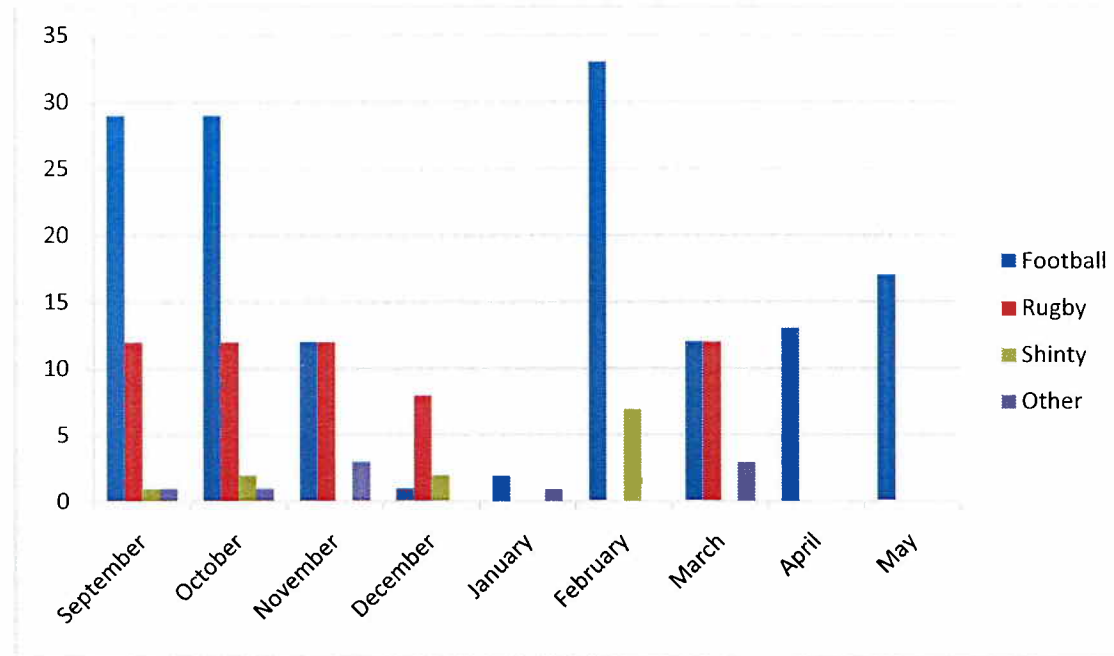
mafia, which has heavily infiltrated the BBC”.

With one of its trademark pun headlines, the Sun, labels the fall in viewing figures a “Gael Farce” and reports Michael Fry’s opposition to the channel. However, the Sun also ran sizeable pieces promoting Chick Young’s appearance on Cuide Ri Cathy and David Coulthard’s involvement with Spors, the sports programme.

The fall in viewing figures did not seem to affect the positive coverage Alba received.

Although total coverage was down to 98 stories from 123 in October, positive stories were up from 48 to 72, much of that due to sports coverage.

## THE AMOUNT AND BREAKDOWN OF SPORTS COVERAGE



NUMBER OF SPORTS STORIES MONTH BY MONTH

Without any doubt the sport that receives the most coverage is football, which more than explains MG Alba's decision to sponsor the Alba Challenge cup. In the autumn there was a relatively healthy number

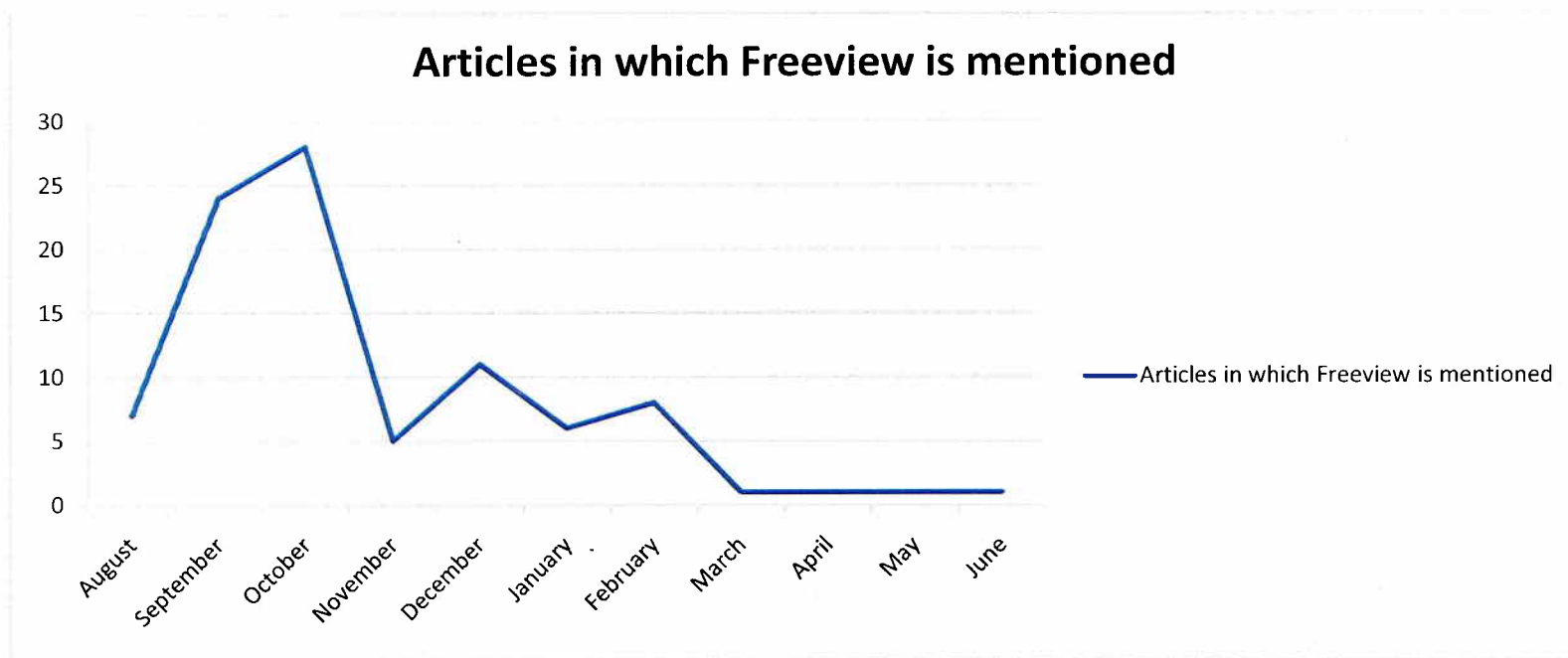
of rugby stories but that stopped as soon as BBC Alba stopped showing matches. Shinty has only 11 mentions, ice hockey 3 and hockey 1. Those figures might increase in future if BBC Alba's plans to screen games

come to fruition, but its involvement with professional football in Scotland would seem to ensure that it is in those stories that the majority of its sports-related exposure will be gained.

## TRACKING THE FREEVIEW DEBATE

One of the most contentious issues facing BBC ALBA is its unavailability on Freeview.

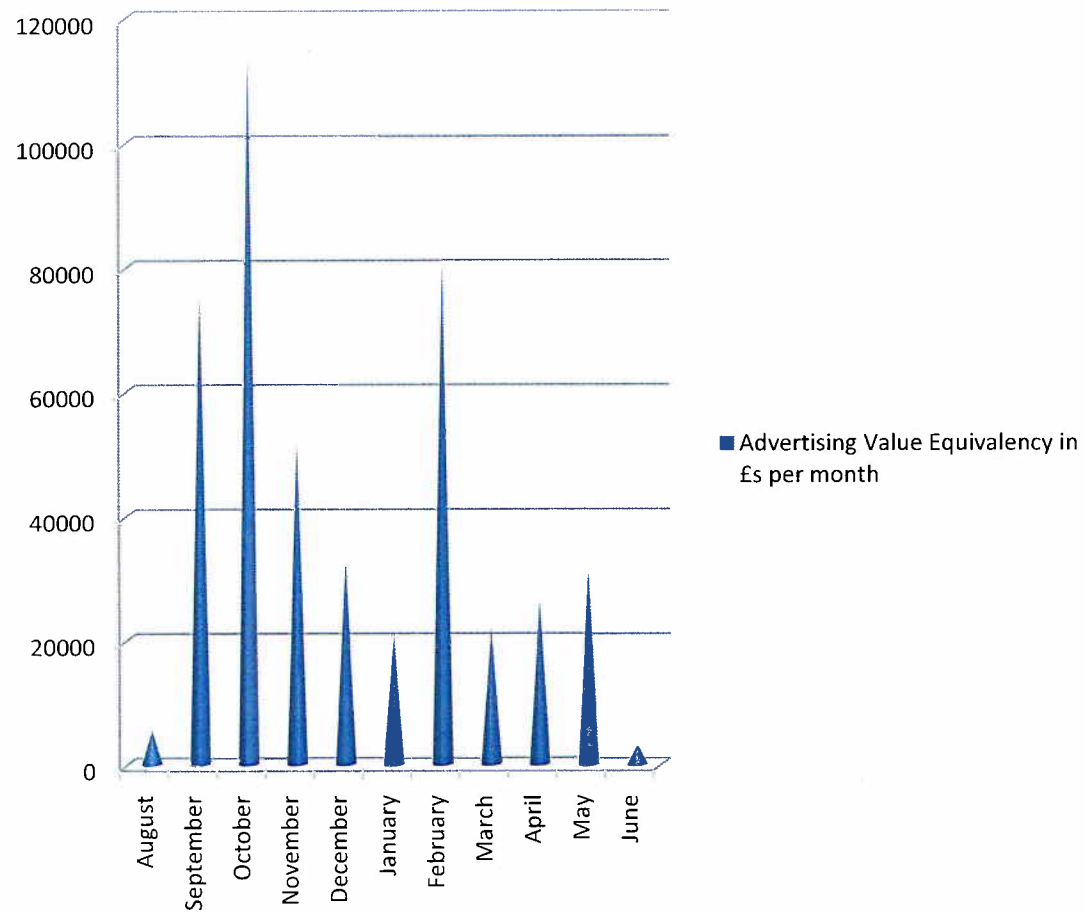
This has been a constant thread running through the entire period of the evaluation.



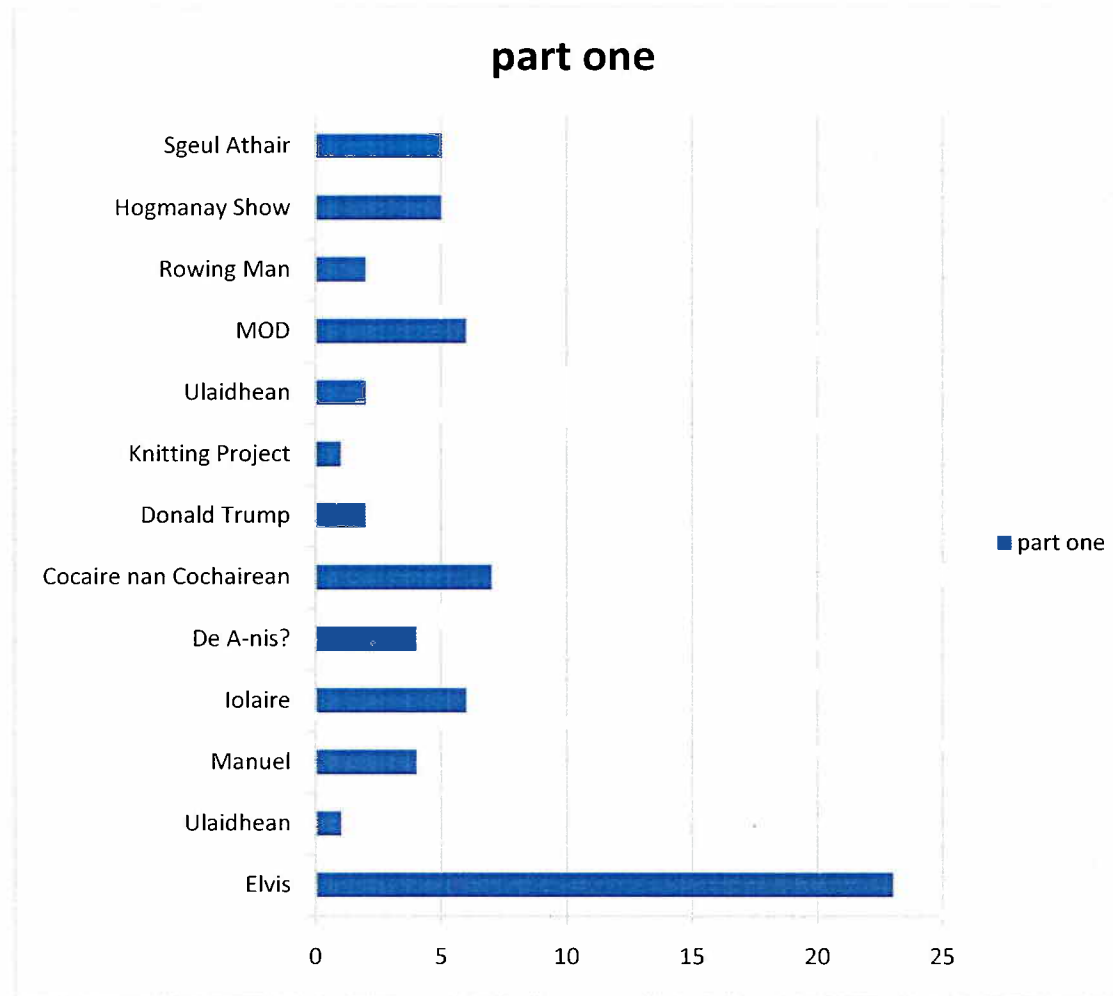
Despite the continuing debate, there has been a downward trend in the number of articles mentioning the issue.

# HOW MUCH IS ALL THE COVERAGE WORTH?

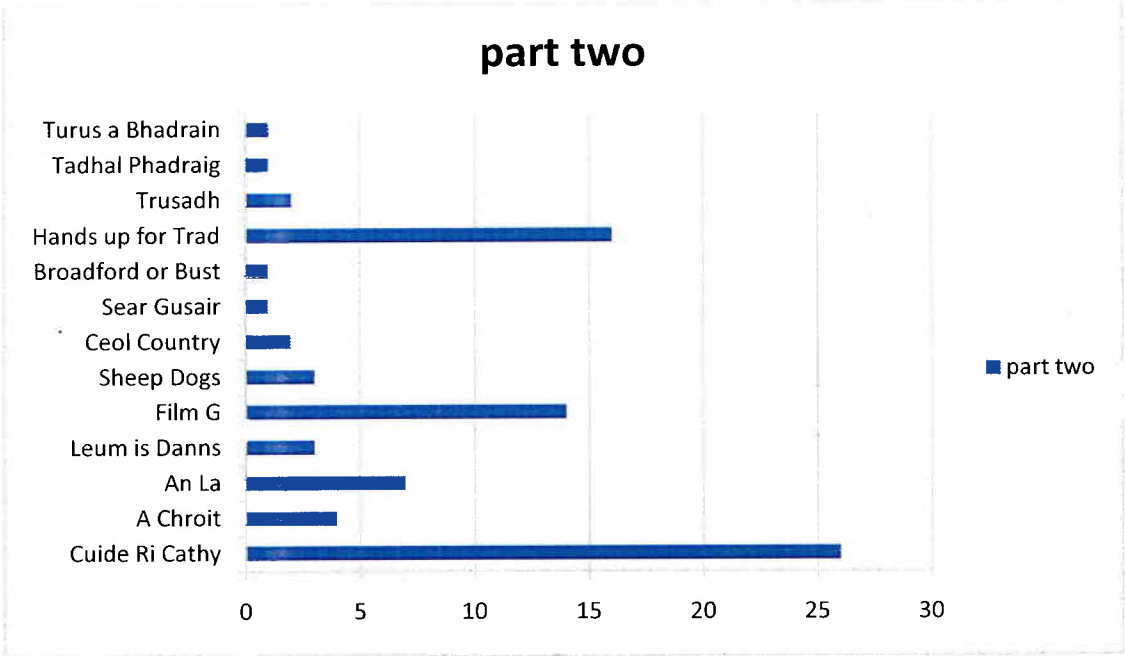
Advertising Value Equivalency in £s per month  
Total value: £464,311.11



# Frequency of articles featuring BBC ALBA programmes



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