With plans for a more substantive round in the New Year, this ‘top-up commissioning round’ is designed to fill slots currently available in the 2020 calendar year. While there are some limited, immediate opportunities, we always continue to look further ahead and plan for the development of ideas that can deliver further along the horizon.

The emphasis is very much on contemporary themes and documentary story-telling, both through True North and blue-chip single docs. Films that deal with tougher themes or contemporary issues are always cherished in a commissioning round, as well those that have plenty of ambition and strong narrative scale. We also have some exciting opportunities for Event-type programming – we are often under subscribed in Events and we’re keen to hear ideas that can collaborate as part of an existing event (be it music, cultural or social), or the ambition to mount a unique event for our audiences. In Ulster-Scots there are some opportunities to add to the schedule for next year with the chance to secure some important commissions in Docs and Series.

Plans for more ambitious commissioning in the new year will become clearer over time, and the timing of this smaller, top-up round is helpful to focus creative thinking and innovation on the BBC Three Fact-Ent development strategy for Northern Ireland.

Opportunities:

Monday /Mid Week 2100: Single Docs: (60’)

BBC Northern Ireland television output has a unique role to play in telling the stories of the present and the recent past in Northern Ireland. Troubles-related themes have been well covered in our current schedule and we want to hear about other areas of life. We want to encourage more vigorous creative dialogue around difficult subject areas: contemporary, gritty, factual content and topical themes approached from a documentary standpoint. We are also interested in enduring themes, as well as topical ones.

- Contemporary themes that differ to True North – topics of scale and significance.
- Agenda-setting films that can drive audience and press attention.
- Legacy films that deal with our past, not necessarily of the Troubles, are popular with audiences.
- Films that have other partners or funders are always of interest where relevant.
- We can look at specialist factual films with the right treatments; we rarely get enough of these offers.
- How do we engage with younger audiences over a BBC hour?
• Films that have humour and a lightness of touch also deliver for our audience.

• Currently commissioned for guidance:

Monday 2235: True North: (30’)

Our local audiences have really taken True North to their hearts and their viewing - our returning single film strand has instant brand recognition amongst viewers, with the contemporary story-telling and serendipitous nature of the content delivering ‘stand-out’ appeal. These films work well when they deliver close quarters access, personal reflection and are full of emotion. These films catalogue contemporary life in Northern Ireland at extraordinary times; they can be smaller films that allude to bigger issues, telling stories that reveal the extraordinary variety and richness of life on our own doorstep. We need real stories with narrative that unfolds and resolves in 30 minutes, films that track real lives and real issues in modern, creative and compelling ways. Consider the breadth of the stories True North has covered to date, extraordinary contemporary stories, all told and captured ‘on the lens’, in present-tense with the hand of the filmmaker never far from the subject. These small films can deliver a big punch, the proximity to the story and the raw emotion delivers genuine insight for the audience, both observed and felt. Aligned to our commissioning of Our Lives, finding the tougher, grittier stories is always harder but often delivers the most impact.

• To complement existing commissions, some of which will come from Our Lives Northern Ireland.

• Currently limited to one run of films next year.

• Contemporary hidden worlds that can reveal universal themes and broad intrigue.

• Kite-marked strand that celebrates all that is both unique and universal in Northern Ireland.

• Younger skewing content will be prioritised.

• Films that are noisy and gritty are always harder to find and deliver but attractive to the strand.

Events: up to Jan 2021

The impact of live events is often captured on television to mark special occasions and celebrate our wealth of talent; bringing audiences together on these occasions is exclusive to the BBC and celebrates Northern Ireland's unique diversity and ability. Music has been a huge factor in our live event coverage, from The Proms to Snow Patrol at Ward Park 3, we have brought the audience an extensive wealth of events across the year and we continue to look for others. Cultural events like St Patrick's Day, Burns' Night and the Belfast Tattoo have an amazing connection with our audiences and have all been well covered, but we will consider other treatments or approaches. We will consider new and imaginative takes on music or festival events, comedy is another occasion of celebration and mirth, sporting events can often
capture the imagination, and all these bring our audiences together to celebrate what we have in common. Ideas for Events should include initial approaches and detailed treatment for production; we will be progressive in development and will support those ideas that are inventive in the production of event coverage across different platforms, as well as offer the audience an innovative experience. Securing partnerships will certainly be central to all successful proposals.

**Ulster-Scots: 1 x Single Doc (60’), 1 x Single Doc (30’) & 1 x Short Series (3 x 30’)**

Reflecting the importance of diversity and inclusion, and stories that explore and celebrate Northern Ireland’s different traditions, Ulster-Scots content continues to make a valuable and increasingly varied contribution to the schedule.

From stand-alone documentaries and series, both presenter-led and observational, to music, sport and factual entertainment, recent commissions have resonated with Ulster-Scots communities, but they have also entertained and informed a much wider audience.

In this top up round, we are looking for ideas that continue to both reach in and reach out. For our 2020/21 slate, creative and contemporary thinking will be important. Your ideas should continue to offer imaginative and unexpected perspectives on community, music, history and identity, across a range of genres. Stories that connect with female and younger audiences, and create opportunities for new talent, will be welcome.

We will consider ideas for Single Documentaries and Short Series. Music, either in documentary or performance, is always of interest.

**Available slots: one 60’ documentary, one 30’ documentary and one short 3 x 30’ series**

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Launch Briefs: **1st November 2019**

Deadline for receipt of ideas on **BBC Pitch**: 5th December 2019 at 5pm

Pitches for Shortlisted Ideas: Week Beginning: **7th January 2020**

All queries contact: linda.mccarter@bbc.co.uk