

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Children's tv and video content, HC 1338

Tuesday 3 March 2026

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Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Mr Bayo Alaba; Vicky Foxcroft; Damian Hinds; Dr Rupa Huq; Liz Jarvis; Jeff Smith.

Questions 179 - 264

Witnesses

I: Patricia Hidalgo, Director, BBC Children's and Education; Iain Bundred, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, BBC; and Kate Morton, Head of Commissioning and Acquisitions 0-6, BBC.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Patricia Hidalgo, Iain Bundred and Kate Morton.

Q179 **Chair:** Welcome to this morning's meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Today we are holding our fourth evidence session on children's TV and video content and we are joined by representatives of the BBC, which is the largest provider of TV content for children and young people in the country. We are joined by the following BBC representatives: Patricia Hidalgo, Director of BBC Children's and Education; Iain Bundred, Director of Policy & Public Affairs; and Kate Morton, Head of Commissioning and Acquisitions for the 0 to 6 age group. You are all very welcome. Thank you so much for joining us today. Before we begin, I remind Members to make sure that they declare any interests at the point that they ask their questions.

I will start with Patricia. Your evidence called for a sustainable future funding model to be agreed as part of the charter review that is ongoing at the moment. Obviously we don't want you to prejudice your response to the charter consultation, but are you satisfied that the Government's framing of possible future funding models in their consultation paper will be capable of delivering that?

Patricia Hidalgo: We need to think about how this industry works, to begin with. The children's media industry is the most global industry in all the different genres. It relies a lot on co-productions and international money to make sure that the content that we provide goes as far as it needs to for volume. To do that we have been asking for an enhanced tax incentive, which we believe will not only help us fill in the finance gaps to make sure that we can deliver content at scale but also will attract more investment internationally, allowing the UK producers to keep the IP within the UK as well as to attract more international funding for more work to be done here. That will then incentivise the whole industry, which would make it much easier for us to get a better type of content, more creativity, more time to invest in children's content and at the same time deliver the fantastic content that we have been able to make for so many years. It is more complicated than just funding—of course we need sustainable funding, we need to supercharge this industry at local and international level to be competitive.

Q180 **Chair:** What about the timing of this? The charter review is ongoing at the moment. How crucial is that timing for children's TV and content from the BBC's perspective?

Patricia Hidalgo: We have heard from a lot of people coming here that the industry has already failed, it has been failing for years. Right now we seem to be the only ones left in town. The BBC and Channel 5, to a very small extent, are the only commissioners of children's content in the UK, and that is happening at a global level. Public service broadcasters are the only remaining broadcasters that are investing in children's content, and that is a huge problem, so I think it is really important.



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Iain Bundred: On the charter review specifically, as Patricia said it is absolutely critical, not just for the future of children's education but for all of the missions and public purposes the BBC needs to deliver, so that we have a sustainable funding mechanism.

You asked a specific question about the framing. I think the framing doesn't lead you towards that, and you will hear more from us in the next week. I say to anyone watching, please do respond to that consultation because we have one week to go and it is the moment for the wider public and the industry to say what they want from the BBC. We will be putting forward our proposals, which set out the need for a sustainable funding mechanism and the risks if we don't go forward.

Patricia is right, the children's education space is a good example of this. We have become the primary provider of it and we see the young audiences moving online. I believe it is 72% of young people's watching is from SVODs or video sharing platforms. To keep pace, we need a sustainable funding mechanism. We also need a wider market intervention, as Patricia set out.

Q181 **Chair:** Is it too late?

Iain Bundred: I don't think that is ever the case. Now is the time to intervene and we have seen across the board at the moment on the future of public service media we came together with the other PSBs, not looking just at kids but the wider need for a renewed PSB compact. The BBC has had incredible success but now is the moment to transform. I think about things like the success of iPlayer, and I am sure you will hear a lot about this from us this morning; 2.2 billion views of iPlayer for kids' content shows that we are transforming in a positive way. We had the ambitious plans to do more in YouTube to reach underserved audiences in particular, and we can do more. The charter review comes at a very timely moment to set the future of BBC, but it can't be the BBC alone. It needs a wider industry intervention.

Q182 **Damian Hinds:** Good morning, everyone. We all remember great children's telly. Some of it is because it is just good entertainment and some of it is just it keeps you busy, keeps you occupied, but then also for some output there is an educational and developmental benefit. There is the famous "Sesame Street" effect. What mix do you aim for between stuff that keeps people viewing and stuff that has some sort of higher goal? Who do you hear from in advising on what makes good health, education and development content?

Patricia Hidalgo: I will let Kate respond on who she talks to about making that content, but on the mix of content that we have currently at the BBC, it has to live by our values. We are there to entertain, educate and inform and we look at the content to make sure that it fits those values. We don't put anything on our services that will not entertain and, to a certain extent, also educate. Even the most fun, crazy slapstick comedy will also educate. It might be about friendship or teamwork.



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There might be something in there that is entertaining. We have been aiming in the past few years to attract more audiences to our services to make sure that we are investing in all those, in the content that children really want to watch and the content that we want children to discover.

Q183 Damian Hinds: Presumably that is a different calculation now in a world where people are selecting individual pieces of content to watch. If you thought, “I have got this kid for an hour” it is easier to mix in a cartoon that they are just going to enjoy with a little bit of let’s tell them about vegetables or something, because kids are never going to pick a vegetable programme. How does your role change in this self-selection model?

Patricia Hidalgo: We identified about five years ago that we relied heavily on live action and factual entertainment content and there was not enough animation. We saw children leaving the BBC to go to competitors to search for that animation, so we have changed our strategy to increase the amount of animation that the BBC provides. First, we got dispensation from Ofcom, because it takes three to four years to make, to acquire that animation. At the same time we put in place animation content development so that we could deliver that animation.

We have basically used tactics, so we looked at what are the children coming for and where do we want to do it. We had a conversation with Ofcom about this because it wanted to see the result of this experiment or strategy. I am very happy to say that we could prove that children who had not been coming to the BBC before were coming for an animated programme and then were going on to watch “Dumping Ground” and “Horrible Histories”. That is what we were aiming for, bring them in, make sure that what they are going to watch is wholesome, but then take them into the content that we are commissioning.

Q184 Damian Hinds: I wonder as a follow-up—I don’t expect you to have this in front of you—you might be able to give us something quantified about the change over time from live action to cartoon or whatever other formats. That would be quite interesting.

Patricia Hidalgo: We will do that.

Q185 Damian Hinds: Sorry, I cut across you. You were just handing over to Kate to talk about inputs.

Kate Morton: Thank you very much. On how we make these decisions, where do we get the data, who are we talking to, we are very reliant on tapping into our audience. We do think audience first and we use focus groups and lots of research, but also the data tells a story. When we are talking animations that children are coming to, they are not necessarily not nutritious. We have a whole series of fantastic animations that are very educationally rich: “Numberblocks”, “Colourblocks”, “Wonderblocks”. I don’t know if you are aware of these programmes but a whole generation of children are now starting school with an understanding



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about numeracy and how numbers work because of “Numberblocks”. In the last six months there were 39 million views of “Numberblocks” on iPlayer.

Chair: Olly from “Blue Zoo” has been—

Kate Morton: Yes, Olly is a fantastic advocate for educative content and we are very happy to have and support that content on the BBC. Other shows like “Hey Duggee” are hugely important for social skills and emotional intelligence, emotional learning as well. There is a lot of nutritious value within our animated as well as our live action content. We make decisions about what works and what we should be commissioning more also on that performance. We are very lucky, CBeebies and BBC are the number one and two channels in the linear space and our top programmes on BBC Children’s get more views than the top children’s content of Disney and Netflix combined. We have data to go on to say what is working, therefore what is appealing, but also we work with trusted experts to make certain our content is delivering on our public service values.

Q186 **Damian Hinds:** Does the data or research tell you anything about the relative benefit or disbenefit of binge watching a single show with 10 episodes versus having a line of varied content, including a bit of animation, a bit of live action, a little bit of news, old-fashioned channels, what we used to call a channel?

Iain Bundred: I think this speaks to thinking about provenance in the round, and that is why we are doing more with YouTube and others. With our all our strategies we are trying to bring as many people on to iPlayer where we have the wider ability to serve audiences in that environment.

Q187 **Damian Hinds:** Although you can still just binge on a single programme on iPlayer.

Iain Bundred: You absolutely can and in fact my nine-year-old son sometimes does, I must admit. There is something about you are trying to expose them to different types of content. Other platforms do that as well. I am not saying that we are unique in doing so. Now the audience experience is such that the minimum they demand is a large content library to try different things. We use a very bespoke environment to try to make sure it is the best possible educational and entertainment experience for younger people but it is an interesting question as we think about policy interventions: how do we ensure that that mixed diet is delivered in other spheres?

Q188 **Damian Hinds:** I am sorry to slightly press you. Does the data tell you anything? Is there a benefit or a disbenefit? In the olden days when someone watched an hour’s worth or an hour and a half’s worth or whatever it was, there was a variety. Does that matter?

Patricia Hidalgo: We have not done a piece of research on variety per se but the tactics that we use to make sure that kids stay with us for



longer is that within iPlayer we will surface content that is alike or akin to the content they have just watched, something that we know that they might like. We do a lot of, "If you watched this, you might like to watch that". I just need to say this. Today I was coming over and we were discussing some of these subjects and the taxi driver suddenly said, "Can I ask something?" and I said yes. He goes, "I think what you're saying is right. My children actually are watching more children's content when they come to iPlayer than when they go to Netflix. When they come to iPlayer, after they have watched one show, they go and find another children's show. When they go to Netflix, I don't know what they're watching." I am just repeating what this man said.

Iain Bundred: Our socioeconomic report published today has some data as well as the focus group of the taxi driver.

Patricia Hidalgo: I just had to say that because it made me smile to think that you get this response, somebody is listening and has an appreciation for what we are doing.

Q189 **Liz Jarvis:** I want to ask, Patricia, do you think that children's TV is a viable business?

Patricia Hidalgo: I don't believe it is a viable business right now. We have seen what has happened with the advertising restrictions and we are seeing children's channels closing all the time. On the top of that, if you think about streaming, as we have moved linear into streaming, the streamers don't see children as an acquisition audience. They see them as a retention audience. If you already have over 5,000 hours in your streaming service, you might think, "Maybe we don't need to invest any more". We have an issue there that if the streaming world is not going to start investing in children, it will be very tough to sustain this business.

Q190 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Good morning, everybody. I will probably come to all three of you but I will start with Patricia. The evidence referred to a global retreat from commissioning children's content on the biggest platforms. How is this impacting your ability to source and work with co-production partners?

Patricia Hidalgo: It has really impacted, but we have worked extremely hard to make sure that we get those partners, especially from other public service broadcasters. We are talking all the time with the likes of France Télévisions, RAI, Televisión Española, all of the Nordics. We are currently in conversation with all of the Nordic public service broadcasters to see how we can come together to collaborate more. Last year we relied on 23% of the income to the budget coming from international co-production partners. If that goes, that will be a bigger issue as well.

Q191 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Is that 23% into the UK?

Patricia Hidalgo: Into the UK, 23% of our budget was coming from those co-production partners.



Q192 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Kate, would you like to elaborate?

Kate Morton: Yes, thank you. There has been a very big change. Last year we had the quite shocking statistic that the BBC was the No. 1 commissioner of global children's content. That is not because we had increased our amount of content. We had stayed stable. In the US in particular, other commercial streamers and so on have literally fallen away. We are getting more and more pitches and more and more submissions from UK independent production companies but also international ones because, as Patricia said, we are literally the only game in town.

On the co-productions and the work that we are doing, the other thing that I think is very notable is how appealing the BBC is internationally as a marker of quality. I go to a lot of international markets, television markets and so on, and there is always an amazing reaction from international attendees who are saying, "Wow, the BBC, this is something that you are interested in" because of our quality, our ability to make content that actually works. BBC content is sold to 130 countries worldwide at the moment, so we are talking about a really viable export of content.

The shows that you are talking about are not necessarily just animation. We are one of the few creators of children's drama. We have 90 hours of children's drama this year. One show, "A Kind of Spark", by Elle McNicoll, about a neurodiverse character—and she is a neurodiverse writer—has been sold to Australia, France, New Zealand, the Netherlands. It is a seven-plus drama that is really exciting and compelling. There are a couple of seasons. The first season was filmed in Cheshire and the second in Northern Ireland. It is amazing content that really does travel and those appeal internationally, which is why we have such great relations, as Patricia said, with public service broadcasters.

We have a fantastic platform but we just need more assistance to be able to get more into the marketplace so that we are not the only people who are supporting these important UK creatives.

Q193 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Kate, that last point threw up a question in my mind. You are talking about 130 countries, which shows a viability. We understand the strength of the UK culture internationally. That is a massive something that we can export. Can more be done? You ended with "more support". Can more be done to increase that market for the content that we produce that generates more income for the organisation?

Kate Morton: I will hand over to Patricia to talk a little bit more on the tax credit.

Mr Bayo Alaba: Are we coming to tax?

Kate Morton: Yes, because that answers your question.



Mr Bayo Alaba: Okay, so just park that. Iain, can I come to you, sir?

Iain Bundred: I think there is a real danger here that the next generation will grow up without culturally relevant content. That is a big point. There are lots of reasons why we have got to where we have, but now BBC provides 86% of the PSB content in this space and that is not where we want to be. As Patricia and Kate have discussed, we are by far the largest commissioner of new content and I think that goes back to the content library point. Why invest in new content when kids are already engaging in older stuff and as kids churn through, new ones will be exposed? We obviously have a unique business model and we are very lucky to have that.

We hope the charter review keeps that unique business model going in many ways, but we can't lose the sense of British stories, regional accents, the special pieces. That has a big impact—you heard from Pact in a previous session, I believe—on the wider indie sector as well. There is definitely an audience out there for new stories in this space. I look at the strength of YouTube creators and some of the large companies that are being spun up from this, but there is an audience out there for new storytelling and we have to find a way to reach them and make sure that we get the economics right so that the indie sector in particular has the opportunity to tell those stories in new formats.

Q194 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Given the challenges facing the market for co-productions, what are we doing to find more partners, find the next generation of co-producing partners? What are we doing?

Patricia Hidalgo: We go to all the markets. We talk constantly with our colleagues across the globe, not just Europe. As I said, currently we are speaking with all the Nordic cohort of public service broadcasters.

Mr Bayo Alaba: Sorry, Patricia, to cut across you. I mean UK partners. I am sure colleagues in their own constituencies have a number of small and independent—

Patricia Hidalgo: We work with the likes of Netflix and Disney. We absolutely have no problem in sharing content with them. It all depends where the money is. If we are investing a high amount of money we expect to have the first window because we want to give value back to the licence fee payer. We are very open to share content.

Iain Bundred: I think probably of smaller companies, projects like Ignite.

Patricia Hidalgo: Okay. In finding new talent but also supporting studios across the UK, we have launched a project called Ignite about how do we develop new ideas and new voices in the animation space. We have spent about £1 million so far in developing about 80 different shows with creators and talent across the UK. It is a very unique project. We have already got commissions of three series through that project. It takes



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time, about three or four years, from finding a concept all the way through to creating a show and I am very happy to say that we have done that. That doesn't just include the talent, it includes studios. We have agreements with animation studios across the UK to produce that content with us, which we will commission. That is just one example.

Another example is we have had a diversity and inclusion fund for the last five years. That is about £200,000 every year that goes to indies so that they can hire diverse talent into the commissions that we make. It is supporting them to find creative talent from diverse backgrounds, minority backgrounds, that they might not have in their productions. We are continuously actively looking at how we can help the industry to create more wholesome content but also become more diverse.

Chair: Can I just encourage you to give slightly speedier answers because we have quite a lot of questions to get through?

Patricia Hidalgo: Sorry about that.

Iain Bundred: Part of our YouTube announcement at the start of the year was about having a series of training sessions for creatives in six different clusters across the UK. That is another example of how we are looking to the creative space that I mentioned earlier.

Q195 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Do you own the IP for these co-productions?

Patricia Hidalgo: We don't own the IP of our commissions. The IP is owned by the indie.

Q196 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** What sort of percentage of your co-productions with public service broadcasters are from other countries?

Patricia Hidalgo: As I said before, about 23% of our money comes from international. I don't know the exact percentage of those co-productions but 23% of our budget is funded by international co-production partners.

Iain Bundred: We can send that as a follow-up.

Patricia Hidalgo: We can send that for you.

Q197 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Are there any other areas? Are you identifying new regions for growth, other territories?

Patricia Hidalgo: We are looking all the time. We can see that when there are more interesting tax incentives in one or another market there is more investment or more willingness to invest in children's content. We will always go and talk to those countries and the public broadcasters sitting in those markets to see if they will come and collaborate and create content here also.

Q198 **Jeff Smith:** I need to declare an interest as the recently elected chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the BBC.

I want to talk a little bit about financial support. Patricia, you proposed an



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extra uplift in the tax credit for culturally relevant children's content. Can you talk to us about what you want to achieve with that?

Patricia Hidalgo: Currently the tax credit is for UK-made shows. They are not necessarily culturally relevant. I know very well from having being a beneficiary of that tax incentive making "The Amazing World of Gumball", which is a very American show but made here in the UK. Currently it is 26%. That is below any other country across Europe, first of all. Secondly, it does not ensure that the content will be culturally relevant. As I said before, you can make a very American show, which is great because it helps the industry but it does not make sure that the content is culturally relevant. Independent films have been given a higher threshold because they are considered to be in danger; children's is also in danger as an industry. I believe that if we could increase that tax incentive, not without allowing people to come and use that 26% but through a points system, which already exists there. We have the BFI point system. I believe you have 16% that you need to hit to do something that is a UK works. If you put it up to, say, 24%, to make sure that it was culturally relevant, not only would you make it more cultural, but you would actually make it more attractive for international broadcasters and also national broadcasters and streamers to invest in children's content. If you think about it, there is already a directive that obliges anybody broadcasting within Europe to carry European content. Now, if children's content is given an enhanced tax incentive, it will make it more interesting for streamers to invest in children's content in the UK. That's how we see it.

Q199 **Jeff Smith:** How do you know that? What assessment have you made of the attractiveness of the UK in that context?

Patricia Hidalgo: We already know that Britishness sells. We are already in a really challenged market, bringing 23% investment from international in these challenging times. We are already being quite successful in doing it. If we were to increase that tax incentive and be much more attractive than, say, France, which is at 35%, we would have not just the English language, but also the most creative industry in the world. All the best and most well-known IPs for children come from here. We have an incredible opportunity to attract international investment because Britishness sells. But right now, there's not enough incentive for those foreign countries to come here. They would rather take the work outside because it's cheaper to make it outside.

Q200 **Jeff Smith:** You mentioned that in the enhanced incentive for independent film. Are you aware of any work that's going on to assess the impact of that?

Patricia Hidalgo: No, I am not. I am not aware.

Q201 **Jeff Smith:** Presumably, you have had some discussions about this proposal with Treasury or DCMS. What response have you had, if any?



Ian Bundred: We continue to advocate for this and a number of incentives across the industry. The Government have been open to the ideas, but we recognise it is a constrained fiscal environment. This is why tax credits are most appealing. They are probably the easiest thing for Treasury to sign off, because they do not have a direct, immediate impact. We could go further, and it would be really helpful if the Committee did support the idea to endorse that and to understand the DCMS's response to it formally, because, to the Chair's point, now is the time for intervention, and we need some action quite quickly rather than just having ongoing conversations in this space.

Q202 **Chair:** Could you send us the data that you do have on the international comparators when it comes to enhanced tax credits?

Ian Bundred: Absolutely.

Q203 **Jeff Smith:** Do any of those have some sort of culturally influential criteria?

Patricia Hidalgo: They absolutely do. Especially in France, it has to be made in France, it has to have French writers, directors, so they do have that criteria.

Chair: If you could send us all of that, that would be really helpful. Thank you.

Q204 **Jeff Smith:** I want to talk about the Young Audiences Content Fund a little bit, because, in the course of our inquiry, we have had a large number of people saying that it is a great idea and being quite enthusiastic about some form of Young Audiences Content Fund. Why is the BBC maybe less enthusiastic about it?

Ian Bundred: The first thing is that the previous Young Audiences Content Fund was taken as a top slice from the BBC licence fee, and we do not think that is appropriate. There is a particular point there, which is that anything should come additionally from Government resources. There is a second-order element as well, which is about stimulating demand. How do we make the best case to the Treasury? Our belief is that a tax credit regime goes with the grain of Treasury thinking. It is much easier to deliver. We then come to the final points around what worked last time and where it did not necessarily make genuine change on meeting audience demand. I worry that—and perhaps Patricia can talk a little bit more around the learnings from it—that is not to say that we are against it, per se. We think tax credit is more effective. If there were to be a Young Audiences Content Fund, we would happily work with whoever designed that regime to make sure it is as effective as possible and learn some of the mistakes from the last time around. We did feel last time it did not have the impact that we would have wanted it to.

Patricia Hidalgo: Yes. We did not feel it had the impact—if the purpose of it was not just to create more content, but actually to get that content to reach the desired audience, the impact was not there. So it has to be



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very carefully thought through—how is it going to work this time? Of course, we welcome more money in the market, but you need scale. You need skin in the game to make sure that whatever you are producing actually reaches that audience. We know; we are there every day. It is like being in the trenches. We are continuously fighting for our content to rise up and to be consumed by audiences. One more point on that. Of course, we are doing a good job— 2.2 billion views, 750 million hours of children’s content viewed on iPlayer last year—but we need more support, prominence. I know that others have asked for that. That would go a long way to help us make sure that we add to that reach that we have already, more reach in those platforms that we do not control.

Q205 **Jeff Smith:** Patricia, in your speech to the Children’s Media Summit, you said, “Platforms that succeed with children must share responsibility and invest accordingly”.

Patricia Hidalgo: Yes.

Jeff Smith: You are calling for them, presumably, to provide some up-front finance, and which specific platforms are you referring to there?

Patricia Hidalgo: In general, if you are in the business of attracting children’s eyeballs, you have a responsibility. Otherwise, don’t be in that business, and it is fine. We are not saying everybody should be in the business of attracting children, but if you are doing that, then you have a responsibility to that audience. That is all I meant to say. Again, there is a European quota, directive, for content to be made in Europe. Now, there is no specification of the genre of that content being for children. I do know that currently, that is being looked into by the EBU. They are actually looking at that European quota again, if the UK is still considered a European country, for European works. I also know that there is lobbying going on by producers across Europe to actually ask for a part of that quota to be dedicated to children. So if that happens, and we have this tax incentive of culturally relevant content for children, that will actually work really well in our favour.

Q206 **Jeff Smith:** Presumably, it supports some type of YAC fund if it was paid for by the video-sharing platforms and international streamers.

Ian Bundred: I certainly think that could be appealing, and our focus would be that it does not come from the licence fee.

Q207 **Jeff Smith:** In your speech, Patricia, you referred to the levies in France and Germany. Do they only apply to subscription streamers, and not video-sharing platforms like YouTube?

Patricia Hidalgo: I don’t know that they do it to YouTube. I don’t know if they are deciding to do that, but I do know that it is not just the streaming platforms, it is also linear channels. It is all broadcasters.

Ian Bundred: Canada has some rules on YouTube, from memory.



Q208 **Jeff Smith:** Ian, you said that you think that the tax credit is a better solution than the YAC fund. If the YAC fund were funded by a levy on streamers and YouTube, would you still take that?

Ian Bundred: We absolutely want intervention in favour of children's TV. I would say the challenge is we want action now, not being dragged through a slow process and challenged in trade negotiations, et cetera, et cetera. I really would be focused on what the things are that—and we obviously have a spring statement today. We are not expecting anything in that. I don't think anyone is expected very much in that—but there is a question about how we come together, those who care about kids' television and those in Parliament, to make a coherent case for urgent and immediate intervention. That feels like where tax credits have the best chance of success, and actually being able to move quickly to stimulate demand across the whole industry.

Q209 **Chair:** Patricia, Jeff just asked you about your recent speech about the Children's Media Summit, when you said platforms that succeed with children must have shared responsibility and invest accordingly. Jeff asked you which specific platforms you were referring to, and you said all of them. Could we try to very gently invite you off the fence to be a little bit more specific, please?

Patricia Hidalgo: What I said is not all of them, but actually that you don't necessarily have to be attracting children to your platform. But if you do, if that is your business model, and you want that audience, those eyeballs, you have to have a responsibility.

Chair: Like who? Who are we thinking of? When you made that comment, who were you thinking of?

Patricia Hidalgo: Currently, all streamers are actually targeting children, and they are taking those eyeballs. So, if that is the case, it is important that there is a balanced diet that they are actually providing to that audience. They cannot rely just on the BBC to provide that balance. It needs to be also in whatever they are providing to children. YouTube is another example, but that is a different type of—they don't invest in children's content, but the content that actually goes into YouTube—because currently, yes, Ofcom said 20% of the content viewed on YouTube in the UK by UK users comes from the UK. We have just run our own research; for children, it's only 15%. So, this is more about prominence. I don't think for YouTube that it is for them to invest, because they don't invest in making content. It is others that put the content in there. And there is loads of fantastic British content on YouTube. It's just not surfacing. If we could surface that content, that could be a way to make it so that children actually benefit from that, to have a prominence.

Chair: We are going to investigate that a little bit more now, first of all with Liz and then with Rupa. Liz.



Q210 **Liz Jarvis:** Thank you, Chair. I would like to focus on the BBC and YouTube strategic partnership, which was announced in January. If I can ask you, Ian, what does the BBC get out of this partnership?

Ian Bundred: There is a real reflection of how audience habits are changing, and I should say that possibly one of the reasons why it was directed towards me is that I spent five years at YouTube before I joined the BBC last year. I was taken by the seriousness with which the BBC already took YouTube, but felt that it had not even really started. You see that in Kids, right? We have had some really great successes, and Kate may want to talk through some of the work we have done over 20 years on YouTube Kids in particular. There is a sense that there are underserved audiences there that are not currently getting the culturally relevant content that the BBC has a mission and public purpose to deliver. We also think that we have an opportunity to reach a more universal audience with doing that.

So I think it's actually a win-win here, of more audiences there that we are not necessarily reaching on our services, and the ability to test and learn as well. There is a great example with CBeebies House, where we got roughly 900,000 audience on YouTube and about 900,000 on iPlayer, but the iPlayer audience stayed for longer. So that is an interesting data point in understanding how our different pieces work, but that was originally launched with a YouTube audience in mind. So, creating content and getting advice from partner managers and others, which is part of our exciting agreement, helps us to transform as we go forward towards meeting that. Ultimately, the best place for the long-term sustainability of the BBC and for our growth will be on iPlayer and our own services, of course it will be, but there are audiences there that we need to meet, and we can do so.

Q211 **Liz Jarvis:** Has YouTube actually given anything up for this partnership?

Ian Bundred: There are certain bits that they are doing in the kids' space around—they would call it "prominence" in terms of different boxes, where we get some improved discoverability. It is still early days around that. I mentioned to Bayo the work that is going on in terms of training programmes, which they are being very supportive of. They are helping us find new creators. So there is a lot of work done there, but I would say this is a first agreement, and the real point here is about trying to find ways to make sure that we are improving the quality content that we are delivering to YouTube and finding the best-in-class ways to meet the audiences there. Patricia, I don't know whether you want to talk about any specific agreement in Kids?

Patricia Hidalgo: We do not have any specific agreement, but we are working with the YouTube Kids team to make sure that we are giving them content around themes and whatever is happening, so Safer Internet Day or Christmas or anything that has relevance for us as well as for them. We have been working with YouTube channels, and BBC children's YouTube channels have been on YouTube for a long time.



CBeebies is a very big channel for the BBC. We actually have had 520 million views of that channel just in the last year, and it continues to grow, so we are really happy with what's happening there. Maybe you can talk a little bit about the latest originals that we have been producing and how we have done that?

Kate Morton: Yes. Ian mentioned "CBeebies House: Time to Play", which really is a bit like a "Play School" for today's preschoolers. We were lucky enough to have Baroness Benjamin presenting. It is very nutritious content that is quite slow-paced. It is really focused on engaging directly. It is quite an intimate show, because you feel a little bit like you are actually in the room with the presenter. It is educational content, with quite a lot about school readiness—so literacy, numeracy, emotions, mindfulness—but it's all done in a very playful way, in the same way that, for those of us that remember, "Play School" did. It has a similar kind of reassuring, trusted by parents, and safe approach to the content. We have also done other content reimagining of "Blue Peter", and our new version of "Blue Peter" has had great uptake on YouTube and on iPlayer, and really enhanced performance. Our most recent episode had, I think, 270,000 views on iPlayer, so it is really significant. It is a test and learn environment, and that is the brilliant thing about being in that space, where that audience is. We have to go outside of our BBC bubble to where that audience is, and reach them, and then bring them and show them the wealth of the balanced diet that the BBC offers.

Q212 **Liz Jarvis:** Ian, does the partnership provide any assurance on improving prominence for BBC content on YouTube?

Ian Bundred: Not currently. If you look at it across the whole piece, we are really excited about the partnership. We think we are doing some great work, but there is further to go, I believe, in discoverability. There are certain measures—and you have YouTube coming to give evidence soon, so I am sure they will talk a little bit about what they can and cannot offer—but we feel there is more that can be done about prominence on video sharing platforms in general, and YouTube in particular. This goes back to Patricia's point, if at the moment only 15% of kids and about 20% of the overall audience are seeing UK stories on that platform, are we really getting enough culturally relevant content there? So the PSBs are fantastic providers of this. There is also a fantastic UK YouTube creator ecosystem. We are working on something that doesn't try to break the algorithm or the recommendation systems, but goes with the grain of audience behaviours and what audience expectations are, to improve discoverability of PSB content.

Q213 **Liz Jarvis:** How does the BBC earn revenue from placing its content on YouTube?

Ian Bundred: We do not currently earn revenue on public service content. There is actually a question in the charter review about whether we should. I will not pre-empt that, but I would say that the incremental revenues that are available on YouTube are significant, but in terms of



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replacing, for example, the licence fee, I don't think it will make much of a difference. Other PSBs have struggled beyond kids content to deliver long-term sustainable funding.

I thought it was very interesting—I was at the Royal Television Society conference where we heard from, for example, a fantastic UK kids' media company called Moonbug. One of their investors was talking about how the money they make from YouTube, and it is an enormous business doing great work, but the money they make from YouTube is often around the IP around it, rather than actually in the revenue sharing and advertising space. There is a challenge here about how to create sustainable businesses through the revenue-sharing model. They have a fantastic thing, and frankly, they offer a lot more than, for example, TikTok or Instagram do, but it is just a different point. If we go back to how do we ensure we are driving new commissions of quality British content, it is not going to be through advertising. It is going to be through tax credits or other pieces.

Q214 Liz Jarvis: In your written evidence, you said that YouTube did not provide information on the content which they publish, which grows by an average of 20 million videos every single day. In your view, is YouTube a publisher?

Ian Bundred: Funny enough, this is the thing that came up for years, when I was always asked about platform versus publisher. It was never a line that I was ever asked to give, actually, funnily enough. Is YouTube a publisher? They are a platform, right? They are different. There are certain areas where they do publish, but their main focus has been around distribution. It is a different piece. I see it more akin to, if you look at the kind of future of TV debates and how the YouTubers present themselves as a future TV, it is more about how do we reach our audience and how do we work with them as a distribution channel? That is where discoverability and prominence is so important. It is worth noting at this point that the Media Act is still not fully implemented. It does not include video-sharing platforms. We do not want a must-offer and must-carry style regime. We do want changes that deliver on helping British audiences find culturally relevant UK content. That is a massive challenge for society, frankly. There is more that can be done with that particular platform and others.

Liz Jarvis: Okay, thank you.

Q215 Chair: Ian, to push you a little bit on this, your evidence says, "YouTube do not provide information on the content which they publish". Surely the implication of that is that they are a publisher.

Ian Bundred: I mean, yes. I have always found this a slightly esoteric debate. I believe video sharing platforms are just different to the wider pieces of linear channels and streams.

Q216 Chair: You have slightly glibly dismissed that, but the fact is, there is



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quite a lot tied up in that. If they were defined as a publisher, then there would be a whole realm of implications from that, that at the moment, YouTube are not subject to. If you were in our boat, for example, if you were making recommendations as a Select Committee, what would you be saying?

Ian Bundred: I would focus on video-sharing platforms and what UK society needs from video-sharing platforms. They are growing increasingly. They are massively important in audiences. I feel as though, for example, trying to create a copy of the regime for smart televisions onto VSPs does not work. So, I would look at them in the sphere of where they are, of which YouTube is one of them.

In terms of their reliability and responsibility, they do have a different point. I was always struck by how much was invested in content safety and in, for example, the trust and safety programmes going on over there, which took on a certain level of responsibility. They do not upload their own content very much. So, that is a slightly different point.

Q217 **Chair:** They do collate it, though, don't they? It is sort of fed to our consumers. What I was interested to know is if you are making content tailored to succeed on YouTube, how do you resist the temptation to make content to please the algorithm rather than content that is nourishing for the child?

Ian Bundred: That is exactly the test that we have to judge all of our interventions by, both as the BBC, but also any regulatory regime that goes forward. There is actually this almost philosophical difference here—can we upload the most perfect content to satisfy the recommendation systems of a video-sharing platform versus should the video-sharing platform actually be recognising what public service media and the kind of nourishing mixture of pieces do? There is a point where those two need to meet. It is a starting point, and a huge amount of work that Patricia and the team are doing in kids' space is making sure that the content we do upload is YouTube first and is optimised for that. That is not just about particular trends that are popular. It is actually about making sure that it is not just a cut-down or a short clip from our own existing routine, but that we have spoken to the best YouTube creators to learn about what works in that space. There will be certain things that perform better in their recommendation systems. Particularly, I am thinking in adult spaces here, that aren't necessarily what we would say is the best work. There is work to be done there about improving discoverability and making sure that our systems all speak together well.

Q218 **Chair:** Ted Sarandos was over in the UK a couple of weeks ago and was interviewed on the "Today" programme and talked about YouTube as a competitor for TV. He said, "What surprises me all the time is the studios and networks around the world, including the BBC, continue to feed them (YouTube) free programmes. There is probably a better distribution relationship than just turning over your content and making pennies on the dollar". What do you think?



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Ian Bundred: I noticed that Netflix said this morning that they wanted us to be on their distribution platform. Do you know what? This speaks to the challenge of the wider industry, which is that we are in a scale game. We are so lucky in the UK to have iPlayer, which last year was the fastest-growing SVOD in the country. We are so lucky to have a scaled platform that can compete with Netflix and YouTube as well. There are still audiences that we are missing. We talked about “CBeebies House”. It is a great example of how we can try to bring audiences in to iPlayer and try different things and learn from it. In the same way that “Hey Duggee” is on Netflix and we have more content both on iPlayer and on YouTube, there is more we can do here. As I said earlier, the best experience for us will always be on our own content services. What we cannot do—because we have a universal service and want to remain universal—is just stay within a walled garden.

Q219 **Damian Hinds:** I wanted to follow up very quickly on that question about ad revenue on YouTube. Obviously, people on YouTube are used to there being ads. Almost all content must have pre-roll and mid-roll ads, and so on. Do you consider you are not allowed to have revenue? The viewer has not gone to a BBC property. They have gone to a third-party property. There are places where BBC News content appears that have ads. They are just not your ads. Did they offer you money, and you said, “No, thanks”? What was the decision-making process?

Ian Bundred: Let us take it in steps. First, it is worth saying that, in terms of studios’ content, overseas content, we do allow advertising. I am talking about public service content. There is a question about whether we are allowed to serve advertising on public service content, and we did have that debate. With discretion from the Secretary of State, you can do so. It does, as you say, run with the grain of the platform. We chose not to do that currently. There is a question in the charter review about whether we should. I would argue—and you will see more from us on this in the next week, just one week to go, I just want to repeat that on charter review responses—but there is a question about whether it is the right thing. What I mean is, where audiences see BBC content, do they feel they have already paid for it in terms of paying for the license fee? There is another question about pragmatically, how much does it raise, and does it actually drive much? Our analysis is that if we uploaded the whole of iPlayer onto YouTube, we would probably raise something in the range of £30 million to £50 million.

Q220 **Damian Hinds:** Isn’t there another question as well? So what is it, 55:45?

Ian Bundred: 55:45, yes.

Q221 **Damian Hinds:** So, there is your half, but there is also their half. So if they are not getting any remuneration for showing your content, do you think that helps you in the algorithm?

Ian Bundred: We have had a lot of—



Damian Hinds: Sorry, it was a rhetorical question.

Ian Bundred: No, we have had a lot of reassurances in the past. For my five years there, I have never had any sense that not being advertised punishes what is restricted in the content. What I would say, though, is that is always subject to change. There is something around regulatory backstops etc., about whether you would be notified if that was changed, whether you would just see it in your things. I have no evidence, and we have certainly had reassurances that we are not punished, so to speak. I don't think that is the way the YouTube incentive is, because they are really focused on what the audience wants. To Dame Caroline's point, arguably, sometimes they might be focused on what the audience wants rather than what the audience needs, but that is a different debate.

Q222 **Damian Hinds:** Sorry, I am speaking out of turn here, so I am trying to be as quick as possible. Just to check, everything you just said about YouTube, does that also apply to Meta and to TikTok?

Ian Bundred: No, because they don't offer anywhere near the same revenue-sharing opportunities.

Damian Hinds: I meant not taking the revenue sharing.

Ian Bundred: Yes, I am not aware of us taking ads—

Q223 **Damian Hinds:** Do you think that disadvantages you in their recommender systems?

Ian Bundred: We are the number one news brand on Instagram globally. So that would suggest that we are not doing so bad there, so to speak.

Damian Hinds: Although they do famously change their algorithms with no notice to anybody.

Ian Bundred: They do. We talked about the appropriate regime for via sharing platforms earlier. Some of this point around regulatory oversight of changes is a massive, massive debate and transparency and, frankly, an ability for us to be able to build a business model that encourages us to meet audiences where they are and places like that, but do so in a way that we can rely on it. There is that famous pivot to video thing with Meta, which was a massive challenge for the wider industry. I don't know about the BBC. It was before my time.

Damian Hinds: Thank you.

Q224 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Thank you all. I think a lot of people in this room were in Manchester the other week, so it is good to see you on home turf. If I am declaring an interest, I am a former member of staff in a section that does not exist anymore, the BBC Popular Music Library in the 1990s, which has probably been rationalised out of existence. My sister was the longest-serving female presenter of "Blue Peter" over the late 1990s and



early 2000s. My questions are mainly for Ian. Carrying on along the YouTube theme, my question is about a possible voluntary agreement for prominence on YouTube. What discussions have taken place with public service broadcasters and YouTube to ensure that content is prominent? Before, you turned on a telly, there were only three/four channels, and it went to BBC One, whereas now there is this fight for prominence with the smart TVs.

Iain Bundred: I know there have been a lot of discussions with YouTube, but also with DCMS, about whether more could be done here. The Secretary of State made clear at RTS Cambridge last year that they would legislate if needed, but that they want to see voluntary arrangements first. In the kids' space, YouTube does offer some improvements on discoverability, for BBC in particular and for PSBs more generally, not that many are able to use that. But there is a long way to go.

Q225 **Dr Rupa Huq:** I have been looking at your report, well done, a nice-looking report. You said that 72% of young viewers come to stuff via video sharing, and this says that you have four times more output on children's TV than everything put together, not just the public service broadcasters. Do you think that voluntary will be good enough?

Iain Bundred: No. At the same conference all the PSBs came together and said that we wanted to see regulation.

Dr Rupa Huq: With commercial terms as well?

Iain Bundred: Yes, there is a bunch of changes that we need to see to sustain the public service media ecosystem. One of them is prominence. I mentioned the Media Act earlier. There are also concerns about implementing the Media Act fully. I do not know if you have seen the latest Ofcom guidance, but it says that prominence should be no worse than it was beforehand, which is not what we read as being what Parliament passed last time round. So there is a bunch of changes about prominence, both existing and going forwards on video-sharing platforms. There are then financial incentives and tax credits in the kids space and wider interventions there. There are three other elements, one around partnerships, one around distribution and a switchover, and one around news, because there is a particular focus, which I know this Committee has looked at before, about whether all audiences are able to find sustained news, because it is a business model that, like Children's, is struggling.

Q226 **Dr Rupa Huq:** There are some "Newsround" questions in a bit. Isn't there a sense that the window for trying to persuade YouTube to achieve prominence without legislation passed is disappearing?

Iain Bundred: That is a question that you can ask YouTube directly about.

Dr Rupa Huq: It is mysteriously elusive. We are trying to get it. It is



notoriously elusive.

Iain Bundred: We have seen that there is an appetite around the world to regulate and legislate video-sharing platforms and social media platforms, so now is the time to intervene. On voluntary solutions, I go back to the conversation I was having with Damian. Without reassurance on data and access, voluntary solutions are taken on trust, so a regulatory backstop is always helpful and is necessary. That is why we have come together as all PSBs to campaign and argue for that intervention. Yes, we would support that. But that does not mean that we should not also be having constructive conversations with YouTube and others about how we make sure that users have access to the best BBC content, particularly given that societal challenge that we have, where so little culturally relevant content is available on their platform.

Q227 **Dr Rupa Huq:** This report seems to show that public service broadcasting for kids is shrinking. ITV does not do it anymore. Channel 4 has not done it forever. Even in America, Trump has signed an executive order to stop public service broadcasting. That is "Sesame Street". I know that you said that most things are associated with the UK, but "Big Bird"? It does feel that there is a shrinking space there. For what is left, have you come across this idea of a kitemarking or traffic light system, under one trusted front door? Because there is so much rubbish that spews out on YouTube that maybe parents can have guidance on what is good and maybe you can set a filter. I am a parent myself; God knows what they are looking at half the time.

Iain Bundred: I saw it referenced in a previous hearing. Our focus is on the content production and making sure that we are stimulating high-quality, culturally relevant content here in the UK. I worry that the kitemarking-style intervention might take a long time to get right.

Dr Rupa Huq: Even an age thing, like with the cinema, there are 15s, there are 18s, there is PG.

Iain Bundred: Yes, and that comes down to do the audience expectations work, do the platforms enable it. I know that YouTube Kids, for example, has age gating around it—not age gating, but age bracketing—but I am sure that it is imperfect because that is the nature of an algorithmically driven platform versus those that have human editors overseeing everything that is put out. That is the balance. There is incredible democratisation that YouTube offers, but it does not have the same level of editorial rigour and oversight that we have. That is the beauty of the BBC in many ways.

Thank you for promoting our socioeconomic report. I probably have not talked about it enough. We published it this morning and there are some fantastic findings in there. It speaks to the challenge not just in PSBs but in the UK of content supply. While there is a fantastic ecosystem going outside of the PSB ecosystem, that high-quality nutritional content that informs, educates and entertains, at the moment we are, as Patricia and



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Kate said, slightly the last people standing and we do not want that. We do need intervention now.

Q228 **Dr Rupa Huq:** You have not monetised your content, but it was interesting to hear that the advertising restrictions, you said, Patricia, have been—is that the unhealthy food stuff? Can you just say a little bit more about that?

Kate Morton: Yes. When we were together in Salford I remember talking to you a little bit about that. That important legislation did have a very big impact, particularly on ITV. That was because obviously CITV, which existed previously, was able to have advertising that was for chocolate and so on. However, once that Act came in, the advertising model changed. We all know that that had a very big impact on the children's media industry, because if you cannot advertise that content, you move to content that you can advertise. Hence targeting older audiences on other commercial platforms like CITV. That has had a very big impact over the last few years. Since 2010 the amount of children's content that is being made by PSBs in the UK has almost halved. We are literally all that is left and we are providing 86% of that.

Iain Bundred: That is mirrored in online advertising as well, because of not just in the UK changes, but also COPPA in the US has driven a large decrease in revenues available.

Q229 **Dr Rupa Huq:** It has had similar legislation there?

Iain Bundred: They have had similar, yes.

Dr Rupa Huq: I was interested in international.

Iain Bundred: The COPPA changes are more about data sharing, but they have had an impact because it is harder to monetise under-18 content, the business model is harder, which is one of the reasons that we are left as a major supplier, because we have a different business model.

Dr Rupa Huq: Exciting times with the charter review and the new DG, whoever that may be.

Iain Bundred: Indeed.

Q230 **Damian Hinds:** If we can do these quite quickly, that would be great. Iain, if there is a ban on social media for under 16s, do you anticipate that having an effect on the BBC and, if so, what?

Iain Bundred: We are considering that actively at the moment to think through the consequences of that. We always offer age-appropriate experiences wherever they are, so we will go with whatever Parliament decides in that respect. It could have a positive impact in certain ways in terms of audience behaviours, and that is something that we are looking at.



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Q231 **Damian Hinds:** Patricia, will there be a change in programming as a result of Vote 16?

Patricia Hidalgo: Not really, because all the content that we create is made appropriate for each age audience. We are providing support to children through our education outlets, like Bitesize "Other Side of the Story". We are investing more in those areas, whether it is supporting children to understand how to navigate the internet, or whether it is supporting them with media literacy and teachers with media literacy.

Iain Bundred: I had a fascinating conversation with Public First last week, which are doing focus groups with 12 year-olds who will be voting if that legislation passed. For a start, they told me that "Newsround", even with 12, 13 year-olds, is still very, very popular, which I thought was reassuring. It had some interesting insights about the change in dynamics there and what that will mean. You might want to consider asking it to give evidence.

Q232 **Damian Hinds:** Thank you. Patricia, do you think older children, particularly teenagers, are well served for news on television rather than radio?

Patricia Hidalgo: We know that older children are navigating to BBC News as well as "Newsround", as Iain just said.

Q233 **Damian Hinds:** There is no product for them. There is "Newsbeat" on the radio, but what is the product for a 14, 15, 16 year-old?

Iain Bundred: Something like Instagram.

Damian Hinds: Maybe the answer is that your research says that they do not need one, but what is the approach and why?

Iain Bundred: Our "Socioeconomic Report" has some interesting stats about the news impact. If you look at our success on TikTok and Instagram, it is skewing younger, not necessarily teenagers per se. When I was at YouTube, I was always struck by how many 14 year-olds would say that if they saw a story that was too good to be true, they would go to the BBC News app to check. My concern, of course, is do they know that it is too good to be true. It is widely used as access.

Q234 **Damian Hinds:** But there is no product for them, is there? There is on the radio, but there is not on telly. Do you think that that is a gap or you are happy with that, particularly in the mis- and disinformation world and the unique role that you play? It sounds like it sounds like you think that things are broadly okay.

Iain Bundred: That it is through other platforms rather than linear.

Q235 **Damian Hinds:** Can I ask Kate about "Tiny Happy People"? What went right, what went wrong? You might need to explain what it is, or was, first.



Kate Morton: “Tiny Happy People” was a fantastic and very, very successful initiative that we started to focus on speech and language support for parents, because particularly from covid, we were aware that children were—

Damian Hinds: It was initiated before covid.

Kate Morton: It was, but the benefits of it were very evident in that very tricky time where parents did not get access to taking their children to nurseries. You did not have so much socialisation.

Damian Hinds: Sorry, forgive me. The genesis was before covid. It was not deployed, but it was created around 2018 or 2017.

Patricia Hidalgo: Yes, that is right.

Damian Hinds: It was all about the focus on the home learning environment, which is the missing link in child—not missing, but you know what I mean. It needs more focus for social mobility, for child development, for early years and so on.

Kate Morton: It was very successful. We worked very closely with the NHS and the Department for Education. Because of the success of this, we recognised that we need to give it more prominence, so we have brought it in under CBeebies, which is such a well-known, trusted brand with parents, and launched last summer CBeebies Parenting, a digital support network. We have a website that has all of our digital resources, a lot of the material from “Tiny Happy People”, that fantastic campaign, and on-the-ground events. A couple of weekends ago we were at Blackpool FC with the English Football League doing a CBeebies parenting event where we had parents and preschoolers come together and start to share some of the key information that we have. We work with trusted experts, whether that is educational consultants or educational psychologists. It is all about sharing in what is a very difficult time, as you were saying, for hard-working families to have the time to spend with their children. It is giving them resources and giving them access to experts about how to support their child’s development, for example how to tell a bedtime story.

Q236 **Damian Hinds:** Because we are short of time, may I ask just this follow-up? Can you give us something in writing about numbers, how the programme has grown, how it has changed, and what the future what the future plans are?

Kate Morton: Absolutely, yes, we have a lot we can share.

Q237 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** A quick question. I understand the importance of UK content. Why is “Cocomelon” on iPlayer?

Patricia Hidalgo: “Cocomelon” is a tactic. It was brought in after we had done some research with families, talking to them about what they were consuming and what they wanted their children to see. There were a lot



of parents who were saying that “Cocomelon” was not in the BBC and that they were going to YouTube for this content. So we brought it in as a tactic to see how that would affect bringing in those audiences that were not coming to the BBC. The interesting thing is that it worked. It attracted families that have not been coming to the BBC before, and we saw that they would come to see “Cocomelon” and then they would move on to other content that we were commissioning like “Yakka Dee!” or “Hey Duggee”. Basically that is the reason why we brought it in. In any case, we hear a lot of people saying how “Cocomelon” is not good content and it is bad for you. I do not believe that that is the case, and it would be good to see some research that proves that, because the way we see it, there are lovely nursery rhymes with a lot of thought behind it to make it very family friendly and we believe that that content is not in any way harmful to children.

Q238 Mr Bayo Alaba: Why did you feel the need for the focus groups?

Patricia Hidalgo: We do focus groups all the time. We continuously listen to our audience. For little ones, we have to listen to parents because the little ones are not going to be able to tell us. But we do that. That is something that we do, we test our content. Whenever we launch a new show, we have that tested also with focus groups.

Mr Bayo Alaba: No particular pre-emptive treatment?

Patricia Hidalgo: Not particularly. We do it a lot. That is BAU.

Q239 Mr Bayo Alaba: Richard Bradley, “Horrible Histories” co-creator, was very straight with us when we met him. He said parents might want their kids to go to iPlayer, but kids themselves are ending up in YouTube. How does the iPlayer growth compare to the growth of BBC Children’s content viewing on YouTube?

Patricia Hidalgo: We have not currently been measuring the growth of YouTube in the same way that we have been measuring the growth of iPlayer because we have been focusing, in the last five years, on supporting the move of audiences from linear into iPlayer. As Iain mentioned, last year alone we got 2.2 billion views and 750 million hours of children’s content being watched on iPlayer. Every year for the past five years we have had double-digit growth of content being viewed on iPlayer by children. That is not just content being viewed on iPlayer but children’s content on iPlayer being viewed by children. That is a success story, and I do not believe we have finished. For example, this half-term we had a huge amount of children coming to iPlayer, 53 million streams in just one week of children’s content. That is the highest ever we have had in one week after covid, which was the highest number. We have outnumbered that. So we can see now a trend of iPlayer taking off and we are pleased with the results. We are hopeful that if we get support for more prominence of public service content on YouTube, as we are starting to track what we are doing there, that we can add that reach to



the great reach that we have currently on iPlayer. One does not take away from the other; they can be complementary.

Q240 **Mr Bayo Alaba:** Have you considered more partnerships with PSBs?

Patricia Hidalgo: PSBs within the UK? Currently we are not allowed to have co-productions with other PSBs per se. We do do a lot of co-productions with Irish PSBs, but not currently with UK PSBs.

Iain Bundred: Enabling better partnerships for PSBs is part of those five asks I mentioned that we are looking at. In the kids' space the other PSBs, with the exception of Channel 5, have moved out of that space, but we would definitely welcome them back.

Mr Bayo Alaba: Kate, is there anything that you would like to add?

Kate Morton: What we are offering that is quite different is the storytelling, whether you are doing storytelling for preschoolers or whether you are doing storytelling to retain that exciting seven-plus audience as well. We are working across so many different genres—animation or live-action drama, even live-action drama for preschoolers. We are the only broadcaster that is investing in the same way. We also make content for underserved audiences, which sets us apart from the commercial environment or other PSBs. For instance, we have just done a show called "Tiny Tunes", which is presented by a deaf presenter who is signing with British Sign Language to a group of preschoolers who are learning key BSL signs in nursery rooms. I mention that because it is a very different content. You are asking about what the whole scope is and the environment. It is important that we flag up that we are serving these underserved audiences as well as appealing in a very broad way.

Q241 **Chair:** What we are trying to get at, Kate, is how we can work with other PSBs to build the profile of the iPlayer. In January you announced a new partnership with S4C to build the prominence of Welsh language programming on BBC iPlayer. Is there more capacity for PSB children's content to be gathered together in one place, if that makes sense?

Patricia Hidalgo: We would absolutely welcome that. In fact, we sponsored S4C to go to Cartoon Forum. We paid for it to be able to present, along with us, one of the developments that we are looking for commissioning partners for. So we do want to have more of the different nations and languages.

Q242 **Chair:** Have you had any conversations about how you can attract more PSB content on to the iPlayer? Is that something that you have been discussing?

Iain Bundred: That is something that is always a consideration, but it has to work for their business models. S4C, for example, recently decided that it wanted to put more on to us and we have asked Ofcom to enable advertising there. We are in active discussion there. That obviously will cannibalise its own platform, and that is the decision that S4C felt was



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the right thing to do as long as we can reassure it around discoverability on our own platforms for Welsh language users in particular. That was a win-win for us. If other PSBs are open to that, we are absolutely open to do so.

Q243 Chair: I was also concerned about this comment that you are not measuring the growth of watching on YouTube. Is that because it is difficult to do? Is that because YouTube is not very forthcoming with the data?

Iain Bundred: No. Until we launched this new YouTube strategy in January, our focus has been on growing on iPlayer, as Patricia talked about. We get about 55 million views a month on YouTube; we are able to look at our channels. One of the things that I have discussed before, which has been a challenge for creators as well as for traditional broadcasters like ourselves with YouTube, is understanding how you are getting a percentage of audience share. It gives you fantastic data on your own channel, on your own performance, it does not necessarily give you a sense of how you are doing compared to the wider pool of, say, UK users. There is a bit of a challenge there where we could get greater visibility as part of any agreement with YouTube and I am sure that it is the case with others as well. It is not that we are not tracking it, it is that we are only now at the foothills of that really aggressive strategy to grow. It is all predicated on meeting the underserved audience that we feel needs to. It is something like 46% of four to 15 year-olds are using YouTube every week, so we obviously have to be there and we want to grow there, but it is still early in terms of the metrics.

Chair: We want to talk to you about one of your global phenomena now, "Bluey".

Q244 Vicky Foxcroft: Just a simple question. How much money does the BBC earn from "Bluey" and how much goes back into BBC Children's TV and education?

Iain Bundred: I do not know if I have this but in our annual report we set out the BBC Studios' piece. It is worth saying that it is not an individual payout from "Bluey" that then goes into children's education. It adds the profits at BBC Studios and then BBC Studios shares a dividend with public service. It is true to say that "Bluey" has been an enormous commercial success and that has helped BBC Studios' growth and that has been of benefit to public service, but we do not hypothecate it in that way.

Vicky Foxcroft: So you do not know how much is made from "Bluey".

Iain Bundred: I will get you that specific stat, because we did publish it. I do not want to say it wrong.

Q245 Vicky Foxcroft: That would be helpful. The money that you get from Bluey goes into a part rather than directly into—



Iain Bundred: It is part of Studios' annual reconciliation in terms of revenues that we are doing, and we have had phenomenal success with it. Kate may want to talk about the great work that the Studios team has done to develop the IP there and to expand more in what is an Australian Broadcasting PSB content in the first instance. Specifically on how it goes into BBC Children's, it is not hypothecated and then put across. It is part of the revenues that are raised and then profits that are driven into a dividend that then goes into public service.

Patricia Hidalgo: Can I add something to that? It is important to note that we do not commission "Bluey". "Bluey" is a deal that BBC Studios has with ABC Australia and Ludo Studio. So we do not invest heavily on "Bluey", it is an acquisition for us. When we have invested in other content like on "Hey Duggee" or "Numberblocks" or "Horrible Histories", we get a back-end position in that that money comes back, and we are seeing revenues coming back into BBC Children's. It is not huge, but we do get that revenue coming back to us.

Q246 **Vicky Foxcroft:** Do you get money from "Bluey"?

Patricia Hidalgo: Not from "Bluey", because we are not commissioning "Bluey". "Bluey" is not a commission. We do not invest directly into "Bluey" as BBC Children's and Education.

Vicky Foxcroft: You do not make any money?

Iain Bundred: Studios gets it.

Patricia Hidalgo: Studios gets it, as Iain was explaining, and it is part of all of the revenue that comes back to the BBC.

Q247 **Vicky Foxcroft:** The BBC is seen as a global leader in commissioning children's TV. Why has the BBC not produced another show as successful as "Bluey"?

Patricia Hidalgo: Oh, if I knew that answer, I would be a millionaire by now. It is so difficult. These are unicorns. They come around once every 10, 15 years. What was the one before? It was "Paw Patrol" and there was "Peppa Pig". Even "Teletubbies" was one of them. That was a huge success for the BBC back then and instigated consumer products and different divisions to be born out of Studios. So it is very difficult, but in order for us to find that next unicorn we need to invest. We need to be able to continue developing content at scale to be able to find that next "Bluey". A well-funded BBC will do that.

Q248 **Vicky Foxcroft:** Which of the other children's titles in the BBC Studios portfolio are closest to getting what "Bluey" does, or coming close to that?

Patricia Hidalgo: None of them, but "Hey Duggee" is our second most profitable franchise. We call them franchises when they can bring those



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revenues extra than just viewing. We have invested heavily on "Hey Duggee", both as public service and as Studios.

Kate Morton: "Hey Duggee", in the first six months of this financial year, has racked up in 2025-26 105 million views on iPlayer. That is massive. It is really exciting when I look at the data stats for what the UK audience is watching on the BBC, to sit there in the whole list of everything that is up there. You have "The Traitors", you have "Gladiators", you have "Hey Duggee". It is up there often in the top three, top four.

Q249 **Vicky Foxcroft:** The final one in this section is how has the co-production model affected the ability of BBC Studios to develop shows and retain the IP?

Patricia Hidalgo: As I said before, co-production is very important. It is even more important for BBC Studios because we will not fully fund anything coming from BBC Studios unless it is something that is completely local and does not have that international appeal. So it relies on co-productions and it is taking a lot of risks right now. Our latest drama is "Crookhaven", which when you see it you will love it, because it is an exciting new drama for children and their families. BBC Studios has not found yet the co-production partners, but it has gone out of its way to invest quite a lot of money from its own pocket because it believes it can find those co-production partners. That is the reality of the situation. It is hard to find them and you have to take risks.

Q250 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Out of interest, popular music, the bit I used to work in of your corporation, has that just disappeared from the children's schedules?

Patricia Hidalgo: Absolutely not. I will let Kate talk about music because she is a musician herself. She loves music.

Kate Morton: Yes, we love everything to do with music and it is important that music and the arts is part of content for children, particularly pre-schoolers. We have pop music—

Q251 **Dr Rupa Huq:** My algorithm shows me 1980 bands and they are often on your shows. Can you see those any more?

Kate Morton: There is a lot of use of pop music in content for children. It is important that children are exposed to a wide range of music styles, so it is not so much one genre like pop music. We also have a show like "Musical Storyland", which shows lots of different stories from around the world and different cultural types of music as well that goes with that.

Q252 **Dr Rupa Huq:** I would not find a Smiths video, the equivalent of that, on any of your shows now? As I say, these people used to appear on mainstream kiddie programmes and that has gone. Am I right?

Kate Morton: It has a lot to do with licensing and the cost of licensing music content.



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Iain Bundred: I would say, for example, on audio, our radio products, we have a huge amount and we are expanding, and for example, Radio 1's "Introducing", which has a—

Q253 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Yes, across the corporation it is there, but not within children's. But I am meant to be asking about "Newsround". It is big in your report as one of the crown jewels, it is a trusted lifeline in a sector that is under pressure. How do you make sure that it remains relevant when there is so much other intense competition out there?

Patricia Hidalgo: As we were saying, "Newsround" continues to be watched by more than 3.5 million children on a weekly basis. It is introduced in the majority of schools to primary-school-aged children.

Q254 **Dr Rupa Huq:** That is a constant, is it?

Patricia Hidalgo: That is a constant and we can see it growing. There is a couple of things that we have done. We have moved "Newsround" online, into YouTube. We have a daily bulletin on YouTube currently, which is quite complicated because you have to put it on and then take it off because you do not want to have a bulletin that is out of date. We do that; we have that. We have seen an increase in the traffic that we have on our YouTube channel for "Newsround". I believe that it is 45 million views of that channel in the last year, so we are really, really pleased with that. "Newsround" used to be done in-house by Children's. Last year we moved it on to BBC News. The reason that we have done that is because we believe that BBC News has the scale to make "Newsround" bigger than it currently is, although it is quite big already. We are commissioners of that. From an editorial point of view, "Newsround" continues to be a news programme made for children with children in mind. But with the scale of BBC News behind it, with all that strength, we can have a much bigger impact with "Newsround".

Q255 **Dr Rupa Huq:** We went to ITN and saw something similar. It has a small programme, because if it is too long, you lose people's attention. That is made by ITN.

Chair: Yes, "The Rundown", it is called. It is for slightly older teenagers.

Iain Bundred: To Damian's question earlier, for younger audiences, but of teenagers or pre-teens, we think about what we are doing with the BBC News app. You saw this weekend an enormous amount of appetite from all audiences, particularly younger audiences, to understand what was happening with the US-Israel-Iran conflict. There are 56 million page views so far on our main app. What we do on TikTok and what we do with Instagram and others, there is a huge part of it in the round, but "Newsround" continues to be our crown jewel in that respect. That combination of the best BBC news, insight, intelligence, infrastructure and the kids-at-heart commissioning is what makes it so trusted. Our report has some fantastic data about how parents trust us and how much they do it. I am always struck as well, when my son comes home from school and starts talking about various world events. I say, "Where on



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earth to get that from?" Of course, it's from "Newsround", because teachers are choosing to put that in front of them.

Chair: That because he has seen it in school?

Dr Rupa Huq: Yes, it is very associated with the old school assembly. Even in my day they would wheel in the enormous television on legs.

Iain Bundred: It is not on the curriculum, they choose to do it, which is interesting itself. There are 3.5 million kids watching it through school and teachers are choosing to put it on.

Dr Rupa Huq: So that boosts that figure of 3.5 million.

Iain Bundred: I do not know if you want to talk about the numbers online or on linear, but a huge drive is through the school network.

Q256 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Do you have an active plan to grow that, to get it into more schools?

Patricia it: As I said, moving it to be produced now by BBC News means that BBC News is supporting and promoting "Newsround" in a very different way than it did in the past, using its own news reporters, who have faces that are very well known, and leveraging on being out there, because it can go and interview children in different places where they are, where we might not have sent our own news reporters. So there is a lot more that is happening now that we have moved the production over there, but we are still commissioning it, so we are still in charge of making sure that the editorial stays focused for children.

Q257 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Do you get any recognition or thanks or money from the Department of Education for all this?

Iain Bundred: We get thanks. We are a publicly funded body and this is the core part of one of our missions and public purposes. It is to inform and to educate, but there is also a particular role in purpose 2, which thinks about education and our role in news as well as in purpose 1. That is part of the licence fee. I am not pitching specifically for DfE funding, but if such funding became available I am sure that we would welcome it.

Q258 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Is part of your mission to be countering disinformation and misinformation? There is so much out there.

Iain Bundred: A huge amount. Yes, that is a key pillar of the charter review response that we will make next week. Where the BBC steps in, we have seen, particularly for younger audiences but across the across the UK, in an increasingly polarised society the idea that news becomes contested, that people are seeking out news that they want rather than news they need. The value of the BBC is as a trusted media provider that continues to have a universal product and high levels of trust. That is massive and we have a responsibility, not just in the UK but globally, to grow our reach. We have talked a lot about the YouTube partnership when it comes to news in—sorry, it is kids, but there is also a pillar that



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is all about news, where our goal is to be the number one news provider of English language content.

Q259 **Dr Rupa Huq:** In the factual sphere, would you ever do anything like kids' reality shows?

Patricia Hidalgo: We have semi-reality shows. We have something called "The Next Step". I do not know if you know about that content.

Dr Rupa Huq: It is too old in our house.

Patricia Hidalgo: We have "Stage Stars". Do you want to talk about that one?

Kate Morton: Yes, "Stage Stars", is set in Tring School for Performing Arts. It follows fantastic young talent like dancers, actors, musicians and wannabe pop artists as they progress through the school year. You are seeing rehearsals and so on. It is a structured reality. It is a fabulous show and it is worth having a look. It is on iPlayer.

Iain Bundred: It is worth saying, for example, that we have a long history in this. If you think about "Eurovision Kids", for example, there is a piece there. The key thing, of course, is that as a public service broadcaster, all responsible broadcasters need to think there is a particularly high bar when you are using child actors or when you are using child contestants, so we always think through that. It is important that we do appropriately and responsibly.

Q260 **Dr Rupa Huq:** And what about your relationship with TikTok? It is actually banned in this building—the server will not allow it and it stops you—and on our parliamentary devices. I just wondered about that, because that is for the post-13-year-olds, isn't it?

Iain Bundred: It is important that we offer age-appropriate content only on TikTok. We are not trying to get under 13s in there. But we do have a role to play. As I said, we are doing a lot of news there where it feels like the need for trusted information and news is really important. There is an underserved audience that is using TikTok more than they are using iPlayer, for example, so we have taken the responsibility there. Is there anything that you want to say specifically on kids?

Patricia Hidalgo: We do have a Bitesize for GCSE students, so that is beyond 13 and when it is revision time. We also have "Other Side of the Story", which is that Bitesize service to support children with understanding misinformation and disinformation. Those are the two main things that we have on TikTok. We do not target any kids under 13 on that platform.

Q261 **Dr Rupa Huq:** Just a yes or no answer, can you ever really be unbiased? Surely the selection of the stories of what goes in is demonstrating bias. I do not know if it is ever possible. The reason why Trump pulled out of "Sesame Street" is that he said that it was partisan, or public service



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broadcasting.

Iain Bundred: We have a duty to be impartial.

Dr Rupa Huq: But the selection of the show. Do you know what I mean? You can never really detach yourself, as a social scientist.

Iain Bundred: The Committee heard a lot about systemic bias in the BBC before Christmas, so I would not add much more to that.

Chair: I always question "Big Bird's" politics. We never know. Last but not least, Vicky.

Q262 **Vicky Foxcroft:** I will ask a quick one on TikTok. You were talking about different platforms and their responsibilities and so forth earlier, and you did not name those platforms. But in terms of the BBC and publishing on TikTok, recently we have seen the school wars, blue versus red, on TikTok, which is absolutely terrifying. I think that TikTok did not respond quickly enough to go and tackle this and still is not responding quickly enough. What responsibility do you think that you have as the BBC as a publisher on TikTok?

Patricia Hidalgo: As I said before, we will not target children under 13. Our responsibility is to make sure that children who are there and who see our content will be influenced in a positive way. That is why we have "Other Side of the Story", which tackles misinformation and disinformation right at the heart of TikTok. We tell children that this is fake news or this is something that they should be looking out for, so it helps educate that audience. That is what we can do. We have also some of our GCSE revision times, because we know that students, when it comes to GCSE, do go to these platforms to revise.

Iain Bundred: I can address the question, Vicky. The challenge here is whether, by putting BBC content on to TikTok, we are giving it more credibility or not. The way that we would look at it is that we have a duty to reach audiences where they are. We have seen, as audiences' behaviour changes, that we need to step up and, in those information spaces where there are challenges, provide trusted information. That is a decision we have taken. We always keep that under advisement, but there is definitely a question here. There is fantastic content on all these platforms, TikTok, we talked a lot about YouTube earlier. There are some brilliant creators doing some amazing things.

It brings us back a bit to discoverability, because if we upload this content and it is good-quality content, are we confident that it will be found by UK users? Particularly in that world where only 20% of UK content is being seen, it is important that we are not just there but that we are also able to be found.

Q263 **Vicky Foxcroft:** In particular in terms of this one, it was not disinformation, it was not misinformation, it was dangerous information. My point is are you putting the content out in terms of that platform to



advise—

Iain Bundred: Tackling those trends, for example?

Vicky Foxcroft: Yes.

Iain Bundred: I see. I will check on that. I am not aware of that particular trend, but that is something that BBC Verify does a lot of. If you think about where we are trying to address current negative trends or themes or content areas, that tends to be in the space of less around the school dynamics. I will check and I will let you know if there was anything particular that we did on that issue. Thank you for raising it; I am happy to flag it to our teams.

Q264 **Vicky Foxcroft:** I will come on to what my question is. I am trying to shoehorn three questions into one because I wanted to get away with asking the other question. How does being outside London affect commissioning decisions, ensuring that it is supporting independent TV? What is the perception of the audience? In children's TV, what are you doing to ensure that we represent all parts of the United Kingdom and in particular people from working class backgrounds?

Patricia Hidalgo: I will answer first and Kate can add to that, but 80% of our output for children's content is outside of London. So that is already something that is very important. We also make sure that we have representation and great diversity in children's content. BBC Children's is known worldwide, known for how highly it represents diversity, because it is important that children see themselves represented. That is part of our values. We need to make sure that children see themselves represented on screen. That is our main focus, whether it is accent or ethnicity or disabilities or even where they live. We also think about making sure that cities like Edinburgh or Manchester are represented in the content that we produce. Kate will talk a bit more about that. Very important is how we support the creative industry across the whole of the UK. We work very closely with Screens to make sure that whenever we go to the different nations and regions, we work in tandem with it to find the best talent and to grow the talent that it is trying to grow over there. We also have our own investment in talent and in diversity across the UK.

Kate Morton: Yes, to add quickly, in the last 12 months, we have filmed in locations such as Liverpool, Halifax, Leeds, Hexham, Darlington, Newtownards in Northern Ireland, Belfast, Glasgow and even the Isle of Mull. Within that, it is authentic representation. It is also, as Patricia said, working with local communities, bringing in workforce and giving them opportunities. Even on "Balamory", which we were filming on the Isle of Mull, we ended up bringing in workers from the Inner Hebrides to get their first experience of working in television. There cannot be that much opportunity if you want to work in media, if you are growing up there. We are uniquely positioned to support across the whole of the UK.



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In terms of representation, it is important that we are telling UK stories. One example I would just like to bring is "Crongton" from the amazing Alex Wheatle. That was a groundbreaking drama that we produced. It is set in a multicultural estate, showing socioeconomic diversity. The story is about how children growing up are navigating social politics, peer pressure and identity. So you have authentic representation in shows like that.

Iain Bundred: Just a data point, the Children's Education team meets our 25% target of socioeconomic employment. That is obviously very encouraging. Back to the charter lens, Children's Education is leading the way here, but how the BBC can be more rooted in our communities across the UK is very much a focus of the executive and the board, and you will hear more from us on that in the next week.

Chair: Thank you, everybody, for appearing in front of us. I know that we have gone wildly over time, but it was great to hear your thoughts on such a big range of subjects. Can you please send us all the information that we discussed earlier? Thank you very much.