



From the **Director-General**

6 October 2022

Julian Knight MP
Chair, DCMS Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Julian

I was grateful for the opportunity to appear with our Chairman Richard Sharp and Chief Operating Officer Leigh Tavaziva before the DCMS Select Committee on 6 September.

Julie Elliott MP chaired in your absence and we agreed to come back to Ms Elliott and the Committee on a number of questions raised. You'll find these responses attached to an appendix to this letter.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak to the Committee and to respond to your questions.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tim Davie', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Davie
Director-General

cc. Julie Elliott MP

Appendix

Following on from the DCMS Select Committee hearing on 6 September 2022, please find below the additional information required.

The methodology for the programme content reviews

The Serota Review supported the BBC Executive's proposal to create a series of Internal Content Reviews as internal management tools aimed at helping the Executive and Board to ensure proper oversight of editorial standards and compliance with the Editorial Guidelines. It said; "Such internal assessments, led by the BBC Executive, would enable the BBC to assess impartiality, accuracy and diversity of opinion across its output."

Purpose:

The reviews are intended to:

- Assess whether content upholds and embodies editorial standards
- Support editors and leaders to promote and uphold editorial standards
- Increase understanding of audience attitudes and how they affect perceptions of the BBC and make best use of audience insight
- Share best practice and lessons learnt
- Embed a culture of continuous improvement and confident self-criticism
- Initiate, encourage and enable conversations about editorial standards and values
- Identify any structural changes needed to raise standards
- Identify issues and propose actions plans to correct any problems

Over time, relevant content areas will be reviewed across TV, radio and digital services. These reviews will assess editorial standards including due impartiality across a representative sample of the output. They will look at how processes, procedures and editorial guidelines are being implemented. They will consider the choice of subjects, the tone and approach being used and the audience impact of the content.

Methodology:

Review team - A review team of 2 to 3, including experienced senior leaders drawn from other Divisions/areas of output will engage with the teams under review, conduct the analysis and look at the evidence collected.

Internal engagement - The review panel will meet the teams and attend the cycle of production meetings to see the team work through planning, editorial decision-making and review of the content made within the review period. Teams will be asked to participate in self-review.

Content Analysis - Over a specific period, e.g. a week of output for a daily programme, or a selection of episodes across a year, content will be analysed by the review panel against an agreed criteria.

Audience Research - Audience research will be commissioned to assess what audiences think of the output within the review period. Complaints over the review period, and the BBC's response to those complaints will be included in the research.

Social Media Analysis - To examine related social media output and assess whether it meets appropriate editorial standards.

Conclusions and recommendations from the review will be reported to the Executive Committee and fed back to the content team. The reviews are for internal use and will not be published.

Political alignment and trust figures

The Committee asked for further information on political alignment and trust levels.

When asked to name the one provider they are most likely to turn to for news they trust the most, 48% of news consumers cite the BBC, far ahead of the next nearest (Sky News on 8%). There is no statistical difference in the results from Conservative voters and Labour voters. Among Conservative voters, 47% name the BBC (well ahead of Sky News on 10%). Among Labour voters, 50% name the BBC (well ahead of Sky News on 11%).

Additionally, Yonder polling for the BBC this year on the difference between UK and US audiences found the following:

- There is a high level of trust in national news organisations among the UK public (much higher than in the US), and in contrast to the US, there is very little difference in levels of trust between the left-leaning and right-leaning public.
- National news organisations: 75% of UK adults say they have a lot or some trust in the information that comes from national news organisations (vs 58% among US adults in the US Pew research). And scores in the UK are consistent on both sides of the political spectrum (76% of both left-leaning and right-leaning adults), in stark contrast to the US where there is a 43 percentage point gap between Democrat-leaning (78%) and Republican-leaning (35%) adults.
- Local news organisations: 71% of UK adults say they have a lot or some trust in the information that comes from local news organisations (vs 75% in the US). Again, scores in the UK are consistent on both sides of the political spectrum (69% of left-leaning and 71% right-leaning adults), while in the US there is a 18%pt gap between Democrat-leaning (84%) and Republican-leaning (66%) adults.
- Social media: There is much less trust in information coming from social media. 23% of UK adults say they have a lot or some trust in the information that comes from social media (vs 27% in the US). In the UK this rises to 35% among 16-34s

(41% among 16-24s). Scores in the UK are similar on both sides of the political spectrum (24% of left-leaning and 17% right-leaning adults), a marginally higher trust level among left-leaning adults likely affected by this being a younger-skewing group. In the US there is a 15%pt gap between Democrat-leaning (34%) and Republican-leaning (19%) adults.

Children's productions

The Committee asked for the current figures for those working on children's productions. Kids and Family Productions, having joined BBC Studios in April this year, currently has 157 staff – with a freelance workforce that fluctuates in number depending on the amount of shows in production. At present we have 306 freelancers working with us.

Investigative journalism in the regions

The Committee asked about investigative teams in the regions. It is our plan that there will be a team based in each of our 11 English Regions:

1. North East
2. North West
3. Yorkshire
4. West Midlands
5. East Midlands
6. East
7. West
8. South West
9. South
10. South East
11. London

We are committed to 11 teams that deliver investigations and impact journalism at a regional and local level. They will work closely with a central current affairs team which will be located across two of our regional centres, to maximise the journey of our journalism across all platforms. We are looking to distribute the regional team members across each region so we have dedicated investigative journalism resource in more places than previously. We are consulting with the unions and staff on our proposals. Once we have shared specific location detail with colleagues this autumn we are happy to update the committee.

Ofcom quotas

The Committee asked about Ofcom quotas in relation to regional current affairs minutes on BBC One.

Ofcom's Operating Licence sets out that the BBC should ensure programming for the nations and regions serves, and is of interest to, people living in the area for which the service is provided, and that it should contribute to social wellbeing and cohesion.

As part of this, the Licence conditions include quotas on programmes of interest to audiences in the nations and regions. These quotas include:

- Non-news programming in peak on BBC One and BBC Two (557 hours)
- Non-news programming adjacent to peak on BBC One and BBC Two (179 hours)
- News throughout the day on BBC One (4,100 hours) of which around half must be in peak (2,100 hours)

The Operating Licence also includes specific hours requirements for news and current affairs by Nations opts. For example, the BBC is required to ensure that, with regards to:

- BBC One Scotland, it provides at least 290 hours of news and current affairs each Financial Year;
- BBC One Wales, it provides at least 275 hours of news and current affairs each Financial Year; and
- BBC One Northern Ireland, it provides 310 hours of news and current affairs each Financial Year.

With the exception of the direct impact of the coronavirus pandemic on production, we have exceeded these quotas every year since the Operating Licence was introduced in 2017.

The BBC provides a large amount of current affairs programming across the English regions, some of which contributes to the non-news in peak and adjacent to peak quotas. The BBC also provides other current affairs content (such as *Sunday Politics*) which is not counted in the quotas, because this content is broadcast during Sunday daytime rather than at peak and adjacent to peak times. This content however remains important to the BBC and to audiences.

The new News Channel

Local news:

The Committee asked about the proportion of local news on the new BBC News channel.

The new BBC News channel will continue to cover news and events across the UK as today, alongside bringing the BBC's world renowned international reporting to licence fee payers.

The channel will continue to have dedicated output for UK audiences, including BBC Breakfast and the major UK news bulletins, as well as new programmes such as Nicky Campbell's morning programme (currently only on 5live), bringing a wider range of voices and viewpoints from across the UK. In addition, the expanded dedicated live and

breaking team will ensure that UK breaking news is brought to audiences across the BBC's broadcast and digital services.

Just as today, it would not be the right editorial approach to suggest specific quotas of local, UK and international stories or times in the schedule, as a rolling news channel must be able to respond to the news agenda. The BBC is committed to reporting news and events from across the UK, not least through the BBC One 6.30pm programmes which remain the most watched television news programmes in the UK (and not currently carried by the News Channel) and through our plans to increase coverage of local stories on the BBC's news website and app.

Timescale:

The Board reviewed the regulatory position in relation to the News Channel proposals at the 21 September meeting. As part of that discussion, they noted the position set out by Ofcom that a materiality assessment for the proposals was not required and that the changes did not raise any competition or Fair Trading concerns. The Board were briefed on work being done with Ofcom to provide assurance about how middle tier UK stories will be covered, as well as what will be distinctive about the offer for UK audiences. This falls under Ofcom's wider role to ensure that the BBC is performing against the mission and public purposes, particularly public purpose 1. The Board will receive a further update on the implementation plans for the proposals at the 26 October meeting.

Music commissioning

The Committee asked about the BBC's policy on commissioning music.

For c.20 years the BBC has had agreed Commissioning Guidelines with the composers/songwriters body BASCA and The Musicians' Union for the commissioning of music for screen.

This framework is currently under review as a joint initiative with the MU and the Ivor's Academy, with the aim to replace the old Guidelines with a new Code of Practice, representing best practice in this field.

This Code of Practice will continue to ensure transparency and understanding around the BBC's commissioning process, and ensure fair terms for composers.

The deal framework that the BBC applies to specially commissioned music is as follows:

- Copyright in the sound recording (Master) is owned by the BBC
- The composer enters into a commercially negotiated publishing deal with BBC Studios with the writers share being retained by the composer and revenues and royalties are payable dependent on use
- In addition, performance royalties are also payable where applicable