



House of Commons  
Committee of Public Accounts

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# The BBC's implementation of Across the UK

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Twenty-Sixth Report of  
Session 2023–24

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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## Summary

Through its Across the UK programme, the BBC plans to strengthen its delivery for all the UK by moving a further £700 million of its spending outside London between March 2021 and March 2028, with three phases of implementation. However, it has begun implementing its programme without a clear plan and could not readily explain the expected impact and benefits for licence fee payers.

We are concerned the BBC was too confident of what it can deliver in the future. It did not meet all of its targets for phase one of the programme up to March 2023 and offered little evidence of a coherent approach to delivery, or of effective tracking and measurement. The BBC emphasised that its plans are ambitious, and we heard that it had performed well in some areas, such as moving 58% of TV expenditure outside London, against its target of 60% by December 2027. However, where it is behind schedule, such as audio production and apprenticeships, it did not have a plan to get back on track. For example, it had moved just 1 percentage point of its audio production expenditure outside London since March 2020, with the BBC reporting that it is spending 41% outside London as at February 2024, against its target of 50% by March 2028.

The BBC's plans for evaluating the success of Across the UK are incomplete and, after three years of implementation, it did not have an overall approach in place for assessing the impact of the programme. Its intention to start evaluating performance from 2025, during phase three of Across the UK, is too late for it to change course if needed. In evaluating, it will be important for the BBC to distinguish between new jobs that are created in the regions compared to those simply being moved outside London. The nature of the local hubs the BBC is creating in, for example, Birmingham, Salford, Cardiff and Glasgow, and its engagement with local authorities and stakeholders present risks to achieving the full benefits of Across the UK. This included the BBC not fully grasping the significance of the other bodies and communities it needed to work effectively with and which are crucial to the success of Across the UK. The BBC has yet to develop contingencies for the real risk that some local partners, on whom the success of its programme is reliant, may pull out.

## Introduction

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In March 2021, the BBC published *The BBC Across the UK*, setting out its ambitions to strengthen its delivery for the whole of the UK, particularly in areas where perception of the BBC's relevance is relatively low, and to ensure that every household gets value from the BBC. The Across the UK programme builds on the BBC's previous relocation of several departments to a new regional centre in Salford in 2012, but the BBC considers it a much bigger transformation affecting every part of the BBC and all four UK nations.

The BBC planned to spend a further £700 million outside London between March 2021 and March 2028, and to move around 400 roles outside London. The BBC believed that moving expenditure and decisions on budgets outside London will change the culture of its commissioning, production and news journalism. The BBC will also commission shows that portray different regions of the UK, to better reflect the lives and communities of audiences outside London. It expected this approach to reduce regional differences in audience portrayal perceptions, increase the BBC's regional economic footprint and support growth of local creative industries. It estimated implementing the programme will generate an additional economic benefit totalling around £850 million in local economic growth.

## Conclusions and recommendations

1. **The BBC's plans for Across the UK are overly focused on the actions it will take, rather than what impact it intends to achieve.** The BBC considered moving £700 million of expenditure outside London to be a key measure of success of the programme, but the BBC did not give us a coherent explanation of the impact it expects to deliver for licence fee payers from this commitment. The BBC plans to use a "basket of measures" to assess the success of the programme. However, most of the measures it plans to use are input measures, referring to the BBC's actions (such as moving jobs). It has limited outcome measures to demonstrate the positive change the BBC intends to achieve (such as improving the relevance of its content to its local audiences and creating new, local jobs in the creative sector), but the BBC recognised that it was currently focused on driving the input measures.

**Recommendation 1:** *The BBC should refresh its plans for Across the UK and, as part of its response to this report, it should set out its strategy for realising benefits and what it will deliver (including for licence fee payers, local communities, the wider sector and BBC staff) during the remainder of its Across the UK programme.*

2. **The BBC has not assessed how the changes it has made to the scope of Across the UK will affect the overall shape of the programme and the benefits it is intended to deliver.** Since the BBC's announcement in March 2021, it has changed the composition of projects that make up the Across the UK programme. For example, it has removed from the scope of the programme its original plan to build a network of 100 digital community reporters, as well as the planned relocation of the BBC Concert Orchestra outside London. The BBC will need to find other ways to move its audio spend in order to compensate for these decisions and hit its target to spend 50% of its audio expenditure outside London. But the BBC did not understand well enough the risks and impacts of these changes in scope and so the nature of the expenditure it moves outside London by the end of the programme could look quite different from what it planned at the outset. Changes the BBC is making to services locally could also disadvantage certain groups. In particular, and although no longer part of Across the UK, we are concerned that the BBC's reallocation of budgets from local radio to local online services and more sharing of weekday programmes will, in effect, reduce services for people who are older or less able to access digital online platforms.

**Recommendation 2:** *Where the BBC has made changes to Across the UK by bringing activities in and out of scope, it should compare current delivery and future forecast delivery against its original plan so that it can spell out any differences in the overall benefits to be delivered. It should refresh this analysis on an ongoing basis.*

3. **The BBC remains very confident that it will deliver Across the UK as expected – we are concerned this is misplaced, given it is behind schedule in key areas.** The BBC's initial lack of planning resulted in unrealistic timelines for some areas of the programme, such as moving roles and local recruitment. The BBC repeatedly expressed confidence that it will deliver its Across the UK objectives. It says it has performed well in some areas, such as moving 58% of TV expenditure outside London, against its 60% target. It reported that it had caught up with previously

missed transfer expenditure targets and claimed that it will meet its overall target of transferring £700 million of its expenditure outside London by March 2028. However, in some key areas the BBC has made slow progress or missed its targets, and its explanations for how it would get back on track were not convincing. It aimed to spend 50% of its audio production budget outside London by March 2028, but had only achieved 41% of spending outside London so far, from 40% in March 2020, and it had a £23 million shortfall in transferred expenditure resulting from the cancelled relocation of the BBC Concert Orchestra outside London. By March 2023, the BBC placed 27 apprentices through its West Midlands Apprentice Hub, against a target of 50. It similarly had recruited 617 in-house apprentices against a target of 713, with 60% outside London against a target of 80%.

**Recommendation 3:** *The BBC should urgently finalise its plans for getting back on track where it is behind on implementation of Across the UK, including transferring audio spend outside London and its plans for apprentices.*

4. **The BBC's reporting of Across the UK does not provide Parliament nor the public with a complete picture of progress with the programme, and risks causing confusion.** The BBC considered its internal governance of programmes to be tight and specific, but in its public communication of its progress with Across the UK it sets out its ambitions and how it meets its public purposes more broadly. The BBC told us it considered the relocation of its Birmingham premises from The Mailbox to Digbeth as a separate project from Across the UK yet it included its benefits as part of Across the UK in its 2022–23 Annual Report and Accounts. The BBC stands by its presentation of activity in this way. We are concerned that the BBC is claiming benefits for Across the UK publicly when it is favourable for it to do so for activities that are not part of the programme, compared with dissociating other activities from the programme when they could be seen as a bad news story, such as cuts to local radio.

**Recommendation 4:** *To improve transparency, in future public reporting on Across the UK, including its next Annual Report and Accounts, the BBC should align its reporting of progress on implementation so that its external and internal reporting on Across the UK are consistent with each other.*

5. **The BBC's plans for evaluating Across the UK are incomplete and it does not have in place an overall approach for assessing impact.** To assess Across the UK, the BBC planned to measure changes to audience perception as well as additional economic benefits such as jobs created. However, it lacked a comprehensive framework that pulled together its different measures to give the overall picture of the programme's impact. At this stage of the programme, we would have expected the BBC to already have a benefits management strategy and plan in place. Despite starting the programme in 2021, the BBC did not expect to develop its evaluation plan until the second phase of the programme and would not evaluate until 2025. This will be too late for it to understand the impact the programme is having, to make any changes it may need to make, and to realise the benefits from any changes. The BBC has not articulated what success will look like, nor does it have standardised measures of success for its regional hubs in terms of local impact and generating economic growth. The BBC spoke of the recent publication of an evaluation of Doctor Who's economic impact in Wales following its re-launch in



2005 in Cardiff. That was not part of Across the UK, but the BBC would not commit to undertaking comparable evaluations of economic impact for the regional hubs where Across the UK is focused.

**Recommendation 5: *The BBC should urgently set out a framework that brings together how it will consistently measure all of the tangible, beneficial impacts of Across the UK for audiences and in generating local economic growth.***

6. **The BBC has not fully grasped the significance of the other bodies and communities it needs to work with effectively and which are crucial to the success of Across the UK.** As part of Across the UK, the BBC has established partnerships with local authorities, combined authorities and local industry bodies. The BBC highlighted the value of local partners to the delivery of Across the UK and the work it does, but its evidence is contradictory. The BBC said it wanted partners to bring in investment but also insisted it could deliver Across the UK without them. It also claimed its plans are unaffected by the cancellation of the planned HS2 train line between Birmingham and Manchester. Several local authorities are close to declaring themselves bankrupt and may have to withdraw some local services, yet the BBC did not understand the full impact of these financial pressures and lacked contingency plans if local partners have to pull out. Furthermore, although Across the UK is designed to change the culture of the BBC and will have a significant impact on many staff, the BBC did not collect data on what its staff think about the programme.

**Recommendation 6: *As part of its response to this report, the BBC should set out:***

- *how it will identify and monitor the impact of any sudden or unexpected changes to commitments from its external partners, and what contingency plans it has for such uncertainties.*
- *how it will engage more fully with its staff to understand and take account of their views to make its implementation of Across the UK a success.*

# 1 The intended benefits of Across the UK

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1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the BBC on its implementation of its Across the UK programme.<sup>1</sup>

2. In March 2021, the BBC published *The BBC Across the UK*, setting out its ambitions to strengthen its delivery for the whole of the UK, particularly in areas where perceptions of the BBC's relevance are relatively low, and to ensure that every household gets value from the BBC. It plans to do this by cumulatively spending at least a further £700 million outside London between March 2021 and March 2028. Across the UK builds on the BBC's previous relocation of several departments to a new regional centre in Salford, but the BBC considers it a much bigger transformation affecting every part of the BBC and all four UK nations. Across the UK is expected to increase programming from all parts of the UK outside London, including Salford, Cardiff, Newcastle and the North-East, Birmingham and the West Midlands, Glasgow, and Belfast.<sup>2</sup>

3. The BBC believes that moving decisions on budgets and expenditure outside London will change the culture of BBC commissioning, production and BBC News journalism. This is expected to reduce regional differences in audience portrayal perceptions, increase the BBC's regional economic footprint and support growth of local creative industries. As a result of Across the UK, the BBC expects to move around 400 roles outside London. Since it sees its decision-making and expenditure as catalysts, it estimates the implementation of Across the UK will generate an additional economic benefit totalling around £850 million in local economic growth.<sup>3</sup>

4. The BBC's implementation of Across the UK has three phases spanning seven years, with phase one, up to the end of March 2023, covering set-up and implementation. Phase two, from April 2023 to the end of March 2025, is focused on delivering programme moves. Phase three, from April 2025 to the end of March 2028, is focused on maximising the benefits of the programme. By March 2023, the BBC was £20 million short of its key phase one target for transferring expenditure outside London, but it met many of the other phase one targets. Implementation of the programme up to March 2023 had cost the BBC £34 million.<sup>4</sup>

## The expected impact of the programme

5. The NAO found that the BBC sees Across the UK as adding audience, creative and public value. For example, in articulating its aim to ensure audiences feel better connected and represented, it has committed to:

- transferring £700 million of expenditure outside London;
- increasing expenditure in regions on television network commissions (programmes that will be broadcast nationally);

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1 C&AG's Report, *The BBC's implementation of across The UK*, Session 2023–24, HC 190, 24 November 2023

2 Qq 17, 25; C&AG's Report, paras 1–2

3 Q 46; C&AG's Report, para 3

4 Qq 63, 70; C&AG's report, paras 4, 9–10, 12, 2.6

- increasing expenditure in regions on audio network commissions;
- moving 50% of News story teams outside London; and
- commissioning new and returning drama and comedy titles.<sup>5</sup>

We asked the BBC to explain how it would know whether its aims around audience, creative and public value had been achieved. The BBC told us that its key measure was to cumulatively spend an extra £700 million outside London between March 2021 and March 2028. It also planned, between March 2020 and December 2027, to increase its network television expenditure outside London from 50% to 60%, and from 40% to 50% for audio.<sup>6</sup> The BBC told us that it was using a “basket of measures” to assess its success, which included both input measures, such as its expenditure and activities, and output measures, such as the outcomes the BBC achieves. The BBC recognised that it was currently focused on driving the input measures.<sup>7</sup>

6. The BBC explained that the Across the UK programme was focused on driving more positive perceptions of the BBC and addressing perception gaps across the UK. We therefore asked the BBC what tangible benefits it expected the programme to deliver for communities outside London. The BBC told us that it aimed to ensure that more of its outputs were closer to people outside London and they connected more with it. The BBC explained that, by moving programmes to other locations, they would become “infused with a sense” of that location. The BBC told us that it was also seeking to tell local stories through its locally-set dramas. The BBC explained that it wanted to “close the perception gap” between different regions of the UK, making sure that everyone, in all the regions of the UK felt that the BBC was for them.<sup>8</sup> But in its letter to us after our evidence session, its metric for measuring the success of this only refers to a “statistically significant reduction in regional perception gap”, not the impact that this will achieve.<sup>9</sup> The BBC also aimed to generate wider economic benefits for the creative industries outside London. We asked the BBC whether there was a hierarchy to its multiple aims for Across the UK, to which it responded that its overarching aim was to increase relevance and usage by licence fee payers, in line with its *Value for All* strategy.<sup>10</sup>

7. We repeatedly asked the BBC to clarify how its activities will deliver the objectives of Across the UK. In response, the BBC gave us multiple examples of the programmes it has moved outside London and the local partnerships it had set up, and emphasised its target of transferring £700 million outside London.<sup>11</sup> It told us that it knew that moving expenditure outside London would lead to economic growth and improved perception.<sup>12</sup> The BBC had announced its £700 million commitment before finalising its Across the UK plan, budget and business case. The NAO report found that the BBC's business case was underdeveloped, including that the BBC had not clearly stated the link between its outputs and desired change. The BBC recognised that its business case for Across the UK could

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5 C&AG's Report, Figure 1

6 Qq 17–18, 25–26; C&AG's report, paras 1, Figure 1, paras 2.8–2.9, figure 8

7 Qq 25–26, 30

8 Qq 25–26, 29–30

9 [Letter from Tim Davie, Director General, BBC, to Dame Meg Hillier MP, Chair, Committee of Public Accounts, dated 1 March 2024](#)

10 Qq 62–63

11 Qq 24–26, 29, 30, 45, 47, 62, 63

12 Qq 21, 45, 49

have benefitted from a broader look at the benefits of the programme and committed to improving its approach to business cases, incorporating best practice from HM Treasury's guidance.<sup>13</sup>

### The impact of changes to the scope of the programme

8. Since announcing Across the UK in March 2021, the BBC had de-scoped some activities from the programme, including moving some activities to other initiatives. For example, the BBC originally planned to create a new network of more than 100 digital community reporters across the UK, but later in 2021 decided to move this into its local strategy instead. The BBC said it decided, between March and October 2021, to remove its activities in the devolved nations and local areas from Across the UK and deliver them independently. The NAO reported that the BBC considered the implementation of Across the UK to be an iterative process and that it needed to adapt its plans to meet its overall target. However, the BBC did not have an agreed process for requesting changes to Across the UK until October 2022 and decided not to review any changes made prior to this being adopted. The NAO found that this created a risk that the BBC had not properly understood the risks and impacts of these changes on its overall objectives.<sup>14</sup>

9. In June 2023, the BBC announced that its Concert Orchestra would not be moving outside London as it had originally planned. The relocation would have transferred £23 million of audio expenditure outside London. The BBC will need to find other audio expenditure to transfer if it is to meet its target to increase its audio expenditure outside London to 50% and its overall target of £700 million. The NAO found in November 2023 that the BBC was developing a phase two business case with plans to address these challenges and ensure it would meet its targets, but that these were not yet finalised. We therefore asked the BBC whether it still expected to be able to deliver the overall shape of the £700 million as it originally planned. The BBC told us that, while it was behind on its audio target, it was still holding its radio, music and audio teams to its target to deliver 50% of expenditure outside London. It told us that it was confident that this would be addressed and that it would achieve its headline target for audio expenditure. It explained that changes to the scope of this element of the programme had allowed it to announce new plans, such as those for the additional audit hub for Glasgow and Belfast.<sup>15</sup>

10. The BBC told us that the third phase of the programme, which will run from April 2025 to the end of March 2028, would focus on maximising the impact of the strategy and, where necessary, make changes to its commissions to ensure that it was getting the maximum return and value to audiences. We asked whether it was able to make changes to the programme at this later stage. The BBC explained that it had a responsive and flexible approach to its TV commissioning, making changes on an ongoing basis. The BBC described itself as "very footloose" regarding where it made TV content. It told us that this enabled it to be responsive to editorial and creative opportunities. We asked the BBC if it understood that it could be a big shift for a local partner to have agreed a deal for a network programme to be made in its local area, but then editorially have the

13 Qq 17–20; C&AG's Report, paras 7, 1.12, figure 4

14 Q 39; C&AG's Report, paras 2.2–2.3

15 Qq 27, 72–73; C&AG's Report, paras 2.3, 2.5, 3.5

programme moved somewhere else. The BBC explained that certain regions were priority regions for it and that its commitments were to provide production investment to those regions, but what the money was spent on might change over time.<sup>16</sup>

11. The BBC told us that Across the UK only included work to move activities outside the M25 and that it had separate strategies for its related initiatives in local services. We therefore asked the BBC about the potential impact of other change programmes, particularly in audio, that could affect the impact or delivery of Across the UK. The BBC acknowledged that its other change programmes could also affect the impact of Across the UK, but did not provide any further detail on what this looked like in practice or how it was managing this.<sup>17</sup> We asked the BBC about the impact of its changes to local radio, including the decision to move quite a lot of content online, given that 80% of BBC local radio listeners are over 55 years old. The BBC explained that it had not cut money from local services, which had a flat budget, but reallocated funds from local radio to online services, so there had been cuts within the budget from one area to another. It said it had not closed any local radio stations but acknowledged it was making changes to programmes and presenters, with more sharing of weekday programmes. It told us that decisions to reallocate money from local radio “are not easy choices ... they are incredibly difficult”.<sup>18</sup> While the BBC acknowledged the challenge of changing the provision of local radio, it highlighted the need for it to respond to a changing media landscape, with only 15% of the population listening to local radio and mostly listening to news. It told us that even among those aged 65 to 74 years old, the largest consumption was news. The BBC committed to keep all local radio services and all breakfast shows, stating that local radio was “utterly precious” and that it was doing all it could to protect it.<sup>19</sup>

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16 Qq 29, 63–66; C&AG's Report Figure 3

17 Qq 28–29, 41

18 Qq 29, 31

19 Qq 31–32

## 2 Progress so far

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### Getting back on track

12. The BBC met many, but not all, of the specific targets that it set for phase one of Across the UK to the end of March 2023. By March 2023, the BBC had already commissioned 110 new and returning drama and comedy programmes reflecting communities outside London, against a target of 100 commissions by March 2028. Of these, 68 programmes have already been aired on television, 29 of which specifically portray the devolved nations, including Sherwood, Happy Valley, Control Room, Bloodlands, Two Doors Down, and The Outlaws. The BBC achieved its phase one target for transferring employment outside London, moving jobs equivalent to 291 full-time posts against a target of 288.5. It also agreed two published memoranda of understanding (with West Midlands Combined Authority and Create Central) setting out how to better serve local audiences and creative economies.<sup>20</sup> The BBC described its transfer of TV production expenditure as “a good result”, increasing the percentage of its budget spent outside London from 50% in March 2021 to 58% by March 2023, against a target of 60% by December 2027. However, the BBC missed its interim target for its key measure for the programme of transferring £700 million outside London. The BBC planned to transfer £87.5 million outside London by the end of March 2023, transferring £67.5 million by this date.<sup>21</sup>

13. The BBC's initial lack of planning resulted in unrealistic timelines for some areas of the programme, such as moving roles and local recruitment. It took three months for it to catch up and meet its target for transferring overall expenditure outside London, achieving its target by the end of June 2023.<sup>22</sup> We therefore asked the BBC how confident it was that it would meet its targets for the remainder of the programme. The BBC repeatedly told us that it was confident of hitting its targets for Across the UK, in particular its overall target of transferring an additional £700 million of expenditure outside London between 2021 and 2028.<sup>23</sup> The BBC explained that it was confident because delivery of its transfer expenditure target was in its gift and it had enough time to achieve this. It also explained that, since meeting its phase one target to transfer overall expenditure, it had continued to accelerate its delivery against this. The NAO found that the BBC planned to over-deliver against its transfer of television production outside London, and had identified £90 million of additional television production expenditure which it would transfer by March 2028. The BBC had yet to include this additional £90 million in its forecasts.<sup>24</sup>

14. The BBC recognised that it was behind schedule with its plans to transfer audio expenditure outside London. By March 2023, the BBC spent 41% of its expenditure on network audio production outside London, an increase of just 1 percentage point compared with 40% in March 2020. Having transferred 1 percentage point of expenditure in 4 years, it needed to transfer a further 9 percentage points of spend in the next 5 years to reach its target expenditure of 50% by March 2028. The BBC said it was working through its plans for how it would get back on track with its planned transfer of audio expenditure and it did not expect to have these plans in place until early 2024–25.<sup>25</sup>

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20 C&AG's Report, paras 2.5, 2.11, 2.14, 2.18, Figure 6

21 Q 18; C&AG's report, paras 2.5–2.6, 2.8

22 Qq 18, 70; C&AG's report, para 2.6

23 Qq 18, 26, 45, 69, 73

24 Qq 69–70; C&AG's report, paras 2.6, 2.8 3.5

25 Q 18, 26, 72–73; C&AG's report, para 2.9



15. The BBC was also behind on its targets for apprentice recruitment, namely to double the number of in-house apprentices by the end of 2025, supporting 1,000 in any given year, with 80% of its apprentices outside London. By March 2023, the BBC had recruited 617 in-house apprentices, against a target of 713, with 60% outside London against a target of 80%. As part of Across the UK, the BBC was trialling a new apprenticeship model in the West Midlands with its Apprentice Hub. Through the Apprentice Hub, apprentices were placed with local companies, which shared the costs with the BBC. By March 2023, the BBC had placed 27 apprentices through the Apprentice Hub, against a target of 50. We asked the BBC what barriers it had encountered with the Apprentice Hub, and how it was addressing these. The BBC explained that the hub was based on a demand-led model, and fewer companies than it had expected had been able to take on apprentices. While the BBC undertook to cover the recruitment and management costs of the scheme, and provide one day of paid employment every week, it was reliant on partner companies to provide, and fund, the remaining four days a week. It explained that economic conditions, including rising costs and headcount pressures, “were challenging for the small creative businesses that we wanted to work with” and that with hindsight that additional costs for these businesses to take on early-career apprentices “was probably too much”. The BBC told us that it was evaluating the scheme and reviewing how to improve its apprenticeship offer and whether it would continue with the current model.<sup>26</sup>

16. We asked the BBC about its diversity and inclusion targets for apprentices, and whether it shared our concerns that these were not being met. The BBC explained that it had set overall diversity and inclusion targets for the whole of the BBC. This was for 50% of staff to be female, 20% to be from ethnic minority groups and 12% to identify as disabled. It also has a target for 25% of staff to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It acknowledged that although the apprentice scheme was doing better against these targets than the BBC overall, it would like to see the scheme do better with regards to lower socio-economic diversity. In written evidence provided after the session, the BBC set out that within the apprenticeship scheme it had met or surpassed three of its diversity and inclusion targets for women (55%), people from ethnic minority backgrounds (24%) and people with a disability (16%). However, as of February 2024, 23% of apprentices were from a lower socio-economic background, against a target of 25%. We asked the BBC about the make-up, in terms of grades, of its reported 65% local hires for the jobs created through Across the UK. In written evidence provided after the session, the BBC told us that 0.9% of jobs recruited locally as part of Across the UK were for senior leaders. The BBC described the improvement in opportunities for senior national roles outside London as “a massive change”, but acknowledged that it would take time to increase the proportion of local hires.<sup>27</sup>

## Reporting progress with the programme

17. In response to our inquiry on Across the UK, we received written evidence relating to local news and the impact of the BBC's changes to its local services. Although the BBC told us that its local strategy was being delivered as a separate strategy to Across the UK, we noted that the network of 100 digital community reporters was originally announced as part of Across the UK before being moved into its local strategy. The written evidence

<sup>26</sup> Q 81; C&AG's report, paras 2.20–2.22, 3.6

<sup>27</sup> Qq 75–76, 78–80; [Letter from Tim Davie, Director General, BBC, to Dame Meg Hillier MP, Chair, Committee of Public Accounts](#), dated 1 March 2024, pages 5–6

we received suggested that stakeholders expected that the evidence they had provided on local news would be relevant to our inquiry on Across the UK.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the BBC told us relocating its Birmingham premises from The Mailbox to Digbeth was a separate project to Across the UK, yet it referred to this relocation and claimed its benefits under Across the UK in its 2022–23 Annual Report and Accounts.<sup>29</sup>

18. We asked the BBC if it understood why there was public confusion about what Across the UK did, and did not, include. We observed that a member of the public might think that when something related to the decentralisation of activity brought benefits, the BBC claimed the benefits as part of Across the UK, but when, for example, radio shows were being cancelled, the BBC appeared not to want to associate this with Across the UK as it was a bad news story. The BBC said it could understand the risk, and that these were valid concerns, but told us that it thought that it had made the right calls in these areas. The BBC acknowledged that there was a difference between how it communicated about Across the UK externally and its internal management, which it considered to be tight and specific with Across the UK managed separately from other change programmes. It explained that it considered its management and governance of programmes to be clear so that it could demonstrate the change in benefits or scope of individual programmes, but that when it communicated broadly, using tools such as its Annual Report, it aimed to set out its “overall ambitions and how we are meeting the wider public purposes”. It recognised, however, that its approach might cause confusion regarding what projects are included in Across the UK and which are not.<sup>30</sup>

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28 Qq 29, 39, 40; [BBC0001](#) Written evidence submitted by National World plc, 19 February 2024; [BBC0002](#) Written evidence submitted by News Media Association, 19 February 2024

29 Qq 38–39, 60; C&AG’s report, para 2.4

30 Qq 38–41, 60



## 3 Challenges for the future

### Evaluating benefits and impact

19. In October 2021, the BBC agreed a phased approach to evaluating Across the UK. According to this plan, the BBC would not develop its methodology for evaluating Across the UK until phase two of the programme (April 2023 to the end of March 2025) and would not start measuring impact until phase three (April 2025 to the end of March 2028). Its October 2021 baseline plan included high-level metrics to measure improvements in audience portrayals and added economic value to the creative and production sectors, but lacked detail. The BBC is now in phase two of the programme where, as it planned, it will develop its main methodologies for measuring benefits and impacts.<sup>31</sup>

20. In November 2023, the NAO found that the BBC did not yet have a fully developed evaluation plan to assess its progress with implementing Across the UK and to capture the intended benefits. The NAO reported that at this stage of the programme it would have expected the BBC to now have a benefits management strategy and plan in place. Despite this, the BBC lacked a clear timetable for evaluation and had only recently established a budget for its evaluation activity. The NAO report set out that without a robust evaluation framework, the BBC would not be able capture the impact of its work, nor change course if needed.<sup>32</sup> We therefore asked how the BBC could be confident that Across the UK worked and was delivering the outputs it intended when the BBC did not have an evaluation framework set up from the beginning. The BBC told us that it had long-term experience of delivering activity related to Across the UK, and of measuring its impact.<sup>33</sup>

21. We asked the BBC what precisely it would measure as part of its evaluation. It told us that it had developed frameworks for measuring two key criteria for the evaluation – the audiences framework and the economic framework. It explained that as part of the economic framework it had developed a baseline against which it would be measuring its local gross value added.<sup>34</sup> We asked the BBC why it was developing two separate evaluation strands to assess its main, intended impacts (audience perception and economic growth) rather than bringing them together. The BBC told us that the two plans sat under the programme director, but otherwise did not explain how they formed an overall framework for evaluating Across the UK.<sup>35</sup> In written evidence provided after the session, the BBC said its baseline year for all evaluation measures was the financial year 2019–20.<sup>36</sup> The BBC acknowledged it would need to collect better data to understand the later stages of the programme and its impacts in the regions.<sup>37</sup>

22. We asked the BBC how it was future-proofing Across the UK and how it would ensure that it was not simply replicating the problems of London elsewhere in the future in its regional hubs. These hubs refer to the locations in which the BBC set up Across the UK activities at a scale it considered sufficient to make an impact on the local creative

31 Q 47; C&AG's Report, para 3.8, figure 3

32 C&AG's report; paras 17, 3.8–3.9, 3.12

33 Q 45

34 Qq 45–48

35 Q 61; C&AG's report; para 3.9

36 [Letter dated 1 March 2024 from Tim Davie, Director General, BBC, to Dame Meg Hillier MP, Chair, Committee of Public Accounts](#), page 2

37 Q 55

economies, rather than being thinly spread across many areas. It focused activities on areas where it already had some presence, while increasing commissioning targets in TV and audio outside London to increase production across the UK in many locations. The BBC told us that it was considering the future-proofing of Across the UK. It said its hub approach would be a step forward in getting people into the industry by creating a thriving sector in the north-east and career opportunities at senior levels within the BBC in Glasgow, Cardiff, Birmingham or Salford.<sup>38</sup> We questioned how thoroughly the BBC would measure the economic benefits, including the jobs it expected the programme to create, and ensure that these were truly local. The BBC said that it was going to measure the number of jobs created and it would have to take a detailed look at the local effects within each cluster. The BBC referenced a recent study about the impact of Doctor Who on the regional economy in South Wales, following its re-launch in 2005 in Cardiff (which was not part of Across the UK).<sup>39</sup> However, the BBC would not commit to undertaking comparable evaluations for all its regional clusters to provide a standardised measure of success. However, it did expect to take a more detailed look at the impact of its activities in the West Midlands on jobs.<sup>40</sup>

## Working with stakeholders

23. We asked the BBC if it was always a driver or sometimes the follower in a local creative economy. Giving the example of its move to Salford, the BBC described itself as an “effective first domino”, saying that the local supply chain grew by 70% when it invested in Salford. Nevertheless, it explained the importance of attracting other creative partners to the areas that it was working in. The BBC told us it needed to work with a range of partners and contributors including other broadcasters, regional Mayors, the wider production sector and freelancers, which the BBC referred to as being critical to the delivery of what it does. The BBC told us that an entire region often benefitted from having the momentum that a thriving creative sector brought. This momentum made the BBC itself much more effective as it built the critical mass needed in an area through other productions coming in, the creative energy and private investment.<sup>41</sup>

24. We asked the BBC about the potential impact on Across the UK of issues within local government finance, given that several local authorities were reportedly close to declaring themselves bankrupt, or had already in effect done so, and may have to withdraw some local services. In light of current financial pressures on various local councils, we asked the BBC what contingency plans it had in place if a significant partner had to pull out owing to lack of funding. The BBC could not explain to us any contingency plans it had in place. Instead, it told us that while it did not take the state of public finances lightly, unlike big infrastructure projects Across the UK only required small levels of funding from individual local partners. It gave us the example of its North East partnership, where 12 local authorities and 3 combined authorities were expected to contribute a combined total of £10 to £15 million, and the BBC would contribute £25 million. Furthermore, it asserted that even without investment from local partners it could still deliver Across the UK. The BBC told us that it mainly needed local authorities in order to help attract private investment and creative leaders, rather than to invest their own cash.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, given

38 Qq 68, 97; C&AG's Report para 1.8

39 Qq 25, 45, 49, 50, 51–54

40 Q 93

41 Qq 13, 21–23, 26, 81, 83, 91–92

42 Qq 87–90

that the West Midlands was one of the BBC's key regions of activity, we asked the BBC about the impact of major changes to infrastructure projects, in particular the cancellation of the High Speed 2 (HS2) train line between Birmingham and Manchester. The BBC told us that in many respects its activities in Birmingham were unaffected by the withdrawal of the northern leg of HS2 and it would continue to deliver the benefits of Across the UK in the West Midlands.<sup>43</sup>

25. We asked the BBC what specific data its management had to tell it what its staff thought about Across the UK. It told us it did not have any specific data but said it had a comprehensive staff survey where it looked at how people felt in each location and provided "world-class data on staff engagement". We asked why it did not collect specific data given the clear importance the BBC attached to Across the UK, the fact it was designed to change the culture of the BBC and its disruptive nature for some of its London-based staff. The BBC told us it had an appropriate system in place which it considered proportionate, and that it focused on "good leadership" rather than surveys.<sup>44</sup> The BBC was also unable to tell us at what point it engaged with its staff and musicians regarding the proposed relocation of the Concert Orchestra and could not explain its decision-making process. In written evidence provided after the session, the BBC confirmed it engaged with the Concert Orchestra musicians, management and production in October 2021, some six months after the move was announced in March 2021.<sup>45</sup>

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43 Qq 94–96

44 Qq 84–85

45 Qq 33–37; [Letter dated 1 March 2024 from Tim Davie, Director General, BBC, to Dame Meg Hillier, Chair, Committee of Public Accounts, dated 1 March 2024, page 3](#)

# Formal minutes

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**Monday 25 March 2024**

## **Members present**

Dame Meg Hillier, in the Chair

Olivia Blake

Mr Mark Francois

Peter Grant

Anne Marie Morris

Sarah Olney

Sarah Owen

Matt Warman

## **The BBC's implementation of Across the UK**

Draft Report (*The BBC's implementation of Across the UK*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 25 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Twenty-sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

## **Adjournment**

Adjourned till Monday 15 April at 3.00 p.m.

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Monday 19 February 2024

**Tim Davie CBE**, Director-General, BBC; **Leigh Tavaziva**, Chief Operating Officer, BBC; **Thomas Wrathmell**, Programme Director, BBC

[Q1-97](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

BBC numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 National World plc ([BBC0001](#))
- 2 News Media Association ([BBC0002](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Session 2023–24

Number	Title	Reference
1st	The New Hospital Programme	HC 77
2nd	The condition of school buildings	HC 78
3rd	Revising health assessments for disability benefits	HC 79
4th	The Department for Work & Pensions Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23	HC 290
5th	Government's programme of waste reforms	HC 333
6th	Competition in public procurement	HC 385
7th	Resilience to flooding	HC 71
8th	Improving Defence Inventory Management	HC 66
9th	Whole of Government Accounts 2020–21	HC 65
10th	HS2 and Euston	HC 67
11th	Reducing the harm from illegal drugs	HC 72
12th	Cross-government working	HC 75
13th	Preparedness for online safety regulation	HC 73
14th	Homes for Ukraine	HC 69
15th	Managing government borrowing	HC 74
16th	HMRC performance in 2022–23	HC 76
17th	Cabinet Office functional savings	HC 423
18th	Excess Votes 2022–23	HC 589
19th	MoD Equipment Plan 2023–2033	HC 451
20th	Monitoring and responding to companies in distress	HC 425
21st	Levelling up funding to local government	HC 424
22nd	Reforming adult social care in England	HC 427
23rd	Civil service workforce: Recruitment, pay and performance management	HC 452
24th	NHS Supply Chain and efficiencies in procurement	HC 453
25th	Scrutiny of sound financial practice across Government	HC 673
1st Special Report	Eighth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 628

**Session 2022–23**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
1st	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Annual Report and Accounts 2020–21	HC 59
2nd	Lessons from implementing IR35 reforms	HC 60
3rd	The future of the Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors	HC 118
4th	Use of evaluation and modelling in government	HC 254
5th	Local economic growth	HC 252
6th	Department of Health and Social Care 2020–21 Annual Report and Accounts	HC 253
7th	Armoured Vehicles: the Ajax programme	HC 259
8th	Financial sustainability of the higher education sector in England	HC 257
9th	Child Maintenance	HC 255
10th	Restoration and Renewal of Parliament	HC 49
11th	The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme in England	HC 258
12th	Management of PPE contracts	HC 260
13th	Secure training centres and secure schools	HC 30
14th	Investigation into the British Steel Pension Scheme	HC 251
15th	The Police Uplift Programme	HC 261
16th	Managing cross-border travel during the COVID-19 pandemic	HC 29
17th	Government's contracts with Radox Laboratories Ltd	HC 28
18th	Government actions to combat waste crime	HC 33
19th	Regulating after EU Exit	HC 32
20th	Whole of Government Accounts 2019–20	HC 31
21st	Transforming electronic monitoring services	HC 34
22nd	Tackling local air quality breaches	HC 37
23rd	Measuring and reporting public sector greenhouse gas emissions	HC 39
24th	Redevelopment of Defra's animal health infrastructure	HC 42
25th	Regulation of energy suppliers	HC 41
26th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2021–22 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 44
27th	Evaluating innovation projects in children's social care	HC 38
28th	Improving the Accounting Officer Assessment process	HC 43
29th	The Affordable Homes Programme since 2015	HC 684
30th	Developing workforce skills for a strong economy	HC 685
31st	Managing central government property	HC 48
32nd	Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity	HC 46

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
33rd	HMRC performance in 2021–22	HC 686
34th	The Creation of the UK Infrastructure Bank	HC 45
35th	Introducing Integrated Care Systems	HC 47
36th	The Defence digital strategy	HC 727
37th	Support for vulnerable adolescents	HC 730
38th	Managing NHS backlogs and waiting times in England	HC 729
39th	Excess Votes 2021–22	HC 1132
40th	COVID employment support schemes	HC 810
41st	Driving licence backlogs at the DVLA	HC 735
42nd	The Restart Scheme for long-term unemployed people	HC 733
43rd	Progress combatting fraud	HC 40
44th	The Digital Services Tax	HC 732
45th	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Annual Report and Accounts 2021–22	HC 1254
46th	BBC Digital	HC 736
47th	Investigation into the UK Passport Office	HC 738
48th	MoD Equipment Plan 2022–2032	HC 731
49th	Managing tax compliance following the pandemic	HC 739
50th	Government Shared Services	HC 734
51st	Tackling Defra's ageing digital services	HC 737
52nd	Restoration & Renewal of the Palace of Westminster – 2023 Recall	HC 1021
53rd	The performance of UK Security Vetting	HC 994
54th	Alcohol treatment services	HC 1001
55th	Education recovery in schools in England	HC 998
56th	Supporting investment into the UK	HC 996
57th	AEA Technology Pension Case	HC 1005
58th	Energy bills support	HC 1074
59th	Decarbonising the power sector	HC 1003
60th	Timeliness of local auditor reporting	HC 995
61st	Progress on the courts and tribunals reform programme	HC 1002
62nd	Department of Health and Social Care 2021–22 Annual Report and Accounts	HC 997
63rd	HS2 Euston	HC 1004
64th	The Emergency Services Network	HC 1006
65th	Progress in improving NHS mental health services	HC 1000
66th	PPE Medpro: awarding of contracts during the pandemic	HC 1590



<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
67th	Child Trust Funds	HC 1231
68th	Local authority administered COVID support schemes in England	HC 1234
69th	Tackling fraud and corruption against government	HC 1230
70th	Digital transformation in government: addressing the barriers to efficiency	HC 1229
71st	Resetting government programmes	HC 1231
72nd	Update on the rollout of smart meters	HC 1332
73rd	Access to urgent and emergency care	HC 1336
74th	Bulb Energy	HC 1232
75th	Active travel in England	HC 1335
76th	The Asylum Transformation Programme	HC 1334
77th	Supported housing	HC 1330
78th	Resettlement support for prison leavers	HC 1329
79th	Support for innovation to deliver net zero	HC 1331
80th	Progress with Making Tax Digital	HC 1333
1st Special Report	Sixth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 50
2nd Special Report	Seventh Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 1055

### Session 2021–22

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
1st	Low emission cars	HC 186
2nd	BBC strategic financial management	HC 187
3rd	COVID-19: Support for children's education	HC 240
4th	COVID-19: Local government finance	HC 239
5th	COVID-19: Government Support for Charities	HC 250
6th	Public Sector Pensions	HC 289
7th	Adult Social Care Markets	HC 252
8th	COVID 19: Culture Recovery Fund	HC 340
9th	Fraud and Error	HC 253
10th	Overview of the English rail system	HC 170
11th	Local auditor reporting on local government in England	HC 171
12th	COVID 19: Cost Tracker Update	HC 173
13th	Initial lessons from the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic	HC 175

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
14th	Windrush Compensation Scheme	HC 174
15th	DWP Employment support	HC 177
16th	Principles of effective regulation	HC 176
17th	High Speed 2: Progress at Summer 2021	HC 329
18th	Government's delivery through arm's-length bodies	HC 181
19th	Protecting consumers from unsafe products	HC 180
20th	Optimising the defence estate	HC 179
21st	School Funding	HC 183
22nd	Improving the performance of major defence equipment contracts	HC 185
23rd	Test and Trace update	HC 182
24th	Crossrail: A progress update	HC 184
25th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2020–21 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 633
26th	Lessons from Greensill Capital: accreditation to business support schemes	HC 169
27th	Green Homes Grant Voucher Scheme	HC 635
28th	Efficiency in government	HC 636
29th	The National Law Enforcement Data Programme	HC 638
30th	Challenges in implementing digital change	HC 637
31st	Environmental Land Management Scheme	HC 639
32nd	Delivering gigabitcapable broadband	HC 743
33rd	Underpayments of the State Pension	HC 654
34th	Local Government Finance System: Overview and Challenges	HC 646
35th	The pharmacy early payment and salary advance schemes in the NHS	HC 745
36th	EU Exit: UK Border post transition	HC 746
37th	HMRC Performance in 2020–21	HC 641
38th	COVID-19 cost tracker update	HC 640
39th	DWP Employment Support: Kickstart Scheme	HC 655
40th	Excess votes 2020–21: Serious Fraud Office	HC 1099
41st	Achieving Net Zero: Follow up	HC 642
42nd	Financial sustainability of schools in England	HC 650
43rd	Reducing the backlog in criminal courts	HC 643
44th	NHS backlogs and waiting times in England	HC 747
45th	Progress with trade negotiations	HC 993
46th	Government preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons for government on risk	HC 952

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
47th	Academies Sector Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20	HC 994
48th	HMRC's management of tax debt	HC 953
49th	Regulation of private renting	HC 996
50th	Bounce Back Loans Scheme: Follow-up	HC 951
51st	Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system	HC 997
52nd	Ministry of Defence Equipment Plan 2021–31	HC 1164
1st Special Report	Fifth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 222

### Session 2019–21

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
1st	Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities	HC 85
2nd	Defence Nuclear Infrastructure	HC 86
3rd	High Speed 2: Spring 2020 Update	HC 84
4th	EU Exit: Get ready for Brexit Campaign	HC 131
5th	University technical colleges	HC 87
6th	Excess votes 2018–19	HC 243
7th	Gambling regulation: problem gambling and protecting vulnerable people	HC 134
8th	NHS capital expenditure and financial management	HC 344
9th	Water supply and demand management	HC 378
10th	Defence capability and the Equipment Plan	HC 247
11th	Local authority investment in commercial property	HC 312
12th	Management of tax reliefs	HC 379
13th	Whole of Government Response to COVID-19	HC 404
14th	Readying the NHS and social care for the COVID-19 peak	HC 405
15th	Improving the prison estate	HC 244
16th	Progress in remediating dangerous cladding	HC 406
17th	Immigration enforcement	HC 407
18th	NHS nursing workforce	HC 408
19th	Restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster	HC 549
20th	Tackling the tax gap	HC 650
21st	Government support for UK exporters	HC 679
22nd	Digital transformation in the NHS	HC 680
23rd	Delivering carrier strike	HC 684

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
24th	Selecting towns for the Towns Fund	HC 651
25th	Asylum accommodation and support transformation programme	HC 683
26th	Department of Work and Pensions Accounts 2019–20	HC 681
27th	Covid-19: Supply of ventilators	HC 685
28th	The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's management of the Magnox contract	HC 653
29th	Whitehall preparations for EU Exit	HC 682
30th	The production and distribution of cash	HC 654
31st	Starter Homes	HC 88
32nd	Specialist Skills in the civil service	HC 686
33rd	Covid-19: Bounce Back Loan Scheme	HC 687
34th	Covid-19: Support for jobs	HC 920
35th	Improving Broadband	HC 688
36th	HMRC performance 2019–20	HC 690
37th	Whole of Government Accounts 2018–19	HC 655
38th	Managing colleges' financial sustainability	HC 692
39th	Lessons from major projects and programmes	HC 694
40th	Achieving government's long-term environmental goals	HC 927
41st	COVID 19: the free school meals voucher scheme	HC 689
42nd	COVID-19: Government procurement and supply of Personal Protective Equipment	HC 928
43rd	COVID-19: Planning for a vaccine Part 1	HC 930
44th	Excess Votes 2019–20	HC 1205
45th	Managing flood risk	HC 931
46th	Achieving Net Zero	HC 935
47th	COVID-19: Test, track and trace (part 1)	HC 932
48th	Digital Services at the Border	HC 936
49th	COVID-19: housing people sleeping rough	HC 934
50th	Defence Equipment Plan 2020–2030	HC 693
51st	Managing the expiry of PFI contracts	HC 1114
52nd	Key challenges facing the Ministry of Justice	HC 1190
53rd	Covid 19: supporting the vulnerable during lockdown	HC 938
54th	Improving single living accommodation for service personnel	HC 940
55th	Environmental tax measures	HC 937
56th	Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund	HC 941