



From the Director-General

1 July 2021

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, before your Committee on 15 June. There were some questions on which we promised to come back to you and you'll find those responses attached as an appendix to this letter.

I'd also like to reiterate that with relation to Lord Dyson's report, and the events of 1995 and 1996, the BBC has accepted the failings of the past and we are all committed to learning from this event.

I believe that the country can be very proud of the BBC, and I recognise that we need to be constantly thinking about how we safeguard the trust that audiences have in us. We need to earn it every day, so that every licence fee payer feels that the BBC is for them. This is at the heart of the 'value for all' strategy that we are pursuing.

Once again, the Chairman and I are grateful for the opportunity to speak to the Committee and to answer your questions.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tim Davie', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Tim Davie
Director-General

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Appendix

Following on from the DCMS Select Committee hearing on 15 June 2021, please find below the additional information requested.

Tiny Happy People

Over the past year, the BBC Education team has educated audiences across the UK through Bitesize and Lockdown Learning, and – through *Tiny Happy People* – has given parents the confidence to talk to their babies, and in so doing improve their educational and life chances.

We are working hard to more closely align Bitesize and *Tiny Happy People* as a single educational service for 0-16 year old learners and their parents, with the foundational work of *Tiny Happy People* transitioning parents and youngsters over to Bitesize through new collections which the teams are developing in concert with one another.

Specifically, the Committee sought reassurance that budgets had remained steady – in fact, BBC Education’s overall annual budget has been increased by £1.4m in recognition of the outstanding public value that their work delivers for licence fee payers, both present and future.

Despite the disruption of the last year, *Tiny Happy People* has had an excellent start. Its messages about the value of talking to your baby, and tips teaching parents ‘how and why’ are reaching over 100,000 people every day via special social channels, with a strong audience skew towards 18-34 year old parents and real ‘cut through’ in areas of the country where the BBC traditionally fares less well, such as Coventry, Doncaster and Bradford.

The *Tiny Happy People*’s hard work in establishing professional relationships such as the Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists, Institute of Health Visitors and Public Health England is also paying dividends – our materials form part of specialist training for all three bodies, and specialist childcare professionals are recommending our materials to new parents looking for guidance and ideas.

We’re also rolling out community activation in a number of hub areas. We’ve worked with Home Start Manchester and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority on a successful partnership for two years, and are augmenting this with further activation in Glasgow (alongside Home Start Glasgow, Scottish Government and Rangers FC), in Cornwall with Cornwall County Council and BBC Radio Cornwall, and in Wales and Northern Ireland with the devolved administrations.

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The BBC continues to work closely with the Royal Foundation on *Tiny Happy People*, with our resources highlighted as a key collaboration in the Duchess of Cambridge's recently launched Centre for Early Childhood.

We're also working with our partners at KPMG and the National Literacy Trust to develop a network of business champions who will advocate for early years language development amongst their workforces, and in local communities, using *Tiny Happy People* as a 'toolkit'. We're launching this initiative at a special event on 21 July, alongside research by Pro Bono Economics which shows the scale of the impact of initiatives like *Tiny Happy People* on life chances and 'levelling up'. The Committee would be most welcome to join this event.

Bitesize

Bitesize will remain the core of the Corporation's educational offer, just as it formed the foundation of our Lockdown Learning programme. Approximately 4 million (3.8m per week in Lockdown One, 4.2m in Lockdown Two) used the service every week across the two school closures, with a peak of 5.8m; this reached over 70% of primary aged children and 75% of secondary aged learners. The days of its being pigeonholed as a GCSE revision service are in the past.

We're confident that the service can, and should, play a key role in supporting the 'levelling up' agenda – our ambition is to retain the audiences who found us in lockdown, and to foster more habitual usage – for Bitesize to become the UK's 'go to' free education resource.

We've invested more in our Education team's three-year vision to deliver on this. This includes:

- Increasing the level of content and support on Bitesize for our youngest learners in Early Years and Reception, and better engaging their parents in the learning experience;
- Reinventing the offer for our 11-14 audience, with new sequenced content and better site navigation;
- Building on the success of Lockdown Learning for Primary children by creating easier-to-access and better-structured Primary content;
- Investing in improved functionality – notably around more education gaming, and an increase of personalisation and adaptive learning experiences, but
- stopping short of integrated 'virtual learning environments' so as to maintain clear water between the BBC and commercial providers;

- A continued commitment to offering educational programmes on CBBC and iPlayer through the Bitesize Learning Zone, including brand new episodes of Bitesize Daily which are currently in production.

We take our responsibility to support and incubate the commercial market seriously, and in no sector more so than education. We have excellent working relationships with the British Education Suppliers Association and Publishers Association; their feedback is invaluable in helping us to uphold our responsibilities to their members, and their support in corralling inputs and partnerships was instrumental in the success of Bitesize Daily and Lockdown Learning. Such was the positive feedback from our partnerships with commercial and third-sector education providers in the last 18 months, that we're working to mainstream these relationships by developing a new roster of partners to provide resources to support those on Bitesize and Teach.

Default subtitles on children's iPlayer content

We give all parents the choice to activate subtitles. They are easily switched on and remain on until deselected again. This is a core part of our offering and valued by many users. We have also recently carried out some engagement with BBC iPlayer users about subtitles (3.5m subscribers) to ensure audiences are aware of the services we provide and easily able to access the provisions they value.

We are familiar with the TOTS campaign proposals to have subtitles on by default for all children's content, unfortunately, however, this would be a highly complex and costly undertaking for the BBC iPlayer team to execute across all devices and accounts.

Even generating estimated costs of how try to do this would mean diverting staff and resources away from current BBC iPlayer priorities and needed enhancements. It would require a fundamental change to our current architecture of subtitling on iPlayer which is based on device not on individuals or to specific type of content. Changing our approach of subtitling is not possible for just children and could affect all users.

Unlike other broadcaster and platforms, we provide education content in depth and as an ongoing commitment, including via Bitesize and Tiny Happy People as already mentioned. Taking all these things into account – the resources which would be involved, the quality of our existing subtitles provision and the richness of our overall education offer – our conclusion is that we are not going to progress with the campaign's suggested proposals. We have already been in communication with them about these conclusions, and will endeavour to answer any further questions they may have.

Local News teams in Millbank

The BBC is committed to providing regional political coverage. Across England, there are 42 political reporters assigned to local radio stations and 12 political editors for the English regions.

All 11 regional versions of our weekly political programme continue, with two new digital pilots to test new ideas such as Yorkshirecast which aims to make what happens in Westminster relevant to people in the region.

This commitment extends to our teams in BBC Millbank. New proposals will ensure:

- For local radio services we provide priority services with morning and drive time live 2-ways and 'audio explainers' when the story demands;
- We will continue to provide clips of MPs speaking in key debates which affect their constituents;
- For regional TV we will continue to provide support for editors to highlight their most important stories, as well as resources and support for the political editors in the 1830 programmes;
- Our new network commissioning structure will work with the regional team to maximise use of material;
- We will improve our digital provision by ensuring Millbank regions work closely with online/social to reach underserved audiences.

The BBC is making significant savings across News and this reorganisation will allow us to modernise our coverage in a digital age, while keeping a strong commitment to news across England.

As part of this we do have to make tough choices and our Millbank regional team will be reduced from 10 to 6. However, to reassure the Committee, this will be managed by ending duplication that exists between the national and regional teams.

We will also focus on priority stories at Millbank and assist the English regions and local radio stations to manage their own output by alerting them to news in their own areas. There will not be a reduction in regional political output and we remain committed to reflecting all audiences through our political coverage.

Work of Martin Bashir as Religion and Ethics Correspondent and Editor

As BBC religion editor, Martin Bashir reported for BBC Radio, the BBC World Service, and BBC online, as well as TV channels and the main news bulletins. We do not publish records of journalists' appearances on air but to give the Committee an indication of his work in just the months before he was signed off sick, it included: an exclusive interview with Mina Smallman (cross-platform coverage); "Hajj under lockdown" (cross-platform coverage); "Financial impact of lockdown on faith" (cross-platform coverage); "First weddings after lockdown" (cross-platform coverage); regular contributions to US Election coverage, including a piece of analysis of Trump's evangelical support when he did the Bible photo-op outside St John's Episcopal Church (World Service and online); interview with the Archbishop of Canterbury to mark Mental Health Awareness Week (Six and Ten O' Clock News); interviews with a senior imam, the Anglican Bishop of London and the Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth giving warnings about social distancing in places of worship (Six and Ten O' Clock News and online). Prior to this his work included: numerous interviews with faith leaders; reporting on the Pope's visits; commentating on religious services; covering stories for *Heart and Soul* and reporting on a range of religious issues (including anti-Semitism and inter-faith dialogue post terror attacks) online.