

## **BBC—supplementary written evidence (FON0069)**

### **House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee inquiry: The future of news: impartiality, trust and technology**

#### **Follow up to BBC Session**

Following the BBC's appearance at the Committee on 5 March 2024 please find the follow-up information as requested.

#### **1. Tik Tok – Brand appropriation**

In 2023, the BBC conducted a piece of qualitative research seeking to understand how to maximise BBC News' value to audiences on TikTok. This included getting a deeper understanding of current levels of attribution of the BBC and BBC News brand on our content published on that platform.

During the research, the research agency – MTM - sought cultural insight through expert interviews, did TikTok video diaries with respondents, depth interviews and a survey, identifying levels of likeability and drivers of attribution across service streams, and perceptual/ behavioural impact. In this research we found that:

- 22% of people exposed to BBC News content were able to correctly identify it as "BBC News", with an additional 22% attributing content back to the BBC Masterbrand.
- attribution was most influenced by clear branding cues. Dialling these up helps audiences to navigate to reliable and verified news stories.

These results were supported by the results of experimentation with branding done by the BBC News social media team. The team ran a number of experiments that tested watch time and engagement with news stories – some of which had very clear BBC News branding and some without. The tests consistently found that the presence of the BBC News brand had a net positive effect on watch time and engagement.

#### **2. How different audience groups trust BBC News**

**Source:** Kantar Media, 13,496 UK adults using BBC News in the year, 2022-2023

**Question:** *How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (1 = strongly disagree; 10 = strongly agree) BBC News is trustworthy*

This data is from a very large-scale, nationally representative continuous tracking survey, run by independent research company, Kantar Media. It shows 60% of consumers give a positive score when rating the extent to which they consider BBC News as trustworthy, while 21% give a low score. Across all audience groups – regardless of age, gender, socio-economic group or geography – the majority give a positive score. That said, there are differences in ratings between audience

groups that we wish to lessen and perceptions we are seeking to improve. For example, positive scores are higher in London, among ABC1 groups and among 35+; and are lower among C2DE groups, 16-34s and in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Our impartiality action plan, creative diversity commitments and Across the UK plans are all part of our focus on this.

	All	16-34	35-54	55+
<b>% of respondents giving score of 6-10 out of 10 (positive score)</b>	60%	57%	61%	61%
<b>% of respondents giving score of 1-4 out of 10 (low score)</b>	21%	19%	19%	23%

	ABC1	C2DE
<b>% of respondents giving score of 6-10 out of 10 (positive score)</b>	63%	54%
<b>% of respondents giving score of 1-4 out of 10 (low score)</b>	20%	22%

	Male	Female
<b>% of respondents giving score of 6-10 out of 10 (positive score)</b>	60%	61%
<b>% of respondents giving score of 1-4 out of 10 (low score)</b>	23%	18%

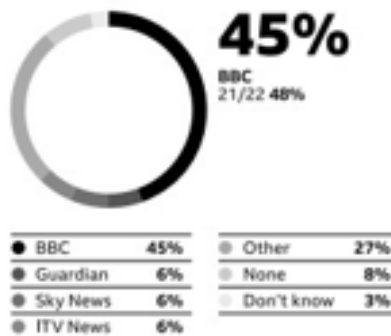
	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	North	Midlands	South (exc. London)	London
<b>% of respondents giving score of 6-10 out of 10 (positive score)</b>	61%	57%	59%	56%	59%	58%	60%	67%
<b>% of respondents giving score of 1-4 out of 10 (low score)</b>	20%	24%	22%	23%	22%	21%	22%	16%

From the BBC Annual Report and Accounts 22/23:

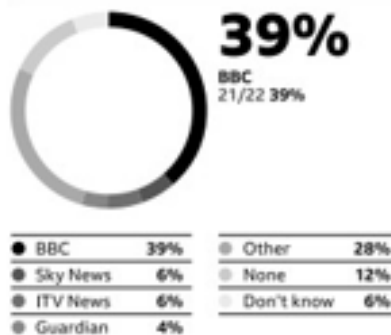
This data from a nationally representative survey from Ipsos UK shows that BBC News is named by far the most often and well ahead of the next nearest provider when news consumers are asked to name the one source they are most likely to turn to for each of news they trust the most; for impartial news coverage; and for accurate news coverage.

**Of all the news sources (TV, radio, newspaper, magazine, website, app or social media) which one source are you most likely to turn to...**

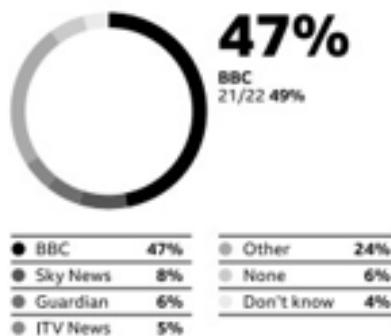
**...for news you trust the most**



**...if you want impartial news coverage**



**...if you want accurate news coverage**

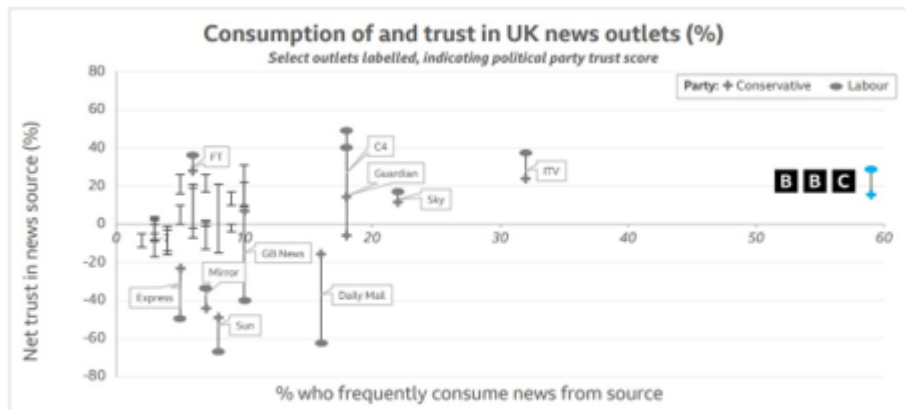


**What is the role of BBC News, its fundamental purpose, and how it is distinctive and different from commercial PSBs or, other commercial players such as Sky**

[from A BBC for the Future - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/documents/a-bbc-for-the-future.pdf>]

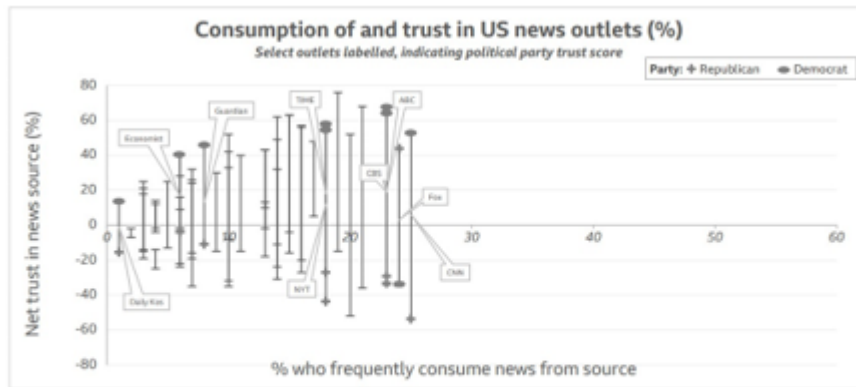
The UK has a single source of news consumed and trusted by the majority. That is the BBC.

'Consumed' and 'trusted' both matter. To have a positive impact on our democratic debate, the BBC must be perceived as trusted and accurate, and it must be consumed. Trust without usage means irrelevance. The BBC is unique in the UK. In the independent data shown below, there is very little difference between net scores for trust in the BBC from people on the left and right of politics. BBC News is consumed frequently by the majority of the public, unlike any other news source.



Source: FT analysis (26 May 2023) from YouGov data. (Net trust = the proportion of people who regard a media organisation as trustworthy minus the proportion of people who regard it as untrustworthy.)

This is a very different picture from the US, where levels of polarisation between each side about each news provider are sharper. No news source is used frequently by more than around a quarter of the public. The effects of this news landscape are visible in the political debate, high levels of polarisation and impacts on citizens in the US.



Source: FT analysis (26 May 2023) from YouGov data. Republican and Democrat based on vote in 2020 Presidential election. (Net trust = the proportion of people who regard a media organisation as trustworthy minus the proportion of people who regard it as untrustworthy.)

But this is not just a US story. Across Europe and beyond, similar forces of media polarisation are undermining shared values and key democratic principles like freedom of expression, the legitimacy of elections, independent judiciaries, and free media. The BBC can help counter these forces. Through the World Service, it is the world’s most trusted international news provider.

Our world is becoming more chaotic and divided. There is a fundamental need for the public to be able to access information they can trust, even if for some the idea of universal truth is eroding. The BBC believes that truth is worth fighting for, even if it can be elusive, and a healthy democracy is worth defending and upholding.

#### *What the BBC stands for*

- We bring audiences independent, impartial and trusted news, free from commercial or political influence, in the UK and around the world, in new ways and on new platforms.
- We witness events – locally, nationally and globally – in news and beyond. We go to great lengths and dangerous places, because our job is to be there when history happens and to pursue relentlessly and fearlessly the stories that matter.
- We nurture civilised spaces where people come together across boundaries. We give voice to all parts of our society and our local communities.
- We are here to reflect, not judge. We take time to cut through the noise, and separate fact from fake. We bring clarity to the chaos so people can make their own judgements.
- We embrace transparency to show how we know what we know. We pull back the curtain on the methods we use to verify our journalism and the choices we make. If people know how it is made, they can trust what it says.

#### **BBC comments on James Frayne/Public First written evidence**

A central argument of the Public First data report appears to be: ***‘There appears to have***

***been a very significant decline in trust in the broadcasters specifically amongst the working-class, provincial Leave voters... They are turning away from the PSBs in large numbers, in apparent irritation about the way they operate. They are mainly irritated with the BBC'.***

While acknowledging that trust in BBC News is positive but lower among C2DE groups (see BBC survey data on page 2 of this document), we would also point out the data from Public First's own survey shows that:

- There is no difference between Leave supporters and the UK average in terms of the proportions saying they are consuming the PSBs less now for news
- The BBC continues to be the news broadcaster that these groups use most by a margin
- BBC News is trusted by the majority of Leave supporters and C2 and DE groups.

In addition, several of the questions used to make points about the PSBs or the BBC are only asked about these providers in the Public First poll, meaning there is no wider context or comparison with other news providers.

Please see examples below – in these, we have referred to **pages** from the Public First written evidence (James Frayne, founding partner, Public First—written evidence (FON0060)) and **tables** from the poll used published on their website: <https://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Public-First-Poll-on-Media-Habits.pdf>

**p.5:** *'From our recent polling, one very clear trend, although perhaps less predictably, is that older, provincial, working-class leave voters are actively turning off the PSBs – and the BBC in particular.'*

**And**

**p.8:** *'There appears to have been a very significant decline in trust in the broadcasters specifically amongst the working-class, provincial Leave voters we describe above. They are turning away from the PSBs in large numbers, in apparent irritation about the way they operate. They are mainly irritated with the BBC.'*

***In terms of a decline in usage in the PSBs and the BBC:***

- While there is no cut in the Public First's published data tables for 'older, provincial working class Leave voters', the published data does show that the BBC continues to be the news broadcaster that Leave voters, C2 and DE audiences and older people use most.

For example, as **Table 2** shows, the BBC is by far the biggest news broadcaster among Leave voters, reaching 65% in a typical week vs. a UK average of 68%. The BBC is also the largest news broadcaster in a typical week for older (77%), C2 (66%) and DE groups (60%).<sup>1</sup>

The claimed weekly usage figures from the poll among Leave voters for TalkTV are 8% and GB News are 16%, and 7% and 11% respectively among adults overall (as an aside, we agree with the report that this claimed usage of Talk TV and GB News is overstated as BARB data puts the average weekly reach of TalkTV at 1.7% and GB News at 3.0% of adults in 2023).

The poll also shows (**Table 11**) that more than half (55%) of Leave voters use read, listen or watch BBC News daily – in line with the UK average (54%). 53% of C2 groups use BBC News daily and 46% among DE groups.

- There is no difference between Leave supporters and the UK average in terms of the proportions saying they are consuming the PSBs less now for news.

The poll (**Table 13**) shows 70% of Leave voters say they watch PSBs for news as much or more today than they used to – in line with the UK average (71%). 29% of Leave voters say they consume less, also in line with the average (28%).<sup>2</sup>

Among C2 and DE groups, 70% of C2 and 66% of DE groups say they watch PSBs for news as much or more today than they used to, with 28% of C2 and 31% of DE groups saying they consume less.

This question on whether respondents are using PSBs for news more, less or the same amount as in the past is only asked of the PSBs so there is no wider context or comparison with change in use of other news media in order to gauge whether or not the point made is general or specific.

#### *In terms of a decline in trust:*

- Among the Leave voters saying they consume news from PSBs less (that is 29% of Leave voters overall/10% of the total sample), 44% of this group said it was because “you can’t trust them as much as you used to be able to” (**Table 15**). It is true that this is higher than the UK average figure (34% of the 28% of UK adults who said they were using PSBs less).
- However, when asked whether they trust or do not trust the news that the BBC broadcasts or publishes, 56% of Leave voters say they strongly or somewhat trust it (**Table 16**). While this is lower than the UK average (61% in this poll), still a majority of Leave voters say they trust BBC News and more than double the proportion who say they distrust it somewhat/strongly (25% vs. 19% UK average). Similarly, the majority of C2 and DE groups trust BBC News (55% and 54% respectively vs. 24% and 20% who distrust it).
- There is also no strong view among Leave supporters regarding where, if anywhere, BBC News is politically skewed (25% felt it generally supports the

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<sup>1</sup> Note – in this question BBC News usage is framed around “TV broadcasters” when the BBC offers news across all its platforms.

<sup>2</sup> Note – this question asks about BBC One, BBC Two, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 so is missing BBC Three, the BBC News Channel and BBC Parliament, and S4C, which are all also PSB channels.

Labour Party; 18% generally supports the Conservative Party; 28% felt it does not generally support either; 29% don't know) (**Table 57**). [The UK average figures were: 17% Labour Party; 20% Conservative Party; 32% neither; 30% don't know.]

- The majority of Leave supporters (57%) regard BBC News as very good/good quality compared with 19% who feel it is bad/very bad (vs. the UK average 63% / 14%). Among C2 and DE groups, 57% and 56% rated it very good/good quality respectively and c.16% bad/very bad (**Table 17**).

One of the report's other main assertions is (**page 2**), *'These caveats aside, the bottom line is: the poll confirms the continued fracture of the British media market, as new media outlets emerge and, more importantly, as social media continues to grow.'* As 'A BBC for the Future' sets out, we know the challenges in today's media market, especially in news. The UK does, though, continue to have a news provider used regularly by the majority of people. As Public First's poll shows, the BBC remains the UK's biggest news provider (as stated on page 4 of their report) – used by 68% of UK adults weekly.<sup>3</sup> While figures are lower among 16-24s (as the Public First report states), BBC News is still used in a typical week by a clear majority – 59% – of this age group (**Table 2**).

With this highest reach – rightly – comes the highest scrutiny from the highest proportion of people who can take a view on BBC News and the highest proportion who want to see their worldview reflected in coverage. The BBC's impartiality action plan, creative diversity commitments and Across the UK plans are all part of our focus on reducing variation in how well we represent different kinds of people and worldviews.

### **3. A BBC For the Future**

As discussed at the session, Tim Davie has now outlined the future BBC strategy, highlighting the BBC's role in ensuring the UK retains a healthy democracy, a strong creative economy and a more cohesive society.

Tim set out the three essential roles the BBC will prioritise to ensure it offers value for audiences:

- Pursuing truth with no agenda – by reporting fearlessly and fairly
- Backing the best British storytelling – by investing in homegrown talent and creativity
- Bringing people together – by connecting everyone to unmissable content

This will mean targeting limited resources and creating a leaner, focused public service BBC. This will include rebuilding the BBC's digital products to offer a modern fully-integrated and more personalised and accessible service, and boosting commercial income with new, major partnerships, investment and new capital.

He confirmed the BBC will look at funding options for the future, examining the merits of evolving the licence fee post-2028 to secure universal funding and assessing

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<sup>3</sup> Note: this question is framed around TV broadcasters. Ofcom and BBC figures place BBC News usage at above 70% of UK adults including measurement across all BBC platforms.



whether funding should be more progressive. Further detail on this will be set out in due course.

He also announced the BBC will undertake the largest public consultation in its history starting next year, so that the views of audiences are at the heart of the debate about the future of the organisation, ahead of the next Charter in 2028.

The BBC has published a document outlining these plans [here](#).

*May 2024*