

Written evidence submitted by the BBC

January 2022

The DCMS Committee – Promoting Britain Abroad Inquiry BBC Written Evidence

Executive Summary

1. The BBC is the world's leading public service broadcaster. It is impartial and independent, and for a century has been creating distinctive, world-class programmes and content which inform, educate and entertain millions of people, not just in the UK but around the world. This vital role is **entrenched in the BBC Charter through its fifth public purpose - reflecting the United Kingdom, its culture and values to the world.**¹
2. The BBC's global reputation for trusted news and high quality content reflects well on Britain ultimately leading to positive perceptions as shown in new research findings previewed for the first time in this evidence². For example the BBC is the best known British cultural export or soft power tool. **This is only possible thanks to the unique way the BBC is funded, which is via the Licence Fee.**
3. In addition, the BBC's commercial operations, led by BBC Studios return investment to the corporation, by **selling UK produced content around the world, allowing further transmission of the UK's cultural benefits.**
4. This submission sets out the BBC's contribution to enhancing the UK's global reputation at a time when tourism is recovering from the pandemic and Britain is seeking new relationships, attracting new investment and reaffirming its position in the world order.

BBC's International News Services

5. **The BBC's international news services - BBC World Service, the BBC World News TV channel and BBC.com - reach 456million people around the world every week** with impartial news and information, more than any other international broadcaster. Indeed the BBC is the world's most trusted and best-known international news broadcaster, with CNN its nearest competitor as consistently shown by independent research. It is available internationally in 43 languages, with correspondents in 75 news bureaux around the world.
6. The World Service has retained its position as the **most trusted international news brand**³ as shown by surveys published as part of the World Service 5 Year Review⁴. This is even in markets which have low trust in news, at a time when trust in the media is under constant attack.
7. The **provision of trusted, impartial information via the World Service is recognised as enhancing soft power** - something regularly acknowledged by parliamentarians and influential figures in the creative industries.

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/mission>

² BBC World Service: Impact and influence 2021 carried out by Tapestry Research.

³ BBC Global News Brand Tracker conducted by Kantar Media and other independent surveys

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2021/bbc-world-service-five-year-review>

8. BBC World Service is chiefly funded by the UK Licence Fee (approximately 75%) with additional funding coming from Government in the form of a grant via the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).
9. FCDO funding increased by £8million in 2021/22 to tackle disinformation and improve digital engagement, taking total FCDO annual funding up to £94.4million. The Government's October Spending Review included a commitment to 'continue to invest in the World Service', with funding figures for April 2022 onwards yet to be officially confirmed.
10. The total reach of BBC World Service has grown significantly over the last five years since the start of Government investment - by 42%. This comes at a time when Britain is forging new relationships with nations around the world and demonstrates that the BBC's global news services are more important to people than ever.

BBC Studios

11. BBC Studios is the **biggest distributor of TV content outside of Hollywood and Bollywood**. It combines the strengths of the UK's most-commissioned production company with a world-class distributor. It is responsible for funding, creating, distributing and commercialising content that is watched and loved by audiences all around the world. In the last financial year it returned **£137 million to the BBC group**, supporting the Licence Fee and enhancing programmes for UK audiences.
12. Under the BBC brand, Studios produces and distributes bold British content that reflects UK culture to global audiences.

Championing Britain

13. Recent research by DCMS and the BFI⁵ suggests **UK TV and film is extremely influential in shaping overall views of the UK**. Indeed in some countries it is the no 1 influencer (New Zealand, and no 2 in USA, Australia and Nordics). It is a key driver in influencing people's decision to visit the UK. This is coupled with enjoying a reputation for high quality content.
14. The **BBC is at the heart of this reputation** providing a platform for UK culture through top draw productions recognisably based in the UK's Nations and regions.
15. It is **associated around the world with distinctive British values of fairness, integrity and impartiality**. Together with the Royal Family and Premier League, the **BBC is one of a tiny handful of British brands known by billions worldwide**. Indeed the *SoftPower30* 2019 rankings cited the BBC World Service as one of two British institutions that are key to British soft power⁶.
16. In an increasingly global marketplace, the BBC brings international audiences content that epitomises UK values. Research shows that even the UK made content for global SVODs is less 'British' than that commissioned by the BBC and UK Public Service Broadcasters.⁷
17. The globalisation of the market has meant that production costs have rocketed in key areas, such as drama, by 35%⁸, while public funding for the BBC has fallen by a quarter in real terms since 2010. It will

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-research-shows-70-of-international-audiences-view-british-film-and-tv-as-high-quality?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_source=edad02fb-3f7a-43b5-8884-7eb4a24ea05c&utm_content=immediately

⁶ <https://softpower30.com/country/united-kingdom/>

⁷ [Enders Analysis, Outsourcing culture: When British shows aren't 'British', March 2020](#)

⁸ <https://www.viv.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/VLV-Briefing-note-BBC-Public-Funding-2010-2021-the-Challenge-Ahead-July-2021-FINAL.pdf>

be important to ensure that the BBC continues to have the scale and content required to maintain its high quality international output which audiences love and trust.

The BBC's International News Services

18. The BBC's global news services play a major role in enhancing the UK's standing and reputation overseas through the provision of trusted and objective news. A recent Ipsos MORI survey found that awareness of BBC World Service is strongly linked to a range of positive perceptions of the UK⁹, supporting the aforementioned DCMS/BFI research.
19. **FCDO investment has enabled the World Service's biggest expansion since the Second World War, including 12 new language services** aimed at Africa, India, Serbia and the Korean peninsula, enhanced programming in English, Arabic, Thai and Russian, and new bureaux in Delhi, Nairobi and Lagos.
20. Commercially-supported BBC World News (and website – BBC.com) is a vital part of the international news offer, giving the BBC both impact and reach overseas. As part of wider changes to the BBC's commercial subsidiaries this year, responsibility for BBC World News has transferred to the Public Service, operating under the World Service licence (with commercialisation delivered by BBC Studios on behalf of BBC News).

Positive Perceptions of the UK

21. **BBC World Service is strongly linked to a range of positive perceptions of the UK including trust and intentions to interact with the UK in the future.** In research commissioned by the British Council¹⁰ amongst younger educated audiences across the world, the BBC World Service was the best known institution across all countries included in the survey (including their home country's cultural institutions in some cases). This research also found that those in G20 countries aware of the BBC World Service were more likely to find the UK attractive and to do business with the UK.
22. In 2021 the BBC commissioned **further research** (as yet unpublished)¹¹ **into the wider impact and influence of the BBC around the world** which found:
 - BBC is the best known British cultural export or soft power tool;
 - BBC is the most trusted news brand amongst both 'mass' and 'influential' audiences;
 - BBC has a direct positive influence on UK perceptions amongst 'mass' (52%) and 'influential' (62%) audiences;
 - BBC users are more likely to support liberal British values;
 - The more 'influential' audiences including business leaders consume BBC news, the likelier they are to invest in the UK, use British goods and suppliers and visit the UK;
 - The BBC reaches audiences across the political spectrum and far outscores its competitors for key news attributes (59% for accuracy, 48% for impartiality and 48% for independence).

⁹ British Council perception survey 2020, fieldwork and analysis by Ipsos MORI (young people targeted)

¹⁰ British Council perception survey 2020, fieldwork and analysis by Ipsos MORI (young people targeted)

¹¹ BBC World Service: Impact and influence 2021 carried out by Tapestry Research. The 'mass' audience total sample was 15,476, and at least 1000 per country (representative of either the total population or the online population of surveyed country) in following locations: USA, Germany, Australia, Canada, Indonesia, South Korea, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Kenya and the Ukraine. Data collection was from 12 May – 9 June 2021. The 'influential' audience total sample was 3,187, comprising 2204 (69%) 'influential' (business decision makers) and 983 (31%) higher profile 'C-suite' influential in following locations: Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and the USA. Data Collection: 14 May 2021 – 2 June 2021)

Benefits at Home and Abroad

23. The **BBC's international news services and the World Service in particular seeks to address the global gap in the provision of trusted international news**, by providing accurate, impartial and independent news and programming of the highest quality. It provides a distinctive service tailored to the needs of its audience, maximising reach of all services in their target markets, and providing journalism that contributes to accountability and good governance to improve the welfare and economic development of citizens in developing countries.
24. The **BBC's accurate and impartial reporting helps people make sense of a complex and fast-changing world**, and tells the stories other news media often can't and won't. BBC journalists are committed no matter that they face ever-increasing threat – as illustrated by the ongoing harassment of BBC News Persian journalists in London, their families in Iran and reporters on the ground in Russia, Myanmar, Ethiopia and Afghanistan.
25. At a time when technology has transformed the way people access and share information the **spread of disinformation is increasing and the need for trusted news and information has never been greater**. World Service programmes hold those with power to account, and help people understand views even when they are not their own.
26. The World Service's role in providing essential information was highlighted during the key weeks when the pandemic was starting to spread around the world. **Digital audiences for World Service languages surged to reach an average of 208 million people per week in March 2020**, up 142% compared to averages across April to December 2019.
27. While the World Service is not a soft power 'asset' to be deployed at will, it provides global public goods in provision of trusted objective international news services, and content which deepens knowledge and understanding, and is inspiring and entertaining. It is able to project positive values about the UK around the world, and enables the UK to accrue soft power, both geopolitically and economically.
28. The **BBC is one of Britain's leading global cultural assets that enables the open exchange of ideas, information, and values among nations, providing space for different communities and cultures to have meaningful conversations, and so helps to foster mutual understanding**. As well as reflecting 'the UK to the world' the World Service brings 'the world to the UK'.

Editorial Impact

29. BBC News delivers a global perspective on the world free from national or commercial interest, and as result **Britain gains geopolitically through enhanced global reputation, relevancy and respect**.
30. **With disinformation and state-sponsored propaganda** (from China, Russia, Iran and others) on the rise, and a climate of growing insecurity for journalists, **BBC language services are a bulwark for democratic freedoms across the globe**. A recent BBC *Africa Eye* investigation exposed the [massacre of at least 15 men in northern Ethiopia](#) which prompted direct action including a G7 joint statement. BBC Arabic's investigative journalism has won much acclaim including an RTS gold for [The Schools that Chain Boys](#) which uncovered systemic child abuse and evidence of sexual abuse inside Islamic schools in Sudan.
31. Another BBC *Africa Eye* [investigation](#) uncovered evidence that Uganda's security forces were responsible for the killing of 50 civilians in Kampala in 2020. Uganda's Daily Monitor covered the story extensively after which police [questioned](#) the paper's editor and managing editor. The piece's Twitter thread generated more than 1.2million impressions, was re-tweeted more than 3,500 times and the film was watched more than 1million times on YouTube in the 24 hours following publication. The Ugandan government has since confirmed that its security forces were responsible, and the Minister of Security has been demoted.

BBC Studios - Entertaining on the Global Stage

32. **BBC Studios has a global consumer weekly reach of more than 70 million** through its owned global channels, UK-based commercial network UKTV, social media and BritBox (not including content on international third-party platforms). Its content achieved over 5 billion video views in 2020, taking BBC-branded content and so UK culture to huge global audiences.
33. BBC Studios makes some of the UK's best-known shows which are enjoyed by audiences across the globe, including *Strictly Come Dancing* (known internationally as *Dancing with the Stars*), *Doctor Who*, *Top Gear* and *The Weakest Link*. As well as finished programmes, BBC Studios takes programmes to new audiences in other parts of the world, such as *This Country* (remade in the US as *Welcome to Flatch*), *Doctor Foster* (remade in India as *Out of Love*), and *Luther* (remade in Russia as *Klim*).
34. Through BBC Studios Productions, its invested independent production companies and independent partners, BBC Studios also supports the creation of iconic intellectual property including *I May Destroy You*, *His Dark Materials*, *Small Axe*, *Killing Eve* and *Bluey*.

BBC Case Study - Doctor Who

- Filmed in Cardiff
- Longest running science-fiction series in the world, at 57 years old
- Available in 239 territories worldwide, has a huge international global footprint and loved by audiences the world over
- 10 million followers on social media and clocked up 100 million video views on YouTube in the last year alone
- Season 12 was well received, with audiences of more than 27 million in the UK and US

35. There are offices in more than 20 markets globally, and production bases or partnerships in seven countries beyond the UK. As well as being a global producer and distributor of content, it also owns and operates BBC-branded channels and on-demand services, which are available in **over 120 territories**. These include BBC Earth, BBC First, BBC Brit, BBC America and BBC Lifestyle.

36. BBC Studios provides a truly global stage for UK-created content that audiences around the world are devouring at pace. Representing hundreds of independent production companies in the global marketplace, and with equity stakes in 12 independent production companies, BBC Studios provides scale – supporting the UK

independent production sector and talent.

Showcasing the UK through Partnerships

37. BBC Studios has a global reputation as a trusted, fair partner, which has enabled it to harness the potential of global partnerships, essential for taking British content to international audiences.
38. It invests in long-term partnership deals with major broadcasters around the world – recent deals include Germany's ZDF, HBO Max in the US and Russia's Yandex. Such partnerships offer BBC Studios the opportunity to collaborate on commissions, to enter into first look deals on new content, and take BBC Studios content to affiliated international audiences.
39. Partnerships are also key in the production of BBC Studios' Natural History Unit landmark productions. BBC super-landmark series are typically funded around 20% from the Licence Fee, with the remainder

funded largely internationally, bringing audiences all of the wonder of these programmes with only a fraction of the cost coming from the Licence Fee. Indeed Blue Planet II and Planet Earth II have been watched by more than a billion people globally.

Future Plans

40. Looking to bring even more great content to global audiences, BBC Studios is planning for the medium to long term to establish complementary, digital-focused services built around British content such as new SVOD channel BBC Select which is available in the US and Canada, or BBC Player which is available in Singapore and Malaysia. As part of this, BBC.com, the global face of BBC Online, has recently been transferred into BBC Studios enabling joined-up delivery of an ambitious global direct-to-consumer strategy.
41. Existing digital plans include further expansion of BritBox (the international joint venture with ITV) in up to 25 markets, with four now operational outside the UK (US, Canada, Australia and South Africa).

Conclusion

42. The BBC and its subsidiaries play a vital role in promoting Britain abroad. For 100 years the corporation has been showcasing British culture and values across the world. Audiences recognise the BBC's reputation, seeking out its trusted news and top entertainment, appreciating the Britishness that is woven through this output.
 43. With sufficient investment, there is a significant opportunity to further grow the reach and impact of the BBC across the globe, including the World Service and the BBC's international news services as well as wider BBC content. This will allow the BBC to continue as a cornerstone of the UK's creative industries in the face of a rapidly evolving media market.
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