



## BBC Audience Council Northern Ireland Advice to the BBC Trust Service Review of BBC One, Two, Three and Four, January 2014

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**BBC Audience Council Northern Ireland**  
**Advice to the BBC Trust Service Review of BBC One, Two, Three and Four**  
**January 2014**

**I. Summary**

The Audience Council has engaged closely with the audience in Northern Ireland to understand the range of views about BBC Television. We draw on feedback from a rolling programme of direct audience engagement, and have hosted ten discussions with different sections of the audience specifically to inform this review. For further details see Section 3 : Evidence Base. Section 1 summarises the key points of our advice to the Trust, which is then described in more detail in Section 2.

Overall, BBC television is valued by many sections of the audience in Northern Ireland. The Audience Council has identified many areas of strength, as well as some areas where BBC television could do even more to serve audiences here. Key issues include: investing in comedy and drama; building on the strengths of local content; doing more for less well served audiences in Northern Ireland; enhancing portrayal of different communities around the UK; helping audiences to find relevant content and future-proofing the BBC, in light of the rapid pace of change in technology and consumption patterns.

The main issues identified by the Audience Council are summarised here:

**Audience performance:** The majority of people we spoke with value BBC television and find programmes that interest them across the week. Audiences especially appreciate the quality and range of programmes and the lack of adverts. However, we are aware that audiences in Northern Ireland watch less BBC television than their counterparts in other parts of the UK. Network programmes tend to perform less well, whilst local ones have an overall positive impact on channel share in Northern Ireland. The reasons for this are undoubtedly complex. However, we would like to see audiences in Northern Ireland derive more value from BBC television. We therefore ask for more content, especially on BBC One, that would appeal to audiences here.

**BBC One:** BBC One is recognised as the mainstream channel and valued for quality and range. However, we see opportunities for the channel to be even more distinctive. In short, BBC One should be as brave as it can be. Soaps and continuing drama are important within the schedule, but we believe that there is also scope for greater range and ambition at peaktime. Audiences would also like to see more new ideas for family viewing, especially on Saturday evenings.

**BBC Two:** Audiences we spoke with were broadly content that the channel fulfils its remit to provide a mix of programmes of depth and substance. However, the channel offer is not that clear to viewers, particularly as strands and genres have migrated from BBC Four or

onto BBC One. We see an opportunity to reduce the number of daytime repeats on BBC Two by broadcasting relevant nations' programmes.

**BBC Three:** The majority of people we spoke with in the target age range were positive about the mix, quality, appeal and distinctiveness of the channel. They identified with it as a channel for younger audiences and for many it is their way into the BBC's television services. Opportunities for enhancement include more interactive content, such as apps, and more programme strands so that there is greater variety across the schedule. We also heard that under-16s watch the channel because they are not well served elsewhere in the portfolio of services, once they outgrow CBBC.

**BBC Four:** BBC Four is highly appreciated by a small audience who commend the quality and intelligence of its programmes. Foreign crime drama has been a major pull for new audiences. However, many BBC Four viewers consider the channel and its programmes something of a hidden gem, and perceive a need for much greater promotion. The relationship with BBC Two is not yet that clear.

**BBC NI opts:** Local opts are highly valued by many people and they are a key part of the BBC television mix for many viewers. Overall, local opts enhance the performance of BBC One and BBC Two in Northern Ireland. Audience performance data suggests that coverage of special events has had a particular positive impact on audience performance, as well as contributing to the delivery of the Public Purposes and a wider and more positive portrayal of Northern Ireland. We would like to see BBC Northern Ireland, and indeed the wider BBC, learn from and build on this success. We also think there should be some additional funding made available for special programme projects to maintain the range of content, including genres such as drama, comedy and major current affairs/documentary projects.

**The channel portfolio and consumption patterns:** The portfolio of programmes offers a wide range of programmes and formats for different audiences. We consider that four channels are still required to meet the range of needs. However, the Trust should consider this further in the longer term as technology and consumption patterns continue to change. We ask that the Trust plays particular attention to 'future-proofing' BBC television in this review, given the pace and extent of change.

**Genres:** Audiences we spoke with perceived opportunities to add further value through investment in television drama and comedy in particular. They recognised some positive changes to daytime TV but felt that even more could be done to reflect the range of interests and needs of the audience at this time. This might include some well-selected repeats from peaktime and also from nations' output.

**Repeats:** The proportion of repeats remains a top of mind criticism when audiences consider value for money. We are especially mindful that the impact of repeats may change over time – for instance, if efficiencies drive up the volume of repeats or if increased on-demand viewing reduces tolerance for narrative repeats.

**Portrayal:** Local audiences feel very strongly that there should be a broader portrayal of Northern Ireland and its communities on the networks, reflecting a contemporary society. They also think there is much more scope for a deeper and more authentic portrayal of diverse groups, e.g., disability, ethnic minorities, LGBT, etc.

We welcomed the *Delivering Quality First* (DQF) strategy to broadcast more nations' content on the BBC's networks, but note that transfers of BBC Northern Ireland programmes are low. We believe this is a missed opportunity to enhance portrayal of Northern Ireland and its communities and to deliver better value for money for audiences. We ask the Trust to challenge the Executive to do more to deliver the intended benefits of the Network Supply and Nations to Network Strategies.

**Value for money:** Most people we spoke with regard BBC television as good value for money. However, there are also perceptions of waste in some areas, including talent costs, staff remuneration and coverage of live events etc. The BBC should continue to challenge itself to deliver efficiencies wherever possible, without unduly impacting on the quality and range of content. We also think the BBC could do more to explain its costs and resourcing decisions.

**Promotion and findability of content:** We were struck by how many different audience groups saw a need for the BBC to do more to promote its services and help them find content. There is a limit to how much time can be allocated to on air trails, and the challenge is for the BBC to find new ways to target diverse audiences with content that is relevant to them. We welcome plans for greater personalisation online and more sophisticated curation of iPlayer content. This should be part of a cross-platform strategy to help audiences access content that is relevant to them, including local content.

## **2. Key themes and Audience Council advice to the Trust**

The key themes we have identified are organised under *Audience Performance*, *The Channel Portfolio* (including local opts), *Genres* and *Other Themes*.

### **2.1 Overall audience performance in Northern Ireland**

The majority of audiences in Northern Ireland that we spoke with enjoy BBC television with most finding something of interest across the week. Audiences especially value the quality, range and lack of adverts. Over 80% of adults in Northern Ireland watch some BBC television every week.<sup>1</sup>

We are mindful, however, that local audiences watch fewer hours of BBC television, and that BBC One and BBC Two achieve a smaller share of the viewing audience in Northern Ireland compared with other parts of the UK. Local opts (ie programmes aimed at audiences in Northern Ireland) have a net positive effect on channel share. However, network programmes (aimed at audiences across the UK) account for the vast majority of hours of output, and they tend to perform less well on average in Northern Ireland.

The reasons for this are undoubtedly complex, being informed by diverse audience tastes and market contexts. Nonetheless, we believe that audiences in Northern Ireland could get even more value from the BBC's network television services. We ask the Trust for more network programmes—on BBC One in particular—that would have strong appeal to less well served audiences here, as well as to similar audiences in other parts of the UK audience.

## 2.2 The channel portfolio

**BBC One (network):** Audiences recognise BBC One as the mainstream channel with a remit to provide something for everyone. They value the quality and range that the channel provides, and have high expectations in this regard. The vast majority of people we spoke with—representing a wide range of interests and tastes—could find BBC One programmes that interested them across the week, and this greatly informs their perceptions of value for money from the BBC as a whole. However, there are opportunities for the channel to be even more distinctive. In short, we think that BBC One should be as brave as it can be.

We are aware, however, that BBC One performs on the whole less well in Northern Ireland than the UK average. We ask the Trust to challenge the Executive to deliver more network programmes on the channel that have strong appeal to less well served groups (such as multichannel homes, lower socioeconomic groups) in Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK.

Many viewers enjoy soaps/continuing dramas like *EastEnders*, *Holby City* and *Waterloo Road* and these play an important role in ensuring there is something for everyone in the schedules. There is particular appreciation for the role which these programmes can play in engaging audiences in social issues, stimulating conversations about important topics and providing access to advice for those who require it. Nonetheless, some sections of the audience found peaktime on BBC One too predictable, with an overreliance on soaps and long running dramas, alongside tried and tested formats on similar topics such as cookery. We agree that there is scope for greater range and ambition at peaktime, in balance with the most popular formats.

We would also like to see more new ideas for family viewing, particularly on Saturday night, following the success of *Strictly Come Dancing*. We heard feedback that the family drama slot, e.g., *Merlin*, *Atlantis*—whilst important and not without its merits—has become a little too formulaic.

We are also aware of audience frustration when popular peaktime programmes clash with programmes with similar appeal on ITV. We are pleased that the BBC has already addressed some of these issues, for example, around *Strictly Come Dancing* and *The X Factor*.

**BBC Two (network):** The audiences we spoke with are broadly satisfied that BBC Two is fulfilling its remit to provide a mix of programmes of depth and substance. Audiences are able to identify programmes which they value and enjoy, and which speak to the Public Purposes, across a wide range of genres. However, they may not always associate them with the channel.

Feedback also indicated that the channel offer is not that clear to viewers – more particularly as programmes and strands have migrated from BBC Four or onto BBC One.

**BBC Three:** Viewers in the target age range that we spoke to were largely very positive about BBC Three. They identified with the channel as a service for young people, and for some it was so much their way into BBC TV that they credited programmes on other channels to this service. The people we spoke with were largely enthusiastic about the mix, quality, appeal and distinctiveness of BBC Three programmes, although some felt there could be more variety within the schedule.

*“Other channels cover the same themes, such as drinking, but BBC Three is the one that shows you the consequences and gets you thinking.”*

Discussion with youth groups, June 2013

*“Content on BBC Three is brilliant but there is a lot of repetition in the schedule. For example, American Dad and Family Guy are on about six nights a week.”*

Discussion with CSV Media Trainees, September 2013

Comedy, drama and factual programmes are especially important and it is within this context—of quality UK originations—that there is also support for a proportion of well-selected narrative repeats and acquisitions. Viewers acknowledged that some programmes can be ‘hit and miss’ but were generally supportive of the channel’s role in taking risks and developing some programmes for BBC One.

We also heard the view that there is scope for more interactive content, such as apps, to support and enrich content. This, along with the enhancements to the iPlayer proposed by the Director-General<sup>ii</sup>, may help to meet audience expectations of a service before broadcasting begins at 7pm each evening. We also agree with the suggestion that more could be done to signpost relevant content on other channels, especially for sections of the audience who see BBC Three as their main way into BBC TV.

We heard that some sections of the target audience thought that BBC Three was not sufficiently challenging, including some who found it too ‘laddish’, with a tendency to draw on stereotypes. We are not clear how well this group is served elsewhere within the BBC TV portfolio, and perhaps this is something which the Trust could consider.

*“BBC Three is too laddish and immature. It relies on stereotypes and I find it patronising. Output is too predictable...Perhaps it is pitched too young for those of us in our late twenties...”*

Discussion with CSV Media Trainees, September 2013

We also heard anecdotal evidence of under-16s watching BBC Three because they are not well served elsewhere in BBC TV schedules. This causes particular concern where there are more adult themes in BBC Three content. We agree with the Trust’s finding in its review of CBBC and CBeebies that other BBC television services should think more about this age group as an audience.

**BBC Four:** Feedback suggests that BBC Four is highly valued by a small audience who appreciate the quality, distinctiveness and intelligence of its programmes.

*“BBC Four broadcasts outstanding arts and culture programmes.”*

Discussion with Co Down Probus Group, November 2013

Foreign crime drama has been a major pull for audiences, including some who were new to the channel. UK dramas, such as *Burton and Taylor*, were also highly valued. Interestingly, audiences were not especially concerned that drama originations had moved to BBC Two, providing the range and quality was maintained.

There was quite a widely held view—which we endorse—that BBC Four and its output could be better promoted. Feedback also suggests that the relationship between BBC Four

and BBC Two is not that clear to audiences and we think that audiences would benefit from clearer channel identities.

*“When people discover these programmes it is like finding treasure – you don’t want to leave!”*

Audience Council discussion Dec 2013, referring to BBC Four foreign language drama

**Local opts:** Local opts continue to be highly valued and a key part of the BBC TV mix for many audiences in Northern Ireland. Overall, local programmes have a net positive impact on the performance (audience reach and share) of BBC One and BBC Two in Northern Ireland, even though they represent a relatively small proportion of the total. Audience performance—in terms of audience share, reach and appreciation ratings—is good.

We are aware, of course, that some sections of the audience are more interested in network output. There is still, for some, a degree of frustration when key programmes are timeshifted too late in the evening to accommodate local programmes. We are mindful that digital technology offers viewers more options, eg live online streaming of network channels, as well as network options on all the TV platforms. We ask BBC management to continue to focus on finding the best balance of network and local programmes in the schedule for audiences in this part of the UK.

In the Trust’s last review of BBC Television (2010) we reported a view that local programmes varied in quality from some that were truly excellent to others that they considered below par. Viewers are clear that they expect standards of production to be equivalent to network programmes. We note with interest that this inconsistency has not been a significant feature of audience feedback for this review. Audiences we spoke with found that local programmes were of a more consistently high quality, with many examples of excellent programmes across different genres. We think that more of this content would be of interest to UK-wide audiences and could be broadcast again on the networks.

In the last two years there has been a particular focus on special events coverage, eg Titanic commemorations, UK City of Culture 2013, The World Police and Fire Games etc. Such output has been highly valued by audiences and has made a very strong contribution to the Public Purposes, in many cases contributing to a broader and more positive portrayal of life in Northern Ireland. Audience performance data suggests that it has had a positive impact on overall impression scores of the BBC in Northern Ireland, which have consistently been below the UK average. We would like to see BBC NI, and indeed the wider BBC, learn from and build on this success, to add further value for audiences in the future.

We are conscious that the volume and spend on local opts for public service broadcasters (ie BBC NI and UTV) has dropped by around one third in Northern Ireland since 2007, with similar situations in Scotland and Wales. The strong performance of local opts, and positive audience feedback, suggests that BBC Northern Ireland still provides a sufficient base of different genres and programmes as well as a reasonable balance between network and local output. There is, however, a strong appetite for more local drama (building on the success of *6Degrees*) as well as further development of local comedy. Viewers prize special events coverage and major one off current affairs/documentary projects like *The Disappeared*, which have a very positive impact on the delivery of the Public Purposes. We would like to see some additional funding available for particular programme projects in Northern Ireland, as well as a continued focus on collaboration with other BBC services and co-productions. We believe this would—for a relatively small amount of funding—make a significant

contribution to the performance of BBC TV in Northern Ireland and inform more positive local audience perceptions of the BBC as a whole. We would also expect some of these programme projects to contribute to the networks.

The Trust should also be aware of the contribution which the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Broadcast Funds make to the volume and range of BBC Northern Ireland television. However, these funds are not guaranteed beyond 2016. Without them we believe the local offer would be significantly diminished in terms of the specific public service commitment to indigenous minority languages and the wider contribution of this output within the schedules.

**The channel portfolio and consumption patterns:** The portfolio of channels offers a wide range of programmes for audiences. A few people we spoke with questioned whether there was still enough high quality content to justify four channels in the future, noting the level of repeats, crossover of content and ongoing pressure on resources. As live viewing still predominates, and the portfolio channels are well received by their target audiences, we believe that viewers would lose out if a channel was dropped in the near/medium future. However, this is an area which the Trust should continue to consider, especially as on-demand viewing grows, channels become less important (many people told us they followed programmes rather than channels) and online possibilities open up. Any shift in the ratio of costs from distribution to content would be highly beneficial - so long as universal access can be maintained and content easily navigated.

We heard that audiences do not usually mind programmes transitioning from one channel to another where there is an audience-based rationale. However, this—along with changes in the ways people access content—does impact somewhat on their understanding of what each channel stands for.

## 2.3 Genres

**Drama:** Audiences expect the BBC to produce very high quality drama and for many this contributes significantly to their overall impressions of the BBC. Although audience views are largely very positive, there is also recognition that competition from other providers - eg ITV and Sky as well as US drama - has increased and the BBC's place as the home of high quality drama is no longer assured. We note a degree of disappointment when the BBC has appeared to some people to occasionally chase ratings at the expense of quality.

To remain distinctive the BBC needs to focus, first and foremost, on the quality of writing. Viewers see a real public service in identifying and developing writing talent, both new and established. We also think that the BBC could create more impact with drama at peaktime on BBC One, where continuing drama seems to dominate the schedules unduly. Audiences would like to see the BBC invest in a wider range of formats, such as authored pieces and one offs, and to take measured risks. BBC Two's new role in drama seems to afford a real opportunity for this. BBC drama should also do more to connect with and portray different audiences around the UK (in terms of demographics as well as geography).

We also question whether the BBC is as good at promoting TV drama as some other providers, and whether it receives sufficient credit for its output. We heard quite a few examples of viewers' estimation of BBC TV drama growing only when they were prompted with programme titles. Some people missed a *Play for Today* type strand which would guide them to quality drama and perhaps create greater overall impact.



Continuing drama and soaps are undoubtedly popular and play an important role within BBC One's remit. However, we also think there may be too much reliance on them in the schedules – see comments on BBC One above. We heard that some younger audiences thought that soaps had run their course and wonder if this is evidenced in audience data. *“EastEnders is dragging, repeating the same old stories ... it's the same with Hollyoaks ... the traditional soap format is dead and we don't have time for them ... good soaps now come in seasons and series.”*

Discussion with youth groups, June 2013

Interestingly, audiences we spoke with did not mind that originated drama was moving from BBC Four to BBC Two where it might reach a wider audience, and because the BBC remains committed to maintaining its investment in the genre overall. However, they did consider that the range and ambition of drama on BBC Two should increase and include more challenging output associated with BBC Four.

**Comedy:** Audiences value comedy highly and want to be assured that the BBC—with a strong reputation for serious knowledge-building programmes—does not lose sight of its remit to entertain. Of course, tastes vary widely and it is in the nature of the genre that programmes have a tendency to either please or fall flat, with less middle ground, whilst some comedies only develop their audiences over time. Audiences we spoke with could mostly find some comedy output to their taste, and together this included a range of formats. However, there was quite a wide consensus that the BBC should do more to innovate and break through with the best. We agree that this is an important area for investment, with a focus on developing new writing, formats and talent.

*“Mrs Brown's Boys gives you a good belly laugh and we'd like more of that.”*

Discussion with community groups in Dungannon, October 2013

**Factual:** Overall, audience feedback about factual programmes was positive, especially with regard to natural history and documentary. Programmes like *Autumnwatch* and *Stargazing* are appreciated for stepping out of the traditional schedule slots, and serve the Public Purposes very well. Audiences have noticed more investment in science programming as well, particularly on BBC Two. Partnerships with other organisations, eg the Open University, can enrich the public value of the broadcast output and we would expect the BBC to continue to build on this, at UK, nations and local level.

**Daytime:** There was some recognition among audiences we spoke with of changes to daytime TV, including more news and current affairs and drama. However, many people still felt that there was too much repetition of formats and that this does not sufficiently reflect the wide range of interests of audiences available to view at that time of day. There is recognition that limited resources should be focused on peaktime, and some people are not interested in watching live TV at this time of day. Quite a few people suggested that there would be value in repeating some of the very best of peaktime viewing, especially from portfolio channels such as BBC Four. We also believe there is further opportunity for nations' programmes with a UK-wide interest to be broadcast on BBC Two, to better reflect communities around the UK.

We welcome the greater differentiation between BBC One and BBC Two Daytime and especially the value added by news and current affairs and original drama. There is clearly

demand amongst the core audience for some popular and well-established formats in familiar slots. We would like to see Daytime continue to evolve to provide a wider range of content, including originations and carefully selected repeats from the portfolio of services.

**Sport:** As we would expect, sport continues to divide opinion, with some sections of the audience thinking there is too much of it and others not enough. However, there is much more appreciation among the audience in recent years of the costs of sports contracts. We did hear a view, from sports fans as well as others, that there was too much commentary and analysis round live coverage, especially before matches.

## 2.4 Other Themes

**Repeats:** The proportion of repeats is quite frequently a top of mind criticism when viewers consider value for money. Some of these perceptions are informed by narrative repeats (ie repeats within a week of the origination) – “*Why repeat a programme that is available on catch-up?*” – some by daytime repeats and a number of people mentioned the Christmas schedule. We understand that a proportion of repeats is necessary to sustain the current breadth of services within reduced budgets. Feedback indicates that audiences also recognise the value of repeating some high quality and carefully selected programmes which they missed the first time round. As long as live viewing remains important, narrative repeats also have a role to play in reaching new sections of the audiences at different points in the schedule.

However, we are mindful that the impact of repeats may change over time. For instance, *Delivering Quality First* efficiencies are likely to impact on the proportion of repeats, such as at peaktime on BBC One. Audience tolerance for repeats on linear services may also diminish as on-demand viewing grows and catch-up services develop. We therefore ask the Trust to monitor the impact of repeats on audiences over time.

**Archive programmes:** We heard that there is a significant appetite for greater access to archive programmes and look forward to understanding more about the Executive’s plans.

**Portrayal:** Almost every audience group we spoke with emphasised the need for a better portrayal of Northern Ireland and its communities for a UK-wide audience on the BBC’s television networks. Audiences particularly want to see a broader reflection of a contemporary and post-Troubles society in Northern Ireland. And they also want to see other parts of the UK outside the South East better reflected across the output. *Last Tango in Halifax* was an excellent example of how this can be achieved, and we hope to see more of this in the future.

*“Network and local TV combine to give us a view of the South East and NI but we see much less of other parts of the UK eg Scotland, the Midlands etc. It’s not so much Escape to the Country as Escape to Hertfordshire! We are interested in a much broader portrayal of the UK.”*

Discussion with CSV Media Trainees, October 2013

We value the Trust’s sustained focus on issues of portrayal of different communities around the UK across the BBC’s network services. There have been some significant developments – not least the considerable impact of BBC NI produced drama, *The Fall*, amongst audiences young and old, including those who would not usually watch BBC Two drama. However, as

the Trust's Purpose Remits Survey<sup>iii</sup> shows, audiences here expect the BBC to do more to reflect the whole of the UK, including Northern Ireland.

Audiences we spoke with also think there is much more scope for a deeper and more authentic portrayal of diverse groups, eg disability, ethnic minorities, LGBT etc. Progress is recognised but there is a need for the BBC to do even more in this regard. This would greatly contribute to the Public Purposes and the distinctiveness of the services. We ask that the Trust continues to challenge the Executive to make further progress.

**Network supply:** We welcomed the Trust's important endorsement of the TV Network Supply Review in 2008, and the intended benefits. We are pleased that there has been significant growth in the proportion of network programmes made in Northern Ireland since then, albeit with some peaks and troughs. Nevertheless, we are aware that the full benefits of the strategy have not yet been delivered in Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to contributing to a sustainable creative centre here as well as a fuller representation of society in Northern Ireland. The audience wants to see local communities better reflected on the BBC's networks, as well as a contribution to a growing creative sector.

*"We don't see enough of Northern Ireland on the BBC's networks. There is almost nothing on BBC Three. If we can produce major international series like Game of Thrones here it is hard to see why we can't see more on the BBC."*

Discussion with Carrickfergus Community Group, October 2013

**Nations to network:** We welcomed the BBC's strategy to broadcast more programmes made for nations' audiences on the networks as well, providing that cultural relevance of content for the primary local audience is not diluted. However, we are mindful that only a very small number of programmes has transferred to the networks to date, and suggest that this is a missed opportunity to enhance portrayal, deliver better value for money and minimise the volume of network repeats. We ask the Trust to continue to challenge the Executive to deliver the intended benefits of this strategy.

**Bringing audiences together:** Audiences we spoke with were very positive about the BBC's coverage of major events. For many it epitomised the distinctiveness and high quality that they expect of the BBC.

*"Nobody does a national occasion better than the BBC."*

Discussion in Newry, September 2013

*"The BBC did the Olympics superbly...it drew on the full capacity of the organisation...it should learn from this experience and apply this to other things."*

Discussion with Co Down Probus Group, November 2013

**Fresh and new content:** Audience feedback as well as the Trust's Purpose Remits research shows that audiences would like more fresh and new content on BBC television, often alongside longstanding favourite formats. We have noted a number of areas above where we believe the BBC could make a particular impact in this regard: the peaktime BBC One schedule, daytime, comedy and drama.

**Value for money:** Most people we spoke with regard BBC television as good value for money overall, particularly when they start to think through the range of content provided.

However, some groups—including some audiences in multichannel homes—continue to resent paying for a service which they believe represents a small proportion of their overall viewing. We are also very aware of perceptions of waste in particular areas of the BBC, such as talent costs, senior staff remuneration, coverage of live events etc. These perceptions are very important in informing wider views about the BBC’s stewardship of the licence fee. We note that the Trust will carry out a detailed assessment of value for money as part of the service review. We recognise the balance to be sought between reducing costs and providing such a range of high quality services for different audiences. We believe the BBC should rigorously challenge itself to deliver efficiencies where possible, without materially impacting on the quality, range and distinctiveness of services. We also think that it should do more to explain its costs and resourcing decisions to licence fee payers.

**Promotion and findability of content:** We were struck by how many different audience groups saw a need for the BBC to do more to promote its services and programmes and help them find content that is relevant to them. This is especially true as channels become less important as a means of navigating and accessing content and as the range of programmes and services available to audiences grows exponentially.

*“BBC Four had a documentary about Fleetwood Mac which I missed...we don’t know these things are on... you need to make more people aware of these programmes.”*

Discussion with CSV Media students, November 2013

*“I don’t hear about programmes and I miss lots of documentaries I would be interested in.”*

Discussion with youth groups, June 2013

*“It (the iPlayer) is a mixed bag...some things are available, some not, some downloadable, some not... there’s no rhyme nor reason to it. A seven-day window is too short.”*

Discussion in Londonderry, September 2013

There is, of course, a limit to the amount of time which can be allocated to on air promotion – and indeed some sections of the audience consider that the proportion of trails to programmes is already too high. The challenge is for the BBC to find new and more sophisticated ways to target different sections of the audience with content that is of interest to them. Younger audiences we spoke with placed particular value on social media, for example, and suggested a personalised scheduling app would benefit audiences. However, the issue was common to audiences of different age groups and demographic profiles. We welcome plans to provide greater personalisation online and more sophisticated curation of iPlayer content. However, this should be part of a wider cross-platform strategy to help audiences access content that is relevant to them. We see this as one of the most important ways in which the BBC can provide greater value to licence fee payers in a competitive marketplace.

**Background sound:** Some sections of the audience—particularly but not exclusively older members of the audience—raise issues of background sound. We ask whether the Trust is content with progress since first taking this issue up with the Executive several years ago.

**Younger audiences:** In recent years we have spoken with a wide range of younger audiences—in their teens and twenties—about BBC services. We consider that the BBC should do more to meet the public service broadcasting needs of this audience across its platforms, including television.

### 3. Evidence base

This year the Audience Council engaged with a range of different audience groups to understand their views on BBC television. We hosted discussions with representatives of local organisations as well as members of the public in Derry and Newry. Members also engaged with a group of media trainees based in Belfast and journalism students in Derry, a Co Down Probus group and community based groups in Dungannon and Carrickfergus. We heard views from visitors to a BBC Experience event in Lisburn and also hosted discussions with youth groups and with people with a particular interest in television drama.

We have also drawn on feedback from our programme of engagement with audiences in recent years, and through members' own networks. We have carefully assessed this feedback in light of our understanding of the strategies and performance for BBC television as well as the BBC's Public Purposes.

We are grateful to everyone who has provided us with views and insights into audience expectations of BBC television and how well these are met.

BBC Audience Council Northern Ireland  
January 2014

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<sup>i</sup> BARB data for *all BBC Television in NI* Jan–Dec 2012

<sup>ii</sup> *Where Next?* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2013/dg-iplayer.html>

<sup>iii</sup> BBC Trust Purpose Remit Survey reports :

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our\\_work/audiences/organisation.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our_work/audiences/organisation.html)