

**BBC Trust Provisional Conclusions  
on BBC proposals for BBC Three**

**Audience Council Northern Ireland  
Advice to the Trust  
September 2015**

**Introduction**

In February 2015, the Audience Council Northern Ireland submitted advice to the BBC Trust, to help inform its public value test [PVT] on the BBC's proposal to reinvent BBC Three as an online (only) service, alongside changes to a number of other BBC services. The Council's advice reflected its understanding of local audiences, and insights gained through Council members' own networks and a programme of direct engagement with younger audiences focused specifically on the proposals.

This is the Audience Council's response to the BBC Trust's consultation on its provisional conclusions on the BBC's proposals, with a particular focus on BBC Three, drawing on our advice to the Trust's public value test and the Council's discussion on the Trust's provisional conclusions.

**Response to the Trust's provisional conclusions**

**BBC Three**

*The Audience Council strongly believes that the decision to close BBC Three as a broadcast channel at this stage will impact negatively on some young audiences and the long term value they derive from the BBC.*

The Audience Council's advice to the BBC Trust's public value test highlighted the diverse needs of 16-34 year olds, perceived gaps in current BBC provision, and a sense of abandonment felt by many young people at the proposed closure of the BBC Three TV channel. We asked the Trust to ensure that the BBC's longer term strategy for young people was a matter of priority.

The Audience Council is mindful of the financial pressures on the BBC to deliver savings and understands the strategic rationale guiding the BBC's proposal for BBC Three and the Trust's provisional conclusions - in particular, a trend in viewing toward online with young people at the vanguard. However, we remain deeply concerned about the potential impact of the proposals for BBC Three, and the loss of reach among younger and other underserved audiences in the short and longer term.

We share the Trust's uncertainty on how quickly an emerging trend in online viewing will progress and express our concern that plans for BBC Three may have overplayed the extent and speed of a transition to digital media across this audience - both in terms of access/affordability and preference.

The Trust has acknowledged that television remains a valued and often preferred point of access for young people offering, amongst other things, a highly valued social and communal experience characteristic of a broadcast service. Furthermore, we would emphasise that - for some - television may be the only point of access to BBC video content, with the quality and/or affordability of online access continuing to present a significant barrier.

We believe that the prompt and full delivery of the conditions proposed by the Trust would be vital, should the proposal for BBC Three be approved. In particular, a gradual and carefully managed transition, raising awareness of the changes, and a clear BBC commitment to programming on BBC One and/or BBC Two that appeals to younger audiences, including broadcast slots for BBC Three long-form content on a continuing basis. For many of the young people we spoke with earlier this year, BBC Three bridged the gap between CBBC and mainstream services with little of interest elsewhere on BBC television. We believe that the BBC's short and longer term relationship with young people is wholly contingent on programmes and content that is of relevance and interest - across the target age range - and is delivered in ways that reach this audience, including linear services.

### **CBBC**

The Audience Council's engagement with audiences this year indicated that, whilst CBBC is a highly valued and trusted source of children's content, there were mixed views about the proposed extension of CBBC hours and, on balance, audiences did not believe this would offer any significant added value to the service. Council notes that the proposal to extend CBBC by one hour in the evening is contingent on the BBC Trust's final decision on BBC Three and related spectrum availability.

### **BBC One + 1**

The Audience Council agrees with the Trust's provisional conclusion on the BBC's proposal for a BBC One + 1 service.

### **BBC iPlayer**

The Audience Council also agrees with the Trust's provisional approval of enhancements to the BBC iPlayer to enable, amongst other things, online premieres and selected third party content for audiences - subject to conditions set by the Trust. Council believes that the evolution of the BBC iPlayer beyond a catch-up and live streaming service would be well received by audiences in general and particularly welcomed by younger audiences. The Council shares the Trust's concerns, however, that those without an adequate broadband connection would be penalised. The Council would also wish to draw attention to the importance of the findability of content and the BBC iPlayer's search functionality - issues that are regularly reflected in audience feedback and highlighted in the Council's advice to the Trust's public value test.