

Understanding audiences

Consultations, research and Audience Councils: those we heard from and what they said

Enabling everyone to have their say

We heard from a range of audiences, in particular through our surveys and public consultations linked to major pieces of work.

The Trust's duty is to reflect the interests of all licence fee payers and to make decisions that are in the public interest. We make sure we are well informed about audiences' views through a number of means, both direct and indirect. There are many industry as well as BBC surveys that measure audience appreciation of programmes, such as the BBC Pulse Survey, and others that look at consumer trends, such as Ofcom's market surveys. These tell us which BBC services people use, and through which channels, and what people think about its and others' programmes and services. The Trust also has direct ways of hearing what the public thinks; these include public consultations, audience research, and feedback from our four national Audience Councils (see page 34). The responses we get, alongside our other evidence on audience perceptions and behaviour, help give us a fully rounded picture of public opinion to inform the decisions we make on licence fee payers' behalf.

Public consultations

Public consultations enable anyone to have a say. We always consult when we review a BBC service and also for some other work – this year, for example, we consulted on guidelines for coverage of the Scottish independence referendum. In the last year we carried out seven public consultations, and heard from more than 13,000 people across the UK about BBC Television and BBC News and other matters. We also received consultation responses from a range of organisations including industry bodies and voluntary organisations.

Research

Our main piece of research is the annual Purpose Remit Survey which measures the BBC's performance in delivering its six public purposes. We also commission a mix of quantitative and qualitative research which, together with our public consultations, gives us a detailed picture of what our audiences think about the BBC's services. This year we commissioned specific research to inform our service review of the BBC's network news and current affairs, and for our review of BBC Television.

Purpose Remit Survey

This survey asks licence fee payers for their views on how important each of the BBC's six public purposes is to them, and how good the BBC's performance is in each case. It also includes some general questions such as whether the BBC offers good value for money.

This year, more than 2,250 adults from across the UK were selected to participate in the survey, enabling us to represent the views of a diverse and fully representative group of licence fee payers.

As in previous years, about six in ten thought that the BBC offered good value for money. Previously, black audiences have given much lower ratings than the average, so we were pleased to see that their perceptions of value for money rose considerably from 36% in the last survey to 50% today. Also in line with previous years, 78% of people said that they would miss the BBC if it were not there – a higher figure than for any other UK broadcaster.

Opposite is a summary of the results for each public purpose.

Sonita Alleyne at an Audience Council meeting



Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence

An important part of creativity is having fresh and new ideas, and this is something the BBC has been particularly focusing on in recent years. We were therefore pleased to see that this year, for the first time since the survey has been running, the perception that the BBC has plenty of fresh and new ideas increased, from 56% to 61%. However, the BBC's performance still does not match high audience expectations in this area so, while we welcome the improvement, we will continue to look for more progress. It is likely that some of the improvement is related to the BBC's newer digital services such as apps, since the main improvement in this score came from 16 to 34-year-olds who are most likely to use them.

Sustaining citizenship and civil society

Public perceptions that the BBC offers high quality, independent journalism dropped last year to 65%, and we said then that this was likely to have been because the high profile problems in the BBC had affected audiences' perceptions and trust. However, the score remained the same this year, and some supplementary qualitative research we carried out suggests greater competition in online news may also be affecting people's overall opinions about the BBC's journalism.

Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities

The extent to which audiences in the devolved nations perceive that the BBC represents them well in network output remains low, at about 50-55% of respondents on average. The score for representation in network news coverage ranges from 47% in Scotland to 57% in Northern Ireland, the latter being a significant increase from last year.

Promoting education and learning

People score this, along with 'bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK', as the BBC's most important public purpose, and the BBC received the second highest rating here, with an average performance score of 70%. 'I have learned new things from the BBC' again scored 74%, while 'the BBC helps children/teens perform with what they learn at school/college' was slightly lower at 67%.

Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK

The BBC received the highest rating for this purpose, with an average performance score of 73%. The statement 'The BBC helps me understand what is going on in the wider world' scored highest of all statements in the survey, at 80%.

Delivering the benefit to the public of emerging communications, technologies and services

Over the past three years there has been a steady improvement in perceptions that the BBC provides quality content on mobile phones and tablets, such that most people today believe this to be the case. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, younger people's perceptions have improved most, while people over 55, who tend to use these platforms less, are less positive.

Stimulating creativity

Though the gap has reduced, there is still room for improvement in the creation of fresh and new content.

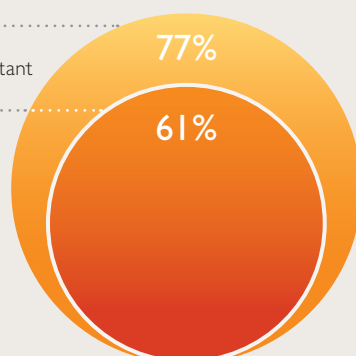
77% of audiences thought that fresh and new ideas were important

But only 61% of audiences thought that the BBC had lots of fresh and new ideas

-16%

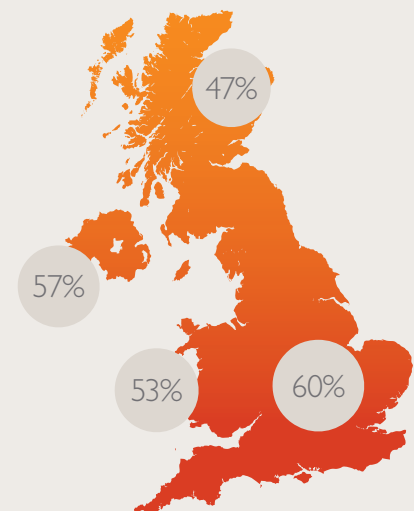
2012/13: -23%

▼ **Fallen short**



Representing life in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England

The map shows the % of people in each nation who think the BBC is good at representing their life in news and current affairs content.



Audience Councils

Audience Councils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland ensure that the interests of audiences across the UK are at the heart of the Trust's work through their regular input into our discussions. They monitor audience views and assess BBC performance in each nation, reporting monthly via their meetings and annually to the whole Trust. Through their work, they help to identify audience needs as a starting point for service reviews, and each year they assess how the BBC is performing for audiences in each part of the UK.

Reflecting audiences' views

Councils are recruited to reflect the diversity of the UK and are chaired by the Trustee for each nation. Some Councils hold public meetings with licence fee payers and consider a range of other audience information in order to formulate their advice for the Trust. This year the Councils focused their work on BBC Television to provide input into our service review. They emphasised to the Trust that audiences believed that BBC One should take more creative risks and that BBC Two should be more innovative and distinctive.

Informing the work of the Trust

We use the advice from Councils in our regular discussions with the Executive. This year, following the review of how the BBC is governed, specific sessions were introduced on how well the BBC performed for audiences in each of the nations based on reports from each Audience Council.

How the BBC performed

Members told us that audiences across the UK think the BBC's services are performing well. However, Councils suggested that more television programmes made by BBC Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be broadcast on the national networks; that content for audiences in the devolved nations including local news and factual content should better reflect changes in society; and that it would be desirable to extend political coverage on local radio in England and to safeguard the relevance of regional television current affairs in England.

Audience Council priorities for the year ahead

The Councils use insights gathered from their meetings with audience members and research to identify priorities which they present each year to the Trust.

This year the Councils said that audiences wanted to see more network programmes reflecting different areas of the UK and more network news reflecting public policy issues in the devolved nations. They noted a desire for news and discussion programmes to contain a broader range of views and voices, to better reflect the diversity of viewpoints. The Councils felt that Radio 4 in particular could work harder to serve audiences outside the South East of England. They also said that when new technical developments like HD and the iPlayer Radio are introduced, programmes and services for audiences in the nations and English regions, and in indigenous minority languages, should be included from the outset.

An annual review from each Audience Council is available on their websites.

Audience Councils monitor audience views and assess BBC performance

