

Audience perceptions of the BBC's Delivering Quality First proposals

Research conducted on behalf of the
BBC

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1. Preface

In order to inform the BBC's thinking and decision-making as part of *Delivering Quality First* (DQF), Ipsos MORI was commissioned by the BBC to conduct a programme of qualitative deliberative research. The aim was to explore public views on potential reductions to BBC television, radio and red button services proposed as part of finding 20 per cent cost savings. Most of the savings were needed in the light of the new licence fee settlement, which keeps the licence fee flat at its current level up to 2016/17 while giving the BBC new responsibilities to fund. Further savings were also being sought by the BBC in order to release funds for investment in new content and digital technology. For details, please refer to the BBC's *Delivering Quality First* publication – http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/dqf/pdf/dqf_detailedproposals.pdf

The research investigated public perceptions of the specific ideas for changes to BBC content and services that were being considered as part of the DQF process and also sought to gauge the broader principles that people feel should govern decisions when making reductions to BBC output.

A deliberative approach was used in order to allow participants to have time to consider the proposals in some depth. In total, 15 deliberative workshops of up to four hours in length took place in 14 locations across the four nations of the UK. Overall, 291 participants were involved, recruited to reflect the UK public in terms of demographics, use of BBC services and attitudes towards the BBC. A qualitative research approach like that used in this study is designed to understand the views that people hold and the factors underpinning these views. While such a qualitative approach is not designed to arrive at the absolute numbers in the population to hold a view and might not always pick up very small pockets of opinion that exist, this research is based on a sizable qualitative sample and can be considered reliable for identifying the range of views on the topic.

This report presents the findings from the research. It sets out participants' overall reaction to the package of DQF proposals; their views on the criteria that should be used when making decisions about changes to BBC output as well as the criteria that they used themselves when evaluating the proposals; and their views on specific reductions to BBC content and services that were under consideration.

2. Summary of the findings

- The research found that participants felt the **package of DQF proposals presented was broadly acceptable** overall. This acceptance should not be interpreted as enthusiastic support (as most were not in favour of reductions to BBC content and services *per se*). However, they considered the proposals a reasonable response from the BBC given the licence fee settlement.
- Where objections were raised, they were voiced more from a 'consumer' rather than a 'citizen' perspective:
 - **Most participants responded to the proposals as 'consumers'** (i.e. viewers/listeners of the services) and cared particularly about the perceived impact of the proposals on the content and services that they used, though there was recognition from most that everyone had to lose something and that they would live with the changes, albeit reluctantly for the proposals that they objected to most strongly
 - **A few thought about the proposals as 'citizens'** (i.e. thinking about the wider impact on society) and expressed some concerns about the impact of some of the proposals on other groups of people or on their own national or regional identity.
- Concerns were most likely to be raised **if participants did not think that a good alternative exists**, although there was some debate about what constitutes a good alternative. Also, **if a reduction was seen to be unfair or disproportionate** (for example, affecting a particular group of people or a BBC service or genre more than others), it would raise some concerns.
- Most participants felt it was important for the BBC to **protect both 'popular' and 'niche' services** because of its remit. They struggled to resolve this potential tension as both were seen to be important for different reasons.
- In making decisions about savings, participants first wanted reassurance that the BBC has taken significant steps to control costs before making reductions to content and services.
- Then, where reductions to BBC output had to be made, participants wanted the changes to be made in such a way that they are **fair and maintain the quality of BBC content**:
 - **Fairness:** This is the most important criteria. Participants wanted any reductions to be fair to all viewers, particularly to themselves and people like them, as well as being fair across audience groups and also to be fair between services
 - **Quality:** The BBC was felt to be different from other broadcasters, with the quality of content being what they particularly valued from the BBC. To this end, they wanted to ensure that the quality of BBC output was protected.

Across the groups, most felt these criteria had been reflected in the package of DQF proposals presented.

- Specific feedback was sought on the individual proposals. For the detail of each proposal, please refer to the BBC's *Delivering Quality First* publication¹. Depending on the reaction the proposals generated among participants, they were grouped into three categories:
 - **Proposals that were broadly acceptable** (those considered acceptable by most participants with only a few concerns raised): changes to late-night television on BBC One and BBC Two; reductions in the budgets of BBC network radio stations; reductions

¹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/dqf/pdf/dqf_detailedproposals.pdf

- in the budgets of BBC digital radio stations; not replacing Radio 4 Long Wave transmitters; standardising the BBC Red Button service across television platforms
- **Proposals opposed by a vocal minority** (general acceptance with strong concerns expressed by a minority): a reduction in the BBC Three budget; less overlap between BBC Two and BBC Four and a reduction in the BBC Four budget; a reduction in non-core current affairs and political programming; a reduction in the BBC News Channel budget; the removal of specific BBC radio stations from digital television²
 - **Proposals that divided views** (caused debate with both support and opposition for the proposal): changes to BBC One and BBC Two daytime content; a reduction in highest-cost programming in peak time on BBC One; a reduction in the BBC's budget for entertainment; a reduction in the BBC's sports budget
 - None of the proposals was opposed by a majority of participants.
- The research also probed reaction to proposals about content specific to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and to the regions of England:
 - Overall, participants in **Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland** had very similar priorities to participants in England, and the proposals affecting Network programming dominated the discussion in all workshops. When evaluating proposals on changes to content for their nation, most participants in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland generally took a consumer perspective, reflecting on how it would affect their own viewing and listening. Although a minority view, principled opposition from a citizen perspective to reductions was more common for nations-specific content proposals than for Network programming proposals. However, most participants recognised the need to make reductions to nations-specific content as part of the overall package of proposals
 - Potential changes to content for the **English regions** were not among the most contentious proposals discussed during the workshops. Reaction was mainly dependent on whether participants consumed the content, and if they did not, there was relatively little principled objection.

²The removal of specific BBC radio stations from digital television will only become a proposal if this capacity on digital television is needed for another purpose. See *Delivering Quality First*: http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/dqf/pdf/dqf_detailedproposals.pdf

3. Background and methodology

3.1 Background

In order to inform the BBC's thinking as part of *Delivering Quality First* (DQF), the BBC commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a programme of qualitative deliberative research with people around the UK. The aim was to explore public views on potential reductions to BBC television, radio and red button services proposed as part of finding 20 per cent cost savings. Most of the savings were needed in the light of the new licence fee settlement, which keeps the licence fee at its current level up to 2016/17 while giving the BBC new responsibilities to fund. Further savings were also being sought by the BBC in order to release funds for investment in new content and digital technology³.

The research was designed to investigate public perceptions of specific ideas for changes to BBC content and services that were being considered as part of the DQF process and could have a material impact on BBC services. In addition, the study sought to gauge the broader principles that people feel should govern decisions when finding savings from BBC output.

In order to generate nuanced, informed feedback, the research needed to allow participants the opportunity to absorb a large amount of information about the DQF proposals. Tackling complex issues takes time and thought, which is why a deliberative approach was used as this enabled discussions over the course of a full evening workshop of up to four hours.

Deliberative research is a dynamic process and seeks to establish what people know and think, but also complements this with detailed discussion to explore the underlying factors behind views and perceptions. This approach also allowed us to track whether and how views changed (and the factors influencing this change) by analysing the discussions that were conducted at different points as the evening progressed. For example, it sought to capture participants' initial top-of-mind reaction to the proposals; their considered opinion as they thought about each in detail; their thinking as they heard others express their views; their response when reflecting on the principles that they felt should guide decisions on changes to BBC output; and their perceptions at the end of the evening, taking everything into account. A key strength of a deliberative approach to research is the opportunity it allows for participants to consider a subject in depth, though it can mean that findings from deliberative studies can sometimes vary from results in surveys that are gauging respondents' immediate reaction.

3.2 Methodology

The research involved 15 workshops in 14 locations across the UK:

- **England:** London (x2), Leicester, Taunton, Blackpool, Cambridge, Hull
- **Wales:** Cardiff, Llandudno and Aberystwyth
- **Scotland:** Glasgow, Livingston and Inverness
- **Northern Ireland:** Belfast and Enniskillen.

³ See http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/dqf/pdf/dqf_detailedproposals.pdf

Twelve of the workshops involved around 20 participants at each, and three smaller workshops comprised around ten participants at each (291 participants in total). Fieldwork was conducted between late May and July 2011.

While it is not appropriate to 'count' participants in qualitative research (which aims to recruit a range of views and understand what underpins these views), these findings are based on a sizable qualitative sample and can be considered reliable for identifying the range of views on the topic. This number and size of the events was optimised to ensure participants reflected the UK as a whole, while recognising diminishing returns of conducting additional sessions.

It was essential to sample and recruit participants in such a way that the research covered a broad cross-section of the public at each of the events. Recruitment was conducted via quota sampling to ensure that the participants who attended the workshops reflected the UK population. The quotas were based on demographic criteria (age, gender, social grade and ethnicity), use of BBC services and attitudes to the BBC.

The workshops were up to four hours in length. Participants were presented with the background and context for DQF and the licence fee settlement, followed by details of specific changes to BBC content and services that were being considered. They then had the opportunity to give their initial reactions to the potential DQF proposals; talk through their views of each in more detail; hear other participants' points of view; explain their perceptions of the proposals overall; and discuss key criteria that should be used when making decisions about changes to BBC output.

The research investigated public views on reductions to content and services that the BBC was considering as part of DQF; it did not look at the ideas for new investment in *Delivering Quality First*. During the fieldwork period, the DQF proposals continued to evolve and this was reflected in the explanations given to participants and the materials used during the discussions. However, most of the proposals remained broadly consistent across all the workshops.

4. Overall views of the proposals

4.1 Reaction to the proposals

Participants felt that the package of DQF proposals presented was broadly acceptable overall. They considered the proposals a reasonable response in light of the licence fee settlement.

“The proposals seem to be very sensible and clearly a lot of thought has gone into them.”

This general acceptance of the proposals should not be interpreted as enthusiastic support. Most participants were not in favour of cuts to BBC programmes and services *per se*. Instead, they recognised that the licence fee settlement means everyone had to lose *something*. Recognising this, participants said they would live with the changes, albeit reluctantly for proposals they objected to most strongly.

“We’re in a recession and everyone’s making cuts – we live in it day-to-day – so the BBC has to make cuts, too.”

“No one really likes cuts, but if you have to, these seem pretty fair.”

Participants also wanted reassurance that the BBC had taken significant steps to control costs before proposing reductions to content and services.

4.2 What caused participants to object?

Where specific objections were raised, these were usually from a ‘consumer’ rather than a ‘citizen’ perspective.

Consumer perspective

As most participants analysed the proposals as ‘consumers’ (i.e. viewers/listeners of the services), the strongest – and initial – objections were typically to reductions or changes to content and services that they said they used personally. They were often unconcerned if a proposal had no direct impact on them.

“The thing I disagree with most is the repeats on Radio 4 but that is because that is what I listen to. There are already quite a few repeats...I feel strongly about it.”

“BBC Three have produced a lot of shows that got big...it brings in good comedy that mightn’t be shown on BBC One or BBC Two.”

Participants had some reservations when they felt proposals were unfair or disproportionate. This could either be because a particular service or programme type faced a relatively larger cut, or because participants thought a proposal would affect a specific group unfairly.

Linked to this, concerns were also more likely to be raised if participants did not feel a good alternative existed. There was no broad consensus about what constituted a good alternative, with some participants offering Channel 4 documentaries, ITV entertainment shows and US

dramas as examples, while in each of these cases others disagreed. Almost all participants said that they were unwilling to pay other providers to watch content and services currently provided by the BBC.

Citizen perspective

A few participants did think as 'citizens' (i.e. thinking about the wider impact on society), worrying about the effect of proposals on other people or groups in the UK. These concerns were more acute when proposals were thought to impact on national or regional identity. Protecting news coverage, maintaining high quality content the BBC was thought to do best, and providing some niche services were all seen as important priorities by this group. However, even the minority of participants who did take a citizen perspective on some specific proposals thought like consumers most of the time.

4.3 Other key themes from the discussions

As well as overall reactions to the proposals, a number of broad themes emerged from the discussions that help provide context for the DQF process:

- Most participants said the BBC should protect content used and valued by the majority because everyone pays the licence fee, though a persuasive and eloquent minority – often the users of the more niche services – argued strongly for protecting them. Once raised, many accepted that the BBC is not just about getting the biggest audiences. It became clear that participants felt it was important to protect both 'popular' and 'niche' services, and they struggled to decide which was more important as they discussed the proposals.

“Even though we don’t really know what BBC Four does... listening to these guys saying how good it is made us rethink.”

- The BBC was seen by most participants as being different from other broadcasters, although they struggled to articulate why or what this means in practice. For many, the key differences were the perceived quality of content the BBC produces and pride in the BBC's worldwide reputation. Participants felt it was important to consider how these features of the BBC can be protected and built on when making decisions about changes to content and services.

“There are some things the BBC just does very well... like the big dramas they do.”

- Participants had a fairly sophisticated debate about an increase in the number of repeats on BBC television where less new content would be produced. Many valued opportunities to 'catch up' via repeats, but argued that repeats should be programmes people want to watch again, on at a convenient time for them and should not reach an unacceptably high level.
- The question of whether the BBC should maintain all its services was not tested during the discussions as it was not a formal proposal. Where raised by participants, most of those suggesting this approach to making savings had no specific service in mind or, if they did, would cite a service that they did not use themselves. In cases when specific suggestions were made, advocates of the relevant service tended to disagree strongly and most of the group would consequently come to oppose the specific suggestion made.

5. How participants make decisions about proposals

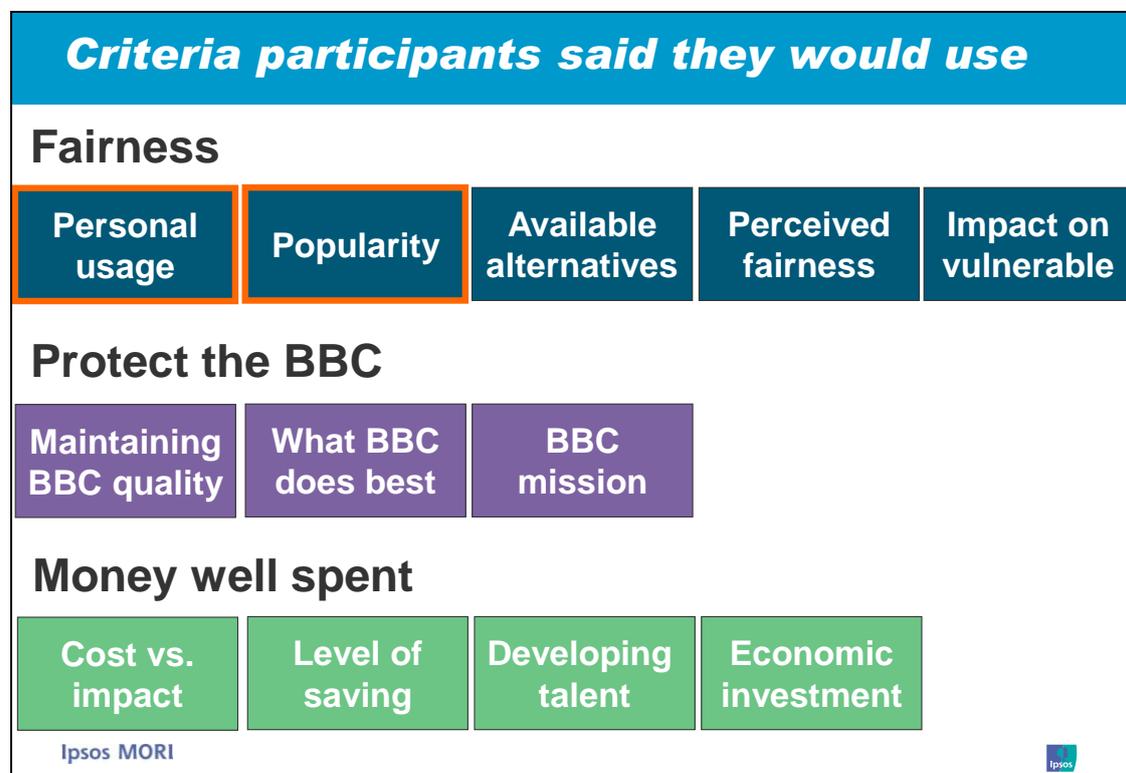
In addition to ascertaining feedback on the specific DQF proposals, the research sought to determine the broader principles that people feel should guide decisions when making changes to BBC content and services. From the discussions, two types of criteria emerged:

1. **Stated criteria** – These are the factors participants said were important to take into account when they were asked to identify the criteria on which decisions should be made about reductions to BBC output. Participants often struggled to articulate their thought processes and develop their stated criteria, particularly when they did not have a strong opinion about proposals
2. **Implied criteria** – These reflect the reasoning participants actually used in practice when they discussed and evaluated specific proposals themselves.

The criteria themselves are not necessarily different between the two categories, but the relative weight of the criteria, and also how they were applied, can vary between what is stated and what can be implied from analysing the discussions.

5.1 Stated criteria

When participants were asked directly about the criteria that should be used in decisions about changes to BBC output, three core areas emerged – **Fairness**, **Protect the BBC** and **Money well spent**. The chart shows these categories and the different elements that make up each one.



The most commonly cited category was **Fairness**. Within this, the criteria most often stated were participants' own usage of a piece of output and the popularity of a particular programme

or service in the population overall (based on audience size). In fact, while many participants were reticent to suggest personal preference was driving their views, in reality this was the most important criterion used by nearly everyone. For proposals to be perceived as fair, most participants expected them to be “fair to me” (i.e. not disproportionately affecting their personal usage) and also fair to most people (i.e. protecting what most people watch/listen to/use) and fair to services (i.e. not disproportionately reducing a genre or service).

These criteria of personal usage and popularity form part of a broader narrative around fairness that also includes how fair the proposal was thought to be in the context of the reductions overall, whether alternative content is available and the impact of the proposal on vulnerable groups.

In the second category – **Protect the BBC** – criteria included making sure the quality of BBC content was protected. Also cited were maintaining what the BBC stands for and focusing on what it does best. Definitions of what the BBC does best varied to some degree based on personal preference, though examples included news and current affairs, drama, documentaries, comedy, sport and entertainment. Also seen as an important criterion by some was ensuring proposals were consistent with the BBC’s mission to inform, educate and entertain (which was explained to participants earlier in the workshops, though was also raised spontaneously by some).

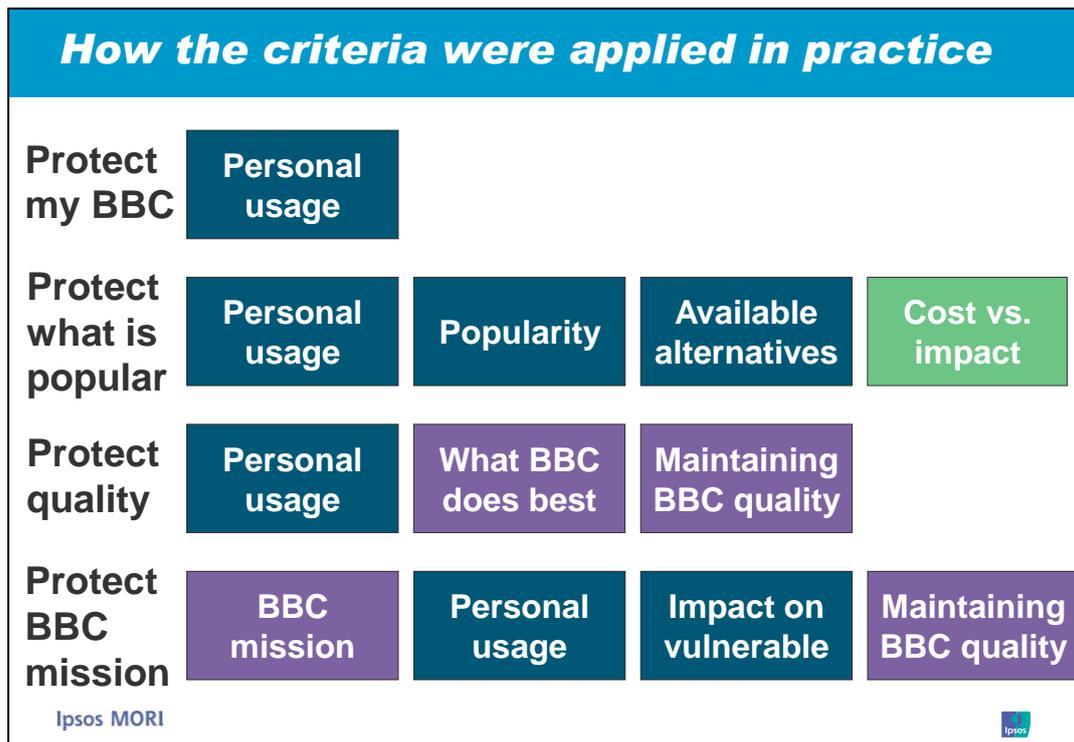
Finally, **Money well spent** comprised four criteria. Taking into consideration cost and impact was the most commonly cited in this category. In particular, if a proposal is associated with a small cost saving but has an apparently large impact, it was judged less acceptable, whereas a large cost saving with a smaller perceived impact was more acceptable. A few participants said decisions should be based on the absolute level of saving independent of the perceived impact. This was particularly important for some of the largest savings (e.g., from sport rights). In addition, some participants felt that it was necessary to consider the extent to which proposals would affect the development of new talent, and some raised the potential economic impact on their region/nation in terms of investment and jobs.

5.2 Implied criteria

The above discussion sets out the factors that participants stated when asked specifically to identify the criteria that should be used when making decisions about changes to BBC output. While participants cited a range of criteria that should be applied, the particular criteria they personally used came to the fore during discussions as they gave their own opinion on the proposals. These ‘implied criteria’ reflect the reasoning participants used when they evaluated specific proposals themselves.

The chart below shows four typologies of different approaches to evaluating proposals that were developed based on analysis of what participants said as they gave their own reaction to each proposal: **Protect my BBC**, **Protect what is popular**, **Protect quality** and **Protect the BBC mission**. The chart also shows the different elements that make up each typology. Personal usage, for example, was evident in each of the four typologies and was the lead criterion in three of the four. The colour of the element relates back to the colours of the stated criteria in the previous section so it is possible to track how the criteria that participants stated *should be used* relate to those that they *used in practice themselves* to evaluate the proposals.

The first two typologies, **Protect my BBC** and **Protect what is popular**, were the most common, with a limited number of participants falling into the latter categories of **Protect quality** and **Protect the BBC mission**.



It is worth noting that not all participants fit these groups exactly, but that they are distinct approaches that appeared across the research.

The main characteristics of each of these groups were as follows:

- Participants in the **Protect my BBC** group would rationalise their response to a proposal with reference to other considerations, but it was clear that their personal usage dominated how they viewed the proposals. Many participants did not move beyond personal usage to consider other criteria.
- The **Protect what is popular** typology was also common. These participants also put personal preference first, but where they had no strong views about a proposal because it did not affect them directly, they would then consider the popularity of the content with people overall (in terms of audience size), availability of alternatives and, in some instances, whether the cost saving justified the impact of the change.
- Fewer participants fell into the **Protect quality** group. These participants again put personal preference first, but then concentrated on ensuring that the BBC protected what it does best and maintained quality as its main priorities. For example, news and current affairs, drama, documentaries and comedy might be protected by this group.
- Finally, the **Protect BBC mission** group appeared to know more about the BBC's remit, making them different from other participants. For them, the BBC's mission was just as important as personal preference, as well as protecting the content that fulfilled particular interests (although, for many in this group, the two criteria overlapped as they were more likely to be viewers of niche programmes). The extent to which proposals affect vulnerable groups and maintaining quality were also important to this group.

Taking together the criteria that participants stated *should* be used to make decisions about changes to BBC output and the criteria they *used in practice themselves* to evaluate the proposals, fairness and maintaining the quality of BBC content emerge as the most important factors overall.

6. Views of specific proposals

The research probed reaction to specific proposals that were being considered as part of DQF. The study investigated response to the material reductions that the BBC was contemplating; it did not look into the ideas for new investment in *Delivering Quality First*⁴. Participants were given an overview of the specific proposal and an indication of the cost saving. For the details on each proposal and the cost saving incurred, please refer to the BBC's *Delivering Quality First* publication. The research was part of an iterative process that was used to inform thinking as the DQF proposals took shape – where aspects of the proposal as explained to participants were at an early stage and differ significantly from what is set out in *Delivering Quality First*, this is highlighted in the text.

Based on participants' views, the proposals were grouped into three categories according to the type of feedback they generated.

6.1 Broadly acceptable proposals

The first category we developed was proposals that were considered broadly acceptable by most participants with only a few concerns raised. Care was taken to ensure each workshop included representatives of each service affected. However, this work may not have picked up small pockets of very strong feeling on particular content or services.

The proposals placed in the '**broadly acceptable**' category were (in no particular order):

- **Changes to late-night TV on BBC One and Two.** This proposal to make a reduction in the hours of new programming shown post 22:35 was generally seen as more acceptable than making changes during peak viewing times. As fewer people watch late at night, this was not seen as a priority part of the schedule by participants. This was, therefore, predominantly a consumer-driven view based on personal usage. The few concerns that were raised were expressed by people who make use of late-night programming.
- **Reduction in the budgets of BBC network radio stations.** These proposals were broadly accepted, including by listeners, because the type of suggested changes to content to meet the cost savings were seen as 'fair' across different stations and not particularly controversial. Some specific objections were raised by listeners, including a move to have single sports commentators on Five Live (because this would eliminate banter and make commentary less interesting) and a small number of objections by listeners to the idea of any Radio 4 cuts (although the changes were seen to be relatively small).
- **Reduction in the budgets of BBC digital radio stations.** There was lower usage of these radio services, meaning that many were unconcerned about the proposals from a consumer perspective. Among users, objections were also limited because the specific changes being suggested to content to generate the cost savings were not viewed as controversial. A few participants who were not listeners raised concerns about the Asian Network, largely because they were unsure what exactly the changes would involve and whether they would have a disproportionate impact as they did not know what alternatives existed. That said, others questioned whether the BBC should provide this service and therefore welcomed the budget cut, and would have accepted a further reduction.

⁴ http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/dqf/pdf/dqf_detailedproposals.pdf

- **Not replacing Radio 4 Long Wave (LW) transmitters.** Participants accepted that LW technology is out-dated and expensive to maintain. However, they wanted reassurance that no one would lose all access to Radio 4 if the proposal went ahead (including people out at sea for the Shipping Forecast). There were concerns from a small minority about the programming specific to Radio 4 LW being discontinued (e.g., the religious services and especially Test Match Special), particularly if these would not be available elsewhere. [The early ideas tested in the research did not specify that this content would be moved to another BBC service if the LW transmitters ceased to operate.]
- **Standardising BBC Red Button by reducing the number of streams in satellite and cable homes to one to match the offer in Freeview homes.** Many participants said that they did not use BBC Red Button services and were not aware that additional Red Button streams were available in satellite and cable homes compared with Freeview homes. While views among non-users of the service were not strong, the fairness of having one standardised service for all justified the change for many. Some participants felt this could be a backwards step because there are people who find this a useful service that gives them more control. Indeed, those who currently use multiple streams were concerned about reduced choice, though this was sometimes linked with a perception that the subscription fees they paid for satellite and cable television entitled them to an enhanced service.

6.2 Proposals opposed by a vocal minority

The second category we developed was for proposals that had a **vocal minority who opposed the change**. This category included (in no particular order):

- **Reduction in BBC Three's budget.** Concern was mainly raised by young BBC Three viewers who felt this was the main service that the BBC provided for them. Most participants who were not familiar with BBC Three were not concerned about the proposal. However, a number who were not viewers of the channel themselves did raise objections from a citizen perspective about this proposal as they were keen to preserve something distinctive for younger audiences. There were also some worries – from BBC Three viewers and participants more generally – that a budget reduction would limit the ability of BBC Three to find and develop new talent and therefore reduce the BBC's innovation, especially in comedy. [The early ideas tested in the research did not specify that BBC Three would gain a specific remit to develop talent and new content that could move to BBC One. Further, comedy rather than drama was cited as a genre that could reduce on the channel.]
- **Less overlap between BBC Two and BBC Four; reduction in BBC Four's budget.** This was considered broadly acceptable by those who do not watch BBC Four, and also by some BBC Four viewers with the caveat that the content they value moved from BBC Four to BBC Two. Indeed, there was some support if the proposal would mean programmes were opened to a wider audience by moving to BBC Two. However, BBC Four advocates strongly defended the channel for its high quality content and were concerned if the size of the potential budget cut was disproportionately higher than the budget reduction to other services. Ensuring any budget cut was on a par with that to be experienced by other BBC television channels was also voiced by some non-viewers of BBC Four. [The early ideas tested in the research involved BBC Two focusing on factual output, drama and comedy and BBC Four focusing on arts and cultural programming. As a result, the level of budget reduction for BBC Four tested in the research was at a higher level than other BBC television channels. The budget reduction for BBC Four is now similar to BBC Three – please refer to the BBC's *Delivering Quality First* publication for the finalised proposals.]
- **Reduction in the current affairs and political programming with fewer viewers and focus on current affairs and political titles watched by larger audiences.** There was some principled concern from a citizen point of view from a small number because they felt current affairs and political coverage is a key BBC strength and should be protected. However, for most participants, because they knew key current affairs and

politics programmes would be protected, the proposal to reduce less familiar and less watched titles was acceptable in the context of the cuts overall.

- **Reduction in the BBC News Channel's budget.** As with current affairs and political coverage, a minority was concerned about any cuts to an area they saw as a key BBC strength, particularly if the number of stories covered, especially international reports, was reduced significantly. However, most had no particular objections to the proposal.
- **Removal of BBC Radio from digital television.** This was seen as a justifiable cut from a citizen perspective by the majority, provided no one loses access to a service completely. There were some objections from a consumer perspective, with those who listened to BBC radio on digital television reluctant to see this ended as it offered them convenience if they did not have DAB radio or better sound quality through their television. Whilst some non-listeners were surprised that radio was available through digital television and questioned this as radio does not have a visual element, some of those who did listen felt that television is becoming integral to entertainment and therefore saw removing radio stations as a backward step. [The removal of specific BBC radio stations from digital television will only become a proposal if this capacity on digital television is needed for another purpose. See the BBC's *Delivering Quality First* publication.]

6.3 Proposals that divided views

The last category of proposals was those that **divided views** and caused debate with both support and opposition for the proposal. These were (in no particular order):

- **Changes to daytime on BBC One and Two.** BBC One becoming the lead daytime service showing new content was not controversial with participants, but there were some concerns about increased repeats on BBC Two. Participants felt this could be mitigated to some extent if repeats are of good quality programmes or give catch-up opportunities for the best new content. The idea of organising the repeats into themed slots on BBC Two was generally not contentious, and there was no objection to children's programming only being shown on dedicated channels (CBeebies and CBBC) after digital switchover is completed when everyone will have access to these services. [In the research, the repeats of BBC Two during daytime were described as themed slots of factual entertainment programming and some repeats of peak-time programming from BBC One. Please refer to the BBC's *Delivering Quality First* publication for the finalised proposals for BBC Two daytime.]
- **Reduction in highest-cost programming in peak time on BBC One.** Many found this proposal for a reduction in new programming on BBC One during peak-time acceptable because of the very small loss of programme minutes. As the reduction was perceived to be limited, these participants expected that they would not notice the changes. By contrast, others argued that peak-time content serves a large audience and is what the BBC does best, making them reluctant to see any reduction, especially if it meant a potentially popular programme would not be made.
- **Reduction in the BBC's budget for entertainment.** Some participants pointed out that this is the most popular content and a key BBC strength that should be protected, while others argued that other broadcasters provide suitable alternative programming. Objections to this proposal were largely from a consumer perspective, based on whether participants felt the changes would mean a programme they enjoyed watching would be lost.
- **Reduction in the BBC sports budget.** This was the most divisive proposal, with views often dependent on the sport being discussed. Some concern was also voiced about reducing minority sports in case these were not picked up by other channels. Opinion on this proposal was, however, largely driven by personal usage. Some were supportive of making significant reductions because they do not watch sport and could not

understand how the high costs of sports rights could be justified, or how protecting sports coverage fits with the BBC remit. On the other hand, advocates of sport on the BBC adamantly disagreed, and they strongly expressed reasons for protecting sport. These included the perception that they had already lost too much sport off the BBC; because they preferred the quality of BBC coverage to other broadcasters and appreciated that coverage was not interrupted by commercial breaks; and because some sport – particularly national events – must be accessible to all, preferably on the BBC.

It is worth noting that none of the proposals was opposed by a majority of participants.

7. Views on proposals about content in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in the regions of England

The research also probed reaction to proposals about content specific to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and to the regions of England. For the detail of these proposals and the cost saving incurred, please refer to the BBC's *Delivering Quality First* publication⁵.

7.1 Proposals about content specific to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Overall, participants in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had very similar priorities to participants in England, and the proposals affecting Network programming dominated the discussion in all workshops.

As with the potential Network changes, most participants generally took a consumer perspective when evaluating proposals on changes to content specific to their nation, reflecting on how it would affect their own viewing and listening.

Although a minority view, principled opposition from a citizen perspective to reductions was more common for nations-specific proposals than for Network proposals. Some were opposed to any cuts in nations-specific content, and others were opposed if reductions would be disproportionate compared with the Network proposals or were perceived to lead to a disproportionate impact. Where concern was raised, participants were keen to protect national culture and identity, and language in Wales, and were particularly concerned if the content was not thought to be available elsewhere. However, most participants recognised the need to make some reductions to nations-specific content as part of the package of proposals.

In terms of the detail of the potential changes, participants in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland welcomed the fact that their nation's news was being protected from reductions. Further, as long as the content they valued continued, participants generally had no particular preference about whether it was shown on BBC One or BBC Two. They were keen that local sport be preserved and expressed concern if they felt it would be unduly affected, especially across both television and radio. There was also specific feedback based on the proposals in each of the nations:

- In **Wales**, changes to Welsh language programming were, with a few exceptions, more contentious than changes to content for Wales in English. Those who did not speak Welsh or who did not consume such output felt uncomfortable commenting on this programming. This suggests that participants felt this was a sensitive area and while they might not personally feel strongly about the proposals, they expected others could. The biggest concerns expressed related to preserving Welsh identity, culture and language, although this seemed to be a reaction to any suggestion of cuts *per se*, and not necessarily related to the detail of the specific proposals.
- Most participants in **Scotland** were willing to accept some reductions in BBC Scotland's output across television and radio as part of the package of wider reductions, though there was somewhat more concern outside Glasgow and Edinburgh in case

⁵ http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/dqf/pdf/dqf_detailedproposals.pdf

representation of areas outside the Central Belt was disproportionately affected. Where voiced, specific concerns about changes to television content for Scotland were cited mostly from a consumer perspective, based on personal viewing preferences. Some, however, were opposed in principle to cuts to BBC Scotland services. This was a small minority of participants, but these views were strongly held, and often linked to devolution in Scotland. There were also concerns that any reduction in BBC Radio Scotland's budget should be proportionate to reductions in BBC network radio station budgets.

- In **Northern Ireland**, some reductions were seen as inevitable in the context of wider cost savings. Participants tended to view the proposals more from a consumer perspective, with principled opposition less common than in Wales and Scotland. However, as consumers, while they could accept the changes, there was still a reluctance to see a reduction in Northern Ireland-specific television programming because they valued this content and felt the quality of the dramas and documentaries made specifically for Northern Ireland had improved in recent years. There were few concerns about the proposals for BBC Radio Ulster/Foyle as the suggested changes to content to meet the cost savings were regarded as sensible and well thought through.

7.2 Proposals about content specific to the regions of England

Participants in England discussed proposed changes to content on BBC television and radio that is specific to the regions of England.

These proposals were not among the most contentious discussed during the workshops. Reaction was mainly dependent on whether participants consumed the content, and if they did not, there was relatively little principled objection.

On television, the proposal that local current affairs programming would cover larger regions in England was not controversial. On English local radio, reaction to the proposal to share content across radio stations during non-peak parts of the day was dependent on whether participants used the service. Keeping content local in the peak listening hours of breakfast, morning and drivetime was considered important, and listeners welcomed that this was reflected in the proposals.

In terms of the content sharing times, response was based on the degree to which there was a sense of identity with areas with which programming would be shared. Where listeners felt that there was a link between areas, sharing content was acceptable, but there was more concern if there was less of a feeling of regional identity.

As regards moving specific English local radio stations from Medium Wave (MW), there was no substantial objection as long as listeners could still tune in on other platforms. Where MW was used to broadcast alternative local sports coverage to that aired on FM, a small number of sports enthusiasts did not like to lose this choice, though others (who generally did not use MW) felt local sports coverage was available elsewhere (in newspapers and online) and so were less concerned.