Cover image
Mrs Brown's Boys: this BBC Scotland/RTE co-production was one of the most successful programmes of the year.
The Council welcomed significant progress with BBC ALBA, the audience for which has doubled since it became available on Freeview.

The BBC Audience Councils advise the BBC Trust on how well the BBC is delivering its public purposes and serving licence payers across the UK. The four Councils – serving Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland – provide an independent assessment of audience expectations and issues.

Members of Audience Council Scotland highlighted four key issues during the year: the BBC’s continuing importance as a benchmark of quality in the UK media; a need for better representation of the regions of Scotland, and of Scotland to the UK; the challenges posed by the coming referendum; and the continuing issue of finding the right balance between Scottish news and news which only affects other parts of the UK.

Audience engagement focused on BBC Radio Scotland and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal, the BBC News and Parliament channels and the BBC Asian Network. The Council welcomed progress with BBC ALBA, the audience for which doubled since it became available on Freeview; and noted the continuing growth of network TV made in Scotland, and some improvement in portrayal of Scotland on the networks. Members commended a year of strong journalism and welcomed innovations like the regional round-up on Reporting Scotland, but felt there was still scope to improve the balance between Scottish and England-only news items. The Council will continue to monitor audience views and advise the Trust in the year ahead.

Bill Matthews
Trust member for Scotland and Chair of Audience Council Scotland
Universality of access to BBC services

The Council has been concerned about access to BBC services by those sections of the audience unable to receive them. Members welcomed the advent of BBC ALBA in the evenings on Freeview and cable from June 2011 and the resulting improvement in access to the service. Reach to the service has increased substantially. The Council had had particular concerns about the quality and extent of Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) coverage in Scotland. Members welcomed the retention of three BBC digital radio services on Freeview in Scotland (BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC 1Xtra and BBC 6Music) and noted the possibility that advances in transmission technology may allow for the return of others at some point in the future.

The Audience Council Scotland (ACS) notes that target coverage for DAB in Scotland is lower than that for the UK as a whole. Members recognise the geographical problems faced by DAB roll-out in less populated areas but believe that a customised solution should be developed – perhaps involving investment in FM or Freeview – to ensure that all BBC services become universally available on at least one platform. Members welcomed the decision to retain medium wave broadcasts in Scotland.

Councils had asked to see a coherent UK-wide strategy on the roll-out of nations and regions programming in high definition (HD), and the proposals for Delivering Quality First (DQF) included further thinking on this topic. Members acknowledged the focus on services which deliver the greatest value to the greatest number, but believe this must be balanced against an equal need to provide services which resonate in the UK’s devolved nations.
Members were concerned at the possibility that opt-out programmes would not be carried on BBC Two HD and have asked for assurances that they continue on standard definition until a satisfactory solution is found. In an age of devolution, BBC Two’s role as a ‘knowledge-building’ channel gives it specific responsibilities within Scotland as well as across the UK. Members emphasised that the BBC Two opt-outs are a key part of Scotland’s national dialogue.

**Stimulating citizenship and civil society**

The ACS had said it would like to see deeper analysis and a stronger sense of challenge in coverage of nations’ issues, and a response to the problem of finding the right balance of coverage between Scottish news and news that only affects other areas of the UK. During the year, members noted the range of vigorous investigative journalism provided by BBC Scotland on topics from sectarianism in football to allegations of corruption at Edinburgh City Council. BBC Scotland continued to provide opportunities for informed debate on current issues such as Call Kaye and Brian Taylor’s Big Debate on BBC Radio Scotland.

The Council had raised the issue of news coverage with the Trust, following Trust research demonstrating a continued bias in some areas of network news towards stories about England. Following a review, the Executive proposed to introduce a short regional round-up on Reporting Scotland, develop news opt-outs on BBC Radio Scotland and, on network news, to improve policy comparisons between England and the devolved nations and increase the role of Scottish correspondents. Members welcomed the regional round-up initiative and noted the improvement in quality scores among the audience; however, members believe that progress in implementing a broader strategy to address these issues has been slow. Members are concerned that the initiatives are, in themselves, insufficient to ensure that BBC News is reflecting contemporary Scotland as well as it could. Audiences value the quality of BBC News, but are ambitious for it to reflect Scotland’s regions more fully, and keep pace with contemporary developments in Scottish politics and society. Members welcomed the engagement of the Trust’s Audiences and Performance Committee with the issues raised in the review.

I. Trustee for Scotland in Dundee.
2. Consultative event on BBC Asian Network.
3. Trustee for Scotland at audience event in Glasgow.
Portrayal and network supply
The Councils had asked the Trust to continue to challenge the Executive to produce tangible enhancements to the full, authentic and accurate portrayal of different communities and identities across the UK.

A range of BBC Scotland factual programmes featured on the UK networks including: The Making of Scotland’s Landscapes, The Scheme, Girls Behind Bars and RBS: Inside the Bank That Ran Out of Money. New BBC Scotland comedies Burnistoun and Gary: Tank Commander appeared on BBC Two and BBC Three respectively. Members felt that comedy could be particularly effective in improving portrayal and representation, especially for parts of Scotland beyond the central belt. Drama is another genre key in driving perceptions of portrayal and members noted the success of BBC Scotland’s The Field of Blood on BBC One. However, the Council feels that progress in developing network television drama which offers full and authentic representation of Scotland has been slow.

The Council welcomed the continuing growth during the year of network television made in Scotland and believes it remains a priority to instigate a network supply process for radio. Members believe this would contribute significantly to new talent development and improved representation of Scotland on the BBC radio networks.

Licence fee settlement
The Councils wanted to ensure that value for money was pursued fairly for all audiences as difficult decisions were made as a result of the licence fee settlement. The ACS commented on the work undertaken during the year to adjust BBC budgets to the reduced funding available. Members believe that the key audience issues they have raised – portrayal of Scotland on the networks, regional coverage in Scotland, and the overall balance of news provision – can be addressed within the limits of the DQF settlement.
Quality and distinctiveness
The Councils had observed that audiences wished to see consistent standards of quality being met in both network and opt-out programmes. The ACS notes that opt-out programmes often receive lower levels of resourcing than the network equivalents with which viewers compare them. Members believe that in general, BBC Scotland opt-outs set standards for broadcasting in Scotland, and meet or exceed the standards of network programmes.

Members noted that the BBC Scotland/RTE series Mrs Brown’s Boys commissioned for network and broadcast in early 2012 received one of the highest audience appreciation scores ever recorded by a BBC comedy programme.

BBC ALBA
The ACS noted audience appreciation of the quality of BBC ALBA content, and some concerns about how it can be maintained in the longer term if the level of originations falls as the inherited programme stock is depleted. The Council welcomes the significant increase in audiences for BBC ALBA achieved in the past year but believes that the long-term resourcing of the service remains a priority for the two partners, the BBC and MG Alba, who share the management of the service.

BBC content for audiences in Scotland
The ACS’s submissions to the BBC Radio 3, 4 and 7 and the nations’ radio reviews highlighted that there is a wealth of BBC content scattered across BBC radio schedules that is culturally relevant to audiences in Scotland. The Council suggested that the Trust ask the Executive to consider how best to commission, schedule and distribute such content to maximise its reach, impact and public value for audiences in Scotland, particularly in the light of the constraints of the licence fee settlement.

Members welcome the action point in the review for BBC radio to co-commission more content, exploring common themes, to use more BBC Radio Scotland content on the UK networks, and to consider whether more programmes made for BBC Radio 4 in Scotland could also be broadcast by BBC Radio Scotland.
In addition to its regular monthly meetings, the Council held audience engagement events across Scotland, consulted other available sources of audience feedback and incorporated them into its advice to the Trust.

There were consultative events in Glasgow and Ullapool on BBC services for audiences in Scotland, and in Dundee on the BBC Asian Network. For the service reviews of the BBC News and Parliament channels there was an audience event in Glasgow and a stakeholder event in Edinburgh. Stakeholder meetings were held in Glasgow in October on the creativity public purpose and in December on the DQF proposals. During the year, the Council noted the final report on the nations’ radio service review and responded to the reviews of BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC News Channel, BBC Parliament, the DQF proposals and the BBC Asian Network. The Council also submitted comments to the Trust’s Audiences and Performance Committee on the Executive review of news provision for audiences in Scotland.

Members attended joint Council events on the reviews of BBC Radio 5 Live and the News and Parliament channels. The Council’s submissions to the service reviews and DQF are available at www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/who_we_are/audience_councils/scotland/your_voice.html

1. Council member Jamie Kinlochan at an audience event in Glasgow.
2. Trustee for Scotland in conversation with the BBC Director-General.
Other issues
Members considered audience research undertaken by the BBC Trust and the BBC Executive and monitored the logs of audience comments made to the BBC. Members discussed issues of concern to audiences at their meetings and, where appropriate, relayed advice to the Trust.
There was discussion of digital switchover in Central Scotland prior to completion of the process in Scotland in July 2011. The Council welcomed the Trust’s conclusions on the Science Impartiality Review, but noted that content for the devolved nations was excluded from the review and suggested that the Executive in Scotland be asked to report on how the recommendations would be implemented in Scotland. In September, members heard a progress report on the objectives set by the Scottish Government’s Broadcast Working Group and concluded that while network production targets were welcome, the ultimate objective should be the development of a strong indigenous creative sector in Scotland.

Following the carriage of BBC ALBA on Freeview from June, members raised the issue of the loss of some network radio on Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) with the Trust and agreed to continue to monitor the level of audience comment about the loss. Following discussion on universality of access in February, members advised Trustees that low levels of broadband take-up/availability affected the BBC’s ability to reach significant sections of the audience in Scotland. There was discussion of the issues arising from the Executive news review throughout the year. Latterly, there was consideration of the challenges posed for the BBC by the coverage of the planned independence referendum.
Sustaining citizenship
It was a year when the independence of BBC journalism was tested at home and abroad by a number of stories which needed unusually sensitive coverage to maintain audience perceptions of impartiality. There was informative and courageous reporting on the continuing political developments in the Middle East, especially the fighting in Libya where correspondents operated in circumstances of great personal risk because of the involvement of UK forces in policing a no-fly zone.

As before, the Council noted that, for some sections of the audience, BBC coverage did not always strike the right balance between Western and non-Western perspectives. But members welcomed original journalism and features during the year which provided context for events in the Middle East from How Facebook Changed the World: The Arab Spring to The Life of Muhammad and Secret Pakistan on recent relations between Pakistan and the West, all on BBC Two.

BBC Radio nan Gàidheal’s ability to provide a mixture of international, national and local news was particularly commended and special mention was made of the fact that the network had native Gaelic speakers in many of the parts of the world who were able to comment authoritatively on international affairs.

In covering the allegations of phone hacking at the News of the World, the BBC reported on a crisis at an organisation known as a major competitor. The Council believed an objective approach was maintained throughout, while undertaking – through a series of scoops – original journalism in the public interest. Coverage of the Leveson Inquiry into media ethics ordered in the wake of the allegations was thorough but not excessive.

There was comprehensive coverage of the Scottish election in May 2011 on BBC Scotland television, BBC ALBA, BBC Radio Scotland, BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and
online. In the aftermath of the historic result, there was analysis of the implications on network and Scottish services.

When the debate on a referendum on Scotland’s future got under way early in 2012, the BBC responded quickly with coverage across all the main BBC outlets and a special debate screened for audiences in Scotland. Members commended coverage on BBC Scotland and the contribution made by BBC Scotland correspondents to network bulletins. Members suggested that the BBC should form a group to cover the handling of issues arising from the debate on the future of the UK, to ensure that standards of impartiality were maintained on both network and local programming.

Members noted that there was strong investigative journalism from BBC Scotland across a range of topics from the Edinburgh tram project to the environmental record of the Scottish salmon farming industry. Coverage of football ranged from sectarianism to the financial affairs of Rangers FC in *Rangers – the Inside Story* on what turned out to be one of the biggest Scottish stories of the year. There was debate on these sometimes contentious topics on BBC Radio Scotland and in March, the future of Scottish football was examined in a special documentary and discussed in a live studio debate on BBC One Scotland.

There was engaging programming on a range of topical issues from the collapse of the Royal Bank of Scotland in *RBS: The Bank That Ran Out of Money* and in *High School*, a year in the life of Europe’s largest school, Holyrood Secondary in South Glasgow (both on BBC One) to the day-to-day running of the London Underground in *The Tube* (BBC Two). Members noted the citizenship value of high quality factual content from Scotland for audiences in Scotland, and when transferred to the UK networks, for audiences throughout the UK.

Accuracy is a key quality in BBC journalism and the different structures and policies in the UK’s devolved administrations need to be accurately described on network news programmes so that audiences in the different parts of the UK are not misinformed. Members have noted considerable progress since the issue was highlighted in the Trust’s Nations Impartiality Review in 2008. However, they believe there is a need for constant vigilance on accuracy, and scope for further improvement in the number of news items which make a comparison between policies in the four nations of the UK. Members also highlighted a continuing problem with the balance of Scottish news and news which only affects other parts of the UK.
Promoting learning
Opportunities for learning and personal development were provided across the schedules and on a wide range of topics from science and health to technology and the arts. Outlets ranged from Frozen Planet and The Culture Show on BBC Two, which is produced in part in Scotland, to series like BBC One’s The Great British Countryside on geology and the landscape, themed approaches to a topic like Mixed Race Season on BBC Two or Spirit of Schubert on BBC Radio 3, and in BBC Scotland’s After Life, an innovative study of the science of decay. Series like Waterloo Road and River City are effective vehicles for raising viewers’ awareness of important social issues like treating addiction, or supporting people who are living with dementia.

There was further provision of resources to support formal education. The popular Bitesize Scotland resource was reorganised to prepare for the introduction of the new Curriculum for Excellence and there was new content for Higher English texts like Sunset Song and The Cone Gatherers. There was new provision for Scots language in Blethering Scots 2 and Scots Scuil. For those studying in Gaelic, there were new resources for language and science.

Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence
Trust research indicates that audiences across the UK would like to see more fresh and new ideas from the BBC. Members noted innovation across all genres and services during the year. There was original British drama like Prisoners’ Wives which cast light on a sometimes overlooked aspect of crime and the justice system, and original comedy like Getting On which offered an unusual perspective on life — and death — in a geriatric ward. There were innovative approaches to period drama on television in The Hour, The Scarlet and the Black and Great Expectations and further contemporary reimagining of a well-worn classic in three new episodes of Sherlock. BBC One Scotland’s adaptation of Denise Mina’s The Field of Blood transferred to BBC One network. However, members felt there was a need
for a more innovative approach to drama in Scotland, where a thriving literary and dramatic scene is not being reflected on BBC services as well as it could. BBC Radio 4 continued to innovate in drama, from a new commission The Lamp celebrating Scotland’s first public lending library, recorded on location in Perthshire, to the highly innovative scheduling of the modern Russian classic Life and Fate across all the network’s drama slots for a week.

Music programming on radio and television continued to support new musicians, performers and writers. The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra experimented with formats from a concert of film scores, Music to be Murdered By, to an hour-long video of highlights from Der Rosenkavalier captured by a single camera focussed on Chief Conductor Donald Runnicles, and with an optional commentary by him, both available on the BBC music website. During a week in March, BBC Radio 3 featured live concerts from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Scottish jazz talent old and new was featured on BBC outlets from legendary saxophonist Bobby Wellins on BBC Radio 3’s Jazz Library to the broadcast debut of jazz students from the Conservatoire on BBC Radio Scotland’s The Jazz House.

Members believe that licence payers also value programmes which cover new topics or old topics in a new way, without necessarily being innovative in format or style. Responsive, timely BBC Scotland content like BBC Scotland Investigates, The Clydebank Blitz, Castle Commando and Dr Fortune’s Australian Casebook met this need. BBC ALBA extends the range of cultural excellence celebrated on BBC services in Scotland, with programmes which ranged this year from comprehensive coverage of the Rockness contemporary music festival in June to a broadcast of a special concert from Inverness Cathedral in October to celebrate the centenary of the birth of the poet Sorley Maclean.

Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities
Some outstanding network programmes like BBC Two’s Jig: the Great Irish Dance-off – on the Irish Dancing World Championships held in Glasgow – offer rich, authentic portrayal of contemporary life in the UK with special relevance to aspects of Scottish life and culture. Editions of Panorama like What’s Fuelling Your Energy Bill explore issues with particular importance for Scotland like the cost of green energy. Much of BBC Scotland’s programming – from The Last Explorers to Gerry Rafferty: Right Down the Line – transferred to the network.
BBC Scotland provides high quality, round the year coverage of Scottish life and culture through its television and radio services. Among the year’s highlights was the series Watching Ourselves – 60 Years of Television in Scotland which celebrated the start of transmissions from Kirk O’Shotts in 1952 with a look at BBC Scotland’s television legacy in drama, sport, comedy, documentaries and news.

Trust research nevertheless indicates persistent audience concern about how Scotland is represented on network and BBC Scotland services. Members welcome a number of recent initiatives taken to address this from the network supply review to the introduction of a regional round-up on Reporting Scotland following the Executive news review. However, the Council is concerned at the overall lack of progress in addressing these issues: the significant increase in network production from Scotland in recent years has yet to produce a ‘stand-out’ Scottish property on the network, and the focus on providing a national service on BBC Scotland television and BBC Radio Scotland may mean that regional perspectives have been under-exposed.

Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK
At engagement events on BBC News, audiences consistently highlighted the value of the BBC’s global journalism. While acknowledging the distinctive contribution made by some other broadcasters, audiences stressed the value of the BBC’s independence and its ability to dig deeper into a story.

BBC Scotland contributed quality content which enhanced awareness of global issues in Rowing the Arctic in December and Wild About Pandas in February (both BBC One), while BBC ALBA programming offered valuable exposure to non-UK perspectives by featuring music from around the world and in Eòrpa, social issues from across Europe. There was live streaming of the 2011 World Pipe Band Championship in Glasgow to over 80 countries.
The Council continues to believe there should be a strategy in conjunction with BBC Worldwide to develop a drama brand from Scotland which would resonate with a global audience. Members noted audience appreciation of BBC Radio Scotland’s Zones, which offer rich resources of music and speech on Scottish life and culture to audiences around the world via overnight broadcasting on the web.

**Encouraging use of new communications technologies**

There was further expansion of the DAB transmitter network in Scotland, and it was noted that the Executive were modelling solutions to improve access to nations’ services on DAB. The Council also noted the successful completion of the switchover to digital television in Scotland. Carriage of BBC ALBA on DTT from June 2011 extended the range of quality content available to audiences in Scotland.

Programme makers found ways of using new media to enrich audience experiences, and encourage them to explore the potential of new media. There was innovative use of web and social media to offer supporting material for a wide range of content from BBC Two’s *The Culture Show* to BBC Radio 3’s *Spirit of Schubert* week in March and BBC Four’s *After Life* experiment in the science of decay.

The profile of BBC Scotland’s online news service continued to strengthen. Members noted that audiences turned to BBC Scotland’s online news service for big stories like the storms of December and January, or the financial crisis at Rangers in February. There was work with other organisations to launch a website for Gaelic learners www.learn-gaelic.net in partnership with MG Alba, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and others.

The Council heard that the BBC was in the process of closing down its blogs and moving to social network systems. Members felt it was important that there remained ways for younger audiences to get involved with citizenship issues via the BBC.
I. Nations variants
Ensure that, in implementation of DQF, the focus on services delivering the greatest value to the greatest number is balanced against the need to achieve greater impact in services for the devolved nations.
In particular, ACS believes it will be important to look carefully at the implications of the proposal to phase out nations variants from BBC Two HD. BBC Two Scotland is an important element of Scotland’s national dialogue and BBC Two’s ‘knowledge-building’ function cannot be delivered fully in Scotland without elements which address specific Scottish needs.
Members believe the possible effects of this proposal should be carefully investigated before an irreversible decision is taken.
Members would welcome a more detailed response from the Executive on future strategy in Scotland.

2. Nations content on the networks
Similarly, members believe the implications of increased use of nations’ drama and comedy on the networks should be more closely examined to ensure there is no risk of diluting the integrity of local cultural production. Clear processes should be devised to ensure that the strategy improves representation on the networks, but protects the distinctiveness and cultural-specificity of content from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland – and from the regions of England.
The Council would also welcome clear processes and targets being set out for the proposed further shifts of commissioning and production leadership to outside of London. In particular, members would welcome a clear commitment to a network supply process for radio, as there is for TV.

3. Services in Scotland
Various editorial changes are proposed in DQF for services in Scotland relating to sports coverage, BBC Radio Scotland speech content, the use of network content on BBC Radio Scotland, local and regional coverage, radio news output in English and Gaelic, daytime output on BBC Radio nan Gàidheal, and the right balance of provision of TV news for audiences in Scotland.
Members recommend that the Trust consider seeking regular updates on the effects of these various editorial changes to ensure that implementation helps achieve improved reach, impact and the strategic objectives set in recent service reviews.

4. Review of news provision
Members were disappointed that the Executive review of news provision in Scotland did not address what members saw as the key issue of achieving the right balance of coverage between Scottish news and matters which relate only to other parts of the UK. Members believe the issue is important for the delivery of the citizenship purpose.
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**www.bbc.co.uk/annualreport**

If you want to know more about how the BBC is run then please visit

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BBC Audience Services is our audience’s virtual front door to the BBC. If you have a question, comment, complaint or suggestion about BBC programmes and services, then please write to us here:

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If you have a view which you think should inform the Audience Council’s understanding of local audience needs, or you would like to find out more about the Council’s activities, please visit our website or contact:

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