Response to The BBC Trust’s ‘Bold, British and Creative’ Consultation

About Voluntary Arts

Across the UK and the Republic of Ireland there are approximately 63,000 voluntary arts groups, regularly involving more than 10 million people participating voluntarily in creative cultural activities: this activity is, and will continue to be, a critical part of both the bedrock and the grass roots of the cultural life of our communities and nations.

Voluntary Arts was created in 1991, in response to a need identified by government and the voluntary arts sector, to provide a universal voice for the voluntary arts across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Today Voluntary Arts has 21 staff and more than 60 volunteers working across 5 nations. We provide information and advice services, undertake lobbying and advocacy work and deliver, and support the delivery of, projects to develop participation in creative cultural activities. Voluntary Arts receives funding from all four UK arts councils. We have offices in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Derry, with flexible working across England.

Our support is particularly focused on those creative citizens who - beyond their own participation and beyond any remuneration - give their time to make such activity more available within their communities (of locality and interest) and to improve the quality and range of those opportunities and activities.

How Voluntary Arts aligns with the BBC’s aims and objectives

Voluntary Arts is working to achieve a healthy, creative and engaged civil society through promoting participation in creative cultural activity. This aligns with most of the six main purposes of the BBC, in particular the third one ‘Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence’ and its underlying objectives:

- Provide output that is distinctive and creative on all its platforms.
- Ensure enrichment for all audiences by covering a wide range of creative and cultural activities.
- Encourage active participation in cultural activities.
- Provide a wide range of enjoyable and entertaining content.
- Foster creativity and nurture and support UK talent across a wide range of genres.

Voluntary Arts’ partnerships with the BBC through the ‘Up for Arts’ programme (with BBC Radio Merseyside, BBC Radio Lancashire and BBC Radio Cumbria) and the national BBC Get Creative campaign have proved to be very successful ways of working. Both initiatives currently meet the BBC purpose ‘Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence’ well and have even greater potential if the partnerships were able to develop further.

Striking the balance between what the BBC is today and what it will be in the future

We would like to know whether you think the BBC is striking the right balance between continuing to do the things it does today, and focusing on new ideas. Is there anything in particular you think the BBC needs to consider in striking this balance?

Voluntary Arts thinks that the BBC is getting a good balance between what it currently does and new ideas. It could be argued that through continuing what it does it does bring in new ideas e.g. in drama, programming.
The BBC ‘Get Creative’ campaign is a good mix of current and new approaches which is proving to be a fruitful way for the BBC to work successfully with external partners to amplify its effect and reach.

Voluntary Arts has worked with BBC Arts during 2015, on the BBC Get Creative campaign to profile and promote creativity and participation to as wide an audience as possible across all BBC platforms. As a formal 'stakeholder' in the campaign, Voluntary Arts enabled the BBC to launch Get Creative simultaneously in 14 different locations across the UK in February 2015.

The BBC has a reach which supports Voluntary Arts' mission to promote creative cultural activity and its benefits to greater numbers of people, which in turn benefits individual and society wellbeing.

FUTURE IDEAS FOR THE NEXT CHARTER
These are the BBC’s initial ideas which will require further work. Please let us know what you think about any or all of these, for example whether you support or oppose them and why.
Is there anything we should think about as we continue to develop these ideas? For example do you have any views about how to make them as effective as possible? Are there any particular obstacles or problems that you think the BBC needs to take account of?

1. INFORM
Local and nations news:
Part of localising news is encouraging a greater range of stories from a wider range of reporters. For example, introducing a culture slot into each news bulletin alongside the established sports slot would expand the range of news reflecting local (and national) activity/issues.

The Bold, British and Creative consultation document talks a lot about the importance of the BBC to the creative industries. One way of building the case around support would be to make sure the creative industries and surrounding cultural sector enjoy a higher profile in all areas of the BBC, not just arts programming.

Providing content for local organisations could include supplying community radio stations with news bulletins as well as them also supplying the BBC with content. The BBC would be well placed to help provide media training and support. With regards to print media – there is not only the private sector to consider but also the voluntary/community sector is a possible conduit to provide the distribution of local news.

This also ties in with ‘Reflecting local culture’. We are pleased to see that the work Voluntary Arts has been doing through its ‘Up for Arts’ partnership in North West England with the three BBC local radio stations has inspired the suggestion that ‘local arts producers would be introduced in each English region to work with local cultural organisations and deliver new Local Radio arts content’.

The ‘Up for Arts’ programme, managed by Voluntary Arts, involves part-time Voluntary Arts staff based within BBC Radio Merseyside, BBC Radio Cumbria and BBC Radio Lancashire, providing both media content and events in the community for people to find and enjoy their creativity. Participant involved in mass singing events, creating Woollen Woods, World War 1 Postcard embroidery and other initiatives have numbered in the thousands, engaging current and new audiences for these local radio stations. This is a good model of how the BBC can
work with a civil society partner to help reflect a community back to itself, as well as growing that community’s skills, confidence and cohesion.

As a UK wide organisation, Voluntary Arts could develop the ‘Up for Arts’ model into Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as we have established staff and contacts in place. Part of this process has already begun through the BBC Get Creative campaign.

Voluntary Arts’ BBC partnership ‘Up for Arts’ creates content already that could be used in World News service too. By working more with partners, the BBC can better serve and reflect different geographic and interest communities. This could also link to the picture portrayed to international audiences, to inspire and exchange experiences.

The evidence from Voluntary Arts’ ‘Up for Arts’ programme is that with appropriate partnerships, the BBC can help draw people to new media channels as well as traditional ones and provide routes to new experiences as a trusted source.

This partnership could be developed further to support the sector through training for grassroots organisations in media skills.

2. EDUCATE
Voluntary Arts would like to ensure that the Ideas Service also recognises the talent and excellence that also comes from the amateur and community arts. For example Alan Bennett starting by writing plays for local amateur groups. This could be achieved by ensuring there are relevant connections between the ‘reflecting local culture’ work and the Ideas Service.

Voluntary Arts’ BBC partnership ‘Up for Arts’ already creates content that could help with curriculum support especially when exploring local heritage, crafts and creativity.

3. ENTERTAIN
We have found the BBC Local radio network a good way to reach parts of the community that other channels do not – we would support its retention in England and look for ways to replicate it more in the other parts of the UK – maybe through working with local community radio stations.

We understand the modernisation drive for digital but mixing it with face to face will provide an even more potent impact for the BBC. ‘Allowing listeners to create their own radio stream’ is an attractive idea.

We agree there is a ‘BBC way of doing entertainment’ and are not surprised that ‘Audiences to BBC entertainment programmes have high expectations that they will ‘learn something new’ from what they are watching’. Much entertainment lately in the creative sphere has been based around reflecting people back to themselves. There has been considerable success in taking reality TV into creative areas such as the Naked Choir, the Great British Bake-Off, The Great British Sewing Bee, The Great Pottery Throw Down – mixing education and entertainment.

Going local to capture content through partnerships such as ‘Up for Arts’ will help meet the audience’s interest in wanting the BBC to ‘do more to capture the distinctive stories of our four Nations’ and help ‘find new storytellers in every part of the UK—people who live and breathe the changing Landscape’ particularly as the programmes go out to where the people are.
IN CONCLUSION
Do you think any of these ideas outlined in this document are more or less important than others?
Do you think there is anything the BBC should be doing less of compared to what it currently does, in order to fund the new ideas?
Do you have a view on all these ideas taken together as a package across the next Charter period?

The ‘Bold, British and Creative document’ states that the BBC ‘must innovate’ and ‘It will require the whole of the BBC’s portfolio of services to think differently’.

Looking beyond commercial relationships to strengthening current and developing new civil society partnerships, the BBC can also create increased choice for audiences in a way that a commercial operation may struggle to match. Children in Need and the ‘Get Creative’ campaign are good examples of this.

These partnerships are not just about creating content but can also lever in development investment that is not possible for the BBC to access directly.

Voluntary Arts’ ‘Up for Arts’ programme involves working with existing volunteers within the BBC – such as the ‘A’ Team at BBC Radio Merseyside. We are aware that volunteering does take place within the institution – something I am not sure many others know about. This is a way the listening/viewing public can get involved. We think more should be done to highlight the volunteering opportunities in the BBC. Plus we also see great possibilities for BBC staff to volunteer within communities, which would provide a connection that will benefit both the community and the BBC – making links that would not otherwise exist – for example between Media City and the inhabitants of Salford.

Confidentiality Declaration:

**Name:** Robin Simpson

**Name of organisation:** Voluntary Arts

I confirm that the information I have submitted is a formal consultation response. It can be published in full on the BBC Trust’s website, unless otherwise specified, and I authorise the BBC Trust to make use of the information in this response to meet its legal requirements. If I have sent my response by email, the BBC can disregard any standard e-mail text about not disclosing email contents and attachments.

**Signed (if hard copy):** Robin Simpson