MINUTES OF THE BBC TRUST MEETING
WITH AUDIENCE COUNCILS

Held on Wednesday 16 January 2013
in the BBC Media Centre boardroom, London

Present:

Lord Patten Chairman
Diane Coyle Vice Chairman
Sonita Alleyne Trust member
Richard Ayre Trust member
Anthony Fry Trust member
David Liddiment Trust member
Bill Matthews Trust member for Scotland
Aideen McGinley Trust member for Northern Ireland
Elan Closs Stephens Trust member for Wales
Suzanna Taverne Trust member
Lord Williams Trust member

Apologies:

Alison Hastings Trust member for England

In attendance from the Trust Unit:

Nicholas Kroll Director, BBC Trust
Alex Towers Deputy Director
Phil Harrold Head of Governance
Kate Atkins Senior Adviser, Governance
Meredith Cook Senior Adviser, Governance
Karl Davies Chief Adviser, Wales
Alison Gold Head of Public Services Strategy
Georgina Hodges Chief Research and Audiences Adviser
Allan Jack Chief Adviser, Scotland
Philip Lillico Chief Adviser, England
Carrie Matchett Chief Adviser, Northern Ireland
From the Audience Councils

Sanjay Dighe  Audience Council England
Thelma Holland  Audience Council England
Hannah Underwood  Audience Council England
Elaine Hicks  Audience Council England
Paul Mullan  Audience Council Northern Ireland
Mahendra Varma  Audience Council Northern Ireland
Pamela Hunt  Audience Council Wales
Aled Jones-Griffith  Audience Council Wales
Ian Stevens  Audience Council Wales
Neelam Bakshi  Audience Council Scotland
Amanda Bryan  Audience Council Scotland
Matthew MacIver  Audience Council Scotland

From the Executive:

Item 2  Philip Almond  Director, Marketing and Audiences
Item 2  James Holden  Head of Audiences
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1 CHAIRMAN’S INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Chairman welcomed Trust members and Audience Council representatives to the meeting, which was the annual opportunity for the Trust to meet formally with representatives of its four advisory bodies, the Audience Councils for England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

2 PRESENTATIONS ON AUDIENCE PRIORITIES AND ISSUES

2.1 The Chairman invited each Audience Council to give a presentation on audience priorities and issues in their nation.

2.2 The representative from Audience Council England illustrated the performance of the BBC in England by using examples of audience members in different English regions. She highlighted the importance of maintaining the quality of services specifically made for audiences in England, including local radio and the regional investigative journalism programme Inside Out. She said it was important that audiences had convenient access to all BBC services and expressed concern about proposals to remove 25 local radio stations from medium wave.

2.3 The representative from Audience Council Northern Ireland said audiences were concerned about how Northern Ireland was portrayed on the BBC’s networks. He called for more programmes which were relevant to, and connected with, people’s lives in Northern Ireland today. He said that access to BBC services was also an issue and noted that DAB coverage in Northern Ireland was limited.

2.4 The representative from Audience Council Wales welcomed the Trust’s new partnership with Welsh-language broadcaster S4C, which would come into effect from April. He said audiences were concerned about network news coverage of the devolved nations and called for more comparison of policy and legal differences across the UK’s nations. Access to BBC services was also an issue, including on DAB, and audiences were concerned about the impact of Delivering Quality First on opt-out programming currently shown on BBC Two Wales.

2.5 The representative from Audience Council Scotland said that, in the run up to the referendum in 2014, there was a real opportunity for the BBC to develop its profile in Scotland and build trust among the Scottish population. The BBC needed to develop and enhance an authoritative voice by increasing authentic Scottish content on services in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK.

2.6 Trust members discussed the issues raised with the Audience Council representatives, including BBC network news coverage of the devolved nations and the challenges facing current affairs programming in different parts of the UK.

2.7 The Chairman said the Trust would take the issues raised by the Audience Councils into account when considering its work plan for 2013-14.
3 PRESENTATION ON THE CHANGING AUDIENCE LANDSCAPE

3.1 The Director, Marketing and Audiences gave a presentation on how the audience landscape had evolved since the current BBC Charter came into effect in 2007. Digital television switchover had been completed across the UK and the iPlayer had launched on Christmas Day 2007. 60% of the population now had personal video recorders, compared with 9% in 2007. Despite these changes, the BBC remained integral in most people’s lives, reaching 96% of the population each week and the BBC accounted for a third of all TV viewing in the UK.

3.2 The Director, Marketing and Audiences considered how societal changes, new technology and increased competition were likely to change people’s relationship with the BBC over the next few years. He noted that the key to the BBC’s ongoing relationship with its audiences remained the provision of high-quality programmes and services.

3.3 Trust members and Audience Council representatives discussed some of the issues raised in the presentation, particularly the impact of new technology and the need to serve all audiences, including those without access to digital services.

4 DISCUSSION ON THE BBC’S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

4.1 The Deputy Director, BBC Trust outlined the Trust’s strategy for the BBC to 2016. He noted that, as a public service, the BBC needed to distinguish itself from the rest of the media and hold the trust of the people who paid for it. The Trust had set the BBC four strategic objectives – increasing the distinctiveness and quality of its output; doing more to serve all audiences; improving the value for money it provided to licence fee payers; and setting new standards of openness and transparency.

4.2 Trust members and Audience Council representatives discussed how well the BBC was delivering on its strategic objectives and where there were areas for improvement. Issues around distinctive output included the performance of BBC One during peak time and the need to develop new programme formats and to take risks across all services and try something new. Audience Council members said the BBC should do more to portray all parts of the UK and felt that some audience groups, such as older women, were currently under-represented. They also called for better access to BBC services for audiences throughout the UK, including to the BBC’s digital radio stations via DAB. Audience Council members called on the BBC to improve – and demonstrate – value for money and noted the negative impact that media stories about senior staff salaries and large redundancy payments had on the BBC. They also suggested the BBC could do a better job in explaining how it spent licence fee payers’ money and what choices it had to make, such as whether to prioritise spending on programme content or distribution platforms.

4.3 The Chairman thanked the Trust members and Audience Council representatives for their contributions and said he looked forward to continuing dialogue with them on the BBC’s progress against its strategic objectives.