MINUTES OF THE BBC TRUST MEETING WITH ITS AUDIENCE COUNCILS

Held on Wednesday 16 March 2016
at 41 Portland Place, London W1

Present:

Rona Fairhead  Chairman
Sir Roger Carr  Vice-Chairman
Sonita Alleyne  Trust member
Richard Ayre  Trust member
Mark Damazer  Trust member
Mark Florman  Trust member for England
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:

Nick Prettejohn  Trust member

From the Trust Unit:

Alex Towers  Director, BBC Trust
Kate Atkins  Chief Adviser, Governance
Karl Davies  Chief Adviser, Wales
Michelle Dunlop  Governance Co-ordinator, Scotland
Alison Gold  Head of Public Services Strategy
Rachel Hallett  Adviser, Governance

Items 20 - 22

Georgina Hodges  Chief Research and Audiences Adviser
Carrie Matchett  Chief Adviser, Scotland
Lydia Thomas  Chief Adviser, England

From the Audience Councils:

Robin Jones  Audience Council England
Michele Scott  Audience Council England
Liz Waugh  Audience Council England
Diarmuid Hanna  Audience Council Northern Ireland
Aidan Langan  Audience Council Northern Ireland
Paul McCallion  Audience Council Northern Ireland
Margaret Hughes  Audience Council Scotland
Jane Ferguson  Audience Council Scotland
Andrew Neal  Audience Council Scotland
Carol Adams  Audience Council Wales
Owen Derbyshire  Audience Council Wales
Andrew Jones  Audience Council Wales

From the BBC:
Item 23
Alice Webb  Director, Children’s

External attendee:
Item 24
Simon Milner  Director, Policy, EMEA, Facebook
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20.1 On behalf of the Trust, the Chairman thanked Audience Council members for their time and work over the last year, and asked those present to express this to those Council members who were not able to attend. She acknowledged the great value that Audience Council work brings to the Trust’s understanding of audiences. This meeting was an opportunity for the Trust to hear directly from, and have a dialogue with, its Audience Councils.

20.2 The Chairman reminded Audience Council members of the Trust’s principles for Charter review, as set out in her speech at the Oxford Media Convention. These included: that last July’s financial settlement should not be undermined; that the Government White Paper should take into account public feedback, gathered by both the DCMS and the BBC Trust; and that the independence of the BBC should be protected. She outlined the expected timeline for the Charter review process.

20.3 The Chairman noted that Sir David Clementi’s review of BBC governance recognised both the importance of audience engagement and the work of Audience Councils. Future audience engagement under a new governance structure would rest with a new Unitary Board and its Chairman; however, the Chairman undertook to keep Audience Council members up-to-date with progress on this matter during the Charter review process.

21.1 The Chief Adviser, Research and Audiences presented the pan-BBC findings of the autumn 2015 purpose remits survey, which measured audience perception of the BBC’s performance against criteria derived from the six public purposes. The survey had been carried out since autumn 2008, and this year for the first time had taken data from the Trust’s audience panel. It measured the ‘performance gap’, where the BBC was perceived as underperforming in relation to particular public purposes.

21.2 Each Audience Council had recently seen presentations of data relating specifically to their nation, to help inform their assessment of performance. A written report on the survey results, both across the BBC and for each nation, would be published along the BBC’s Annual Report and Accounts in July 2016.

21.3 The Chief Adviser, Research and Audiences noted that the overall impression score for the BBC was similar to last year’s and consistent with the trend, and went on to examine in more detail the results relating to particular public purposes.
21.5 She confirmed that where necessary, the Trust could use extensive research carried out for the Charter review process and for impartiality reviews to gain further insight about performance gaps in particular areas, and if appropriate, commission new research.

21.6 The Chairman noted that the results of the survey had enabled the Trust to focus its attention on areas of particular underperformance or declining trends, for example the representation of different areas of the UK and diversity. The Trust had proposed that under a new Charter, the public purposes should be reformed to make them clearer, more meaningful and better understood, so that any future governance structure can best use them to hold the BBC to account.

22 REPORTS FROM AUDIENCE COUNCILS

22.1 In line with Charter obligations, each Audience Council had submitted a report of its assessment of the BBC’s performance in its nation. The Chairman invited a representative from each Audience Council to make a presentation on a key issue raised by their report.

22.2 The representative for Audience Council Northern Ireland spoke about the audience experience of consuming news provision in Northern Ireland. He noted the strong appetite for news and current affairs and the vibrant and plural market for news in that nation. While BBC News was highly regarded in many respects, there were three key areas where audiences sought improvements: local news needed to do more to reflect the changes in society in Northern Ireland, looking beyond the political lens to new ways into stories about public policy issues that impact on everyday lives; network news, particularly on TV, should improve how it reports the devolved nations, particularly through comparisons of approaches in the different nations; and the local digital offer was underdeveloped with a slow and static website, especially at weekends, and limited presence on social media. Trust members and Audience Council members discussed audience expectations of news online, the impact of BBC news services on local commercial providers, and the possibilities of working with local media and social media to increase access to news content.

22.3 The representative for Audience Council Scotland focused on cultural representation. She explained that whilst Scottish audiences valued the BBC, feedback from Council engagement events has been that many did not consider that it adequately reflected their lives or represented Scotland in news, drama and entertainment. This was borne out by the purpose remits survey, where the performance gap for “representing my nation in drama and entertainment” was significant. She reported that the Council felt that BBC Scotland should have the resources to commission network programmes of Scottish resonance, in addition to “nations-to-
network” content paid for from Scottish budgets. Attendees discussed the importance of a “sense of place” in dramas.

22.4 The Audience Council Wales representative considered how the BBC served young people in Wales, an issue regularly raised in the outreach events run by the Council. He reported that there were a number of genres that young people say matter to them - drama, natural history, comedy and sport - but that they said the BBC lacked relevance to their lives, and were more sceptical that older audiences about the independence of BBC journalism. He noted that young people expected to access content that offered them ownership and interactivity, across all devices. By failing to provide this, the Corporation was underserving young audiences, who were unlikely to re-engage with the BBC as they got older. Attendees discussed the changing media habits of young people, who were less likely to be aware of the source of content, and the need to ensure BBC content was both appealing to young people, and distributed in ways that they want to use.

22.5 Audience Council England’s representative spoke about how the BBC’s representation of the UK’s diverse population was key to ensuring distinctiveness. The 2011 census showed that England was the least homogenous nation in the UK, with stark contrasts in the make-up of the population between different areas of the country, and even of the same city. She reported that the Council recommended the BBC seek creative ways to improve inclusion and representation of all of its diverse audience in England. Attendees also discussed local radio provision; in the recent service review of local Radio and local news and current affairs in England, audiences had been clear that they valued this service highly.

23 **BBC CHILDREN’S DIGITAL STRATEGY**

23.1 The Chairman invited the Director, BBC Children’s to set out the BBC’s plans to keep up with children’s changing media habits.

23.2 The Director, Children’s reported that in 2014 the BBC broadcasted around 8,000 hours of children’s content on Cbeebies (aimed at pre-school children) and CBBC (for under 12s). She noted that children expected to be able to watch on-demand, with around one-third of iPlayer requests being for children’s content, and 23% of CBBC viewing being via iPlayer. However, watching linear TV was still important, particularly for younger children.

23.3 She introduced the BBC’s *Big Digital Plan for Children*, which committed to continuing to provide high quality public service UK children’s content, in all genres, but in new ways to reach today’s children.
23.4 She reminded attendees that the BBC’s British, Bold, Creative plan for the next Charter period had set out its proposal for a single online platform for children’s content, called iPlay. This would allow children to access safe, trusted content, including age-appropriate content from BBC channels other than CBBC and Cbeebies. It would also offer content from partners, and user-generated content such as vlogs.

23.5 The Director, Children’s said that the BBC would soon be launching a BBC Children’s iPlayer app, to give children safe access to BBC content suitable for them.

23.6 She explained that while the BBC developed its ideas for iPlay, it would work on six priorities for its Big Digital Plan. These were: to create content that stands out from the crowd; to make sure content could be enjoyed the way children want to; to build digital tools that allow children to connect, create and share; to open up the rest of the BBC to children; to be a trusted guide for children and parents; and to reflect and promote the UK.

23.7 Attendees discussed BBC radio for children, representation of different nations in children’s content, repackaging adult BBC content to present it for children, and how to address the needs of audience members between 12 and 20.

24 THE BBC AND FACEBOOK

24.1 The Chairman introduced Facebook’s Policy Director, UK, Ireland, Middle East and Africa, who was previously Secretary to the BBC Executive Board and Board of Governors. He described his experiences leading the Governance and Accountability Unit and guiding the BBC through the transition between the Board of Governors and the BBC Trust.

24.2 He identified some of the issues facing both the BBC and Facebook, including concerns from competitors and regulators about market impact, and noted that for both organisations, crises were most likely to arise from the content created or shared.

24.3 He spoke about finding a balanced level of accountability which would allow users to trust Facebook’s content, but without constraining that content or threatening freedom of speech.

24.4 He explained that Facebook’s structure, as a company offering a global service and funded by personalised advertising, determined the way in which it was held accountable. He noted that it was held to account by its advertisers, took account of users’ views by handling all complaints individually, and gave account of itself through its policies and its quarterly reports. The company was subject to local laws and to regulation on its
business model and handling of personal data, and was required to appear before government committees.

24.5 The Policy Director, Facebook described the relationship between the BBC and Facebook as a productive one, although the BBC was just one of many media organisations it works with. In his view, there was potential for the BBC to improve the way it worked with social media to share content in a way that appealed to its audience.

25 CHAIRMAN’S CLOSING REMARKS

25.1 The Chairman thanked attendees for contributing to an interesting and useful day, and acknowledged the important contribution Audience Councils’ work made to the Trust’s duty to assess the views of licence-fee payers.