MINUTES OF THE BBC TRUST MEETING

Held on Monday 18 January 2016
at the BBC Trust, 180 Great Portland Street, London

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

Nick Prettejohn  
Trust member

Elan Closs Stephens  
Trust member for Wales

Suzanna Taverne  
Trust member

Lord Williams  
Trust member

From the Trust Unit:

Alex Towers  
Director, BBC Trust

Aurora Ascione  
Chief Economic Adviser

Kate Atkins  
Chief Adviser, Governance

Jon Cowdock  
Head of Business Strategy

Peter De Val  
Head of Legal

Alison Gold  
Head of Public Services Strategy

Georgina Hodges  
Chief Research and Audiences Adviser

Jonathan Mackay  
Senior Strategy Adviser

Kath MacLeod  
Head of Communications

Fran O’Brien  
Head of Editorial Standards

Tristan Pedelty  
Head of Policy and Charter

Gareth Tuck  
Head of Finance
From the BBC Executive:

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1 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

1.1 The Trust approved the minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2015 as an accurate record of proceedings. It noted the matters arising from the meeting.

2 REPORTS FROM TRUST COMMITTEES

2.1 The Chairman noted that the Trust Management Group had approved reports detailing Trust members’ expenses and hospitality for the six months to 30 September 2015. The reports would be published in due course.

3 DIRECTOR’S REPORT

3.1 The Director, BBC Trust presented his report, which provided an overview of activity undertaken by the Trust, including on Charter review.

3.2 The Trust approved its work plan for 2016 for publication and noted the high-level financial forecast for the year.

4 CHAIRMAN’S UPDATE

4.1 The Chairman provided an update on recent activity and outlined the Trust’s annual board evaluation process which was now underway.

5 CHARTER REVIEW

5.1 The Trust’s Head of Policy and Charter Review provided an update on Charter review progress and outlined the next phase of work, including meetings with key stakeholders.

5.2 Trust members noted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had written to the Director-General, confirming that the BBC World Service would receive £85 million per year in new funding through a grant from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This new funding – which would be phased in over the next four years – would require the Trust to make the necessary changes to the World Service operating licence. The Trust said before agreeing to the changes it would require guarantees from the Government that if the funding ceased, it would allow the related services to cease.
5.3 The Trust’s Head of Business Strategy provided an update on the Trust’s review of the operation of the BBC’s fair trading policy.

5.4 Members discussed the review and agreed that the Trust should write to the Government, setting out the main findings and drawing attention to any matters which would need to be considered in the context of Charter review.

5.5 The Trust delegated authority to the Chairman and Trust member Suzanna Taverne to approve the final report for submission to the Government and for publication.

5.6 The Trust’s Head of Business Strategy provided an update on the Trust’s submission to the Government on options for reforming the BBC’s approach to content production across TV, radio and online. The Government had invited further views from the Trust on this matter following publication of its Charter review discussion document last summer.

5.7 Members discussed their submission and agreed that, following delivery to the Government, it should be published, subject to any necessary redactions.

5.8 The Trust approved the direction of travel and delegated approval for agreeing the final submission to the Chairman and Trust members Suzanna Taverne and Mark Damazer.

6 DIRECTOR-GENERAL’S REPORT

6.1 The Director-General briefed the Trust on viewing figures for the BBC’s Christmas and New Year schedules, noting that eight of the ten most watched programmes on Christmas Day were on the BBC. He noted the high levels of catch-up/on-demand viewing, particularly on Christmas Day. He said he was particularly pleased at the audience response to recent drama productions, including Dickensian, And Then There Were None, Sherlock and War and Peace.

6.2 The Director-General noted the recent flooding across the UK and paid tribute to the BBC news teams who had kept audiences updated on developments, including in Cumbria, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

6.3 He highlighted some forthcoming BBC factual programmes, including the return of Stargazing Live, a new David Attenborough special, Attenborough and the Giant Dinosaur and this year’s Reith Lectures with Professor Stephen Hawking.
6.4 Trust members noted the agreement that had been reached by the BBC and the trade association Pact in relation to the BBC Studios proposal.

6.5 The Director-General noted the appointment of Matthew Postgate to the Chief Technology Officer role, leading a new division that would bring together BBC Digital, Engineering and BBC Worldwide technology teams.

7 NATIONS NEWS REVIEW

7.1 The Director-General and Director, News and Current Affairs briefed the Trust on the Executive’s review of the BBC’s news and current affairs output for audiences in the devolved nations.

7.2 Trust members discussed with the Executive issues relating to the review, including the balance between UK-wide services and dedicated nations news services in the devolved nations.

7.3 Members also discussed the need to report the news in a way that accurately accounted for devolution, in particular labelling stories on all pan-UK coverage so that audiences knew how – or whether – stories applied to them. They agreed that, when editorially appropriate, it was important that stories relating to the devolved nations were covered on network news, including stories that compared different policy approaches across the UK.

7.4 The Director, News and Current Affairs said he would reiterate to all news staff the need for accuracy in reporting such stories and ensure that the appropriate editorial controls were in place.

7.5 Members noted that the Trust was undertaking follow-up work to its 2008 review of BBC news coverage of the four UK nations which would be published in the summer.