

**BBC Trust Review of the
BBC's Content Supply Arrangements
BBC Audience Council Northern Ireland
Advice to the review
March 2015**

The Audience Council Northern Ireland considers the review of the BBC's content supply arrangements, and the formal targets and quotas which have ensured an Out-of-London supply, to be both welcome and timely. The network supply strategy (2008) which committed the BBC to producing 50% of its television production (by spend) for the networks from outside London by 2016, with at least 17% from the nations, has been successful.

The Audience Council has expressed its concerns about the commissioning process on a number of occasions. Furthermore, it identified the opportunity of delivering the benefits of the network supply review (2008) in Northern Ireland, as a priority in 2014. The growth and success of the local creative industry sector in Northern Ireland has been significant and remains a government priority. The Council is fully supportive of this development and is pleased to note that the network supply target for Northern Ireland will be reached in 2016. The Council values the commitment of the Executive team at BBC NI to make the new commissioning arrangements work more effectively with London and other parts of the BBC. This is evidenced, amongst others, in BBC Two's commissions for *The Fall* and *Line of Duty* as well as a number of co-commissions with BBC Four - *Digging for Ireland*; *Ireland Journeys with Martha Kearney*; *The Irish Rock Story - A Tale of Two Cities* - all of which have contributed to reaching the network supply targets. Council is keen to see the optimisation of the BBC's role in continuing to grow the vibrant and sustainable creative production sector in Northern Ireland, and also welcomes discussions between NI Screen and the BBC on a partnership agreement that will underpin that relationship. Council would wish to reiterate the importance of overall consistency in commissioning as we have seen the negative impact of a "shift and lift" policy elsewhere.

The Purpose Remits Survey has historically recorded a large performance gap among Northern Ireland audiences regarding how well they feel Northern Ireland is portrayed to a UK-wide audience. Council welcomed the nations-to-network strategy and a *Delivering Quality First [DQF]* commitment to broadcasting more local programmes on the networks. This has improved the portrayal of Northern Ireland on the networks and contributed to fulfilling the public purpose of representing the nations, regions and communities.

Council feels strongly, for a variety of reasons, including maximising efficiencies and minimising repeats, that good quality local productions deserve support for network broadcast. A particular opportunity exists with daytime television, especially BBC Two, and it may be worth considering introducing targets to this effect.

The Council discussed the Director-General's announcement in July 2014 on his ambition to deliver broader choice and better ideas for BBC programmes across all platforms proposing, amongst other things, that the BBC's current in-house guarantee of 50% network and non-network television production be removed, to enable the BBC and independents to vie for commissions on equal terms. Council is aware of the challenges of the wider market and the need to be sensitive to market forces and fair trading. There are questions around the commissioning process in terms of what criteria might be applied in any competition model - e.g. cost, quality, creative ideas, originality - and how they might be measured, as well as what might be best for licence fee payers. Council also recognises issues around the sustainability of the creative sector in Northern Ireland and its ability to compete with other regions of the UK. Council is of the view that success in network supply to date has been driven by the policy of quotas and targets for Out-of-London production. Whilst, on the surface, a target of 3% for Northern Ireland appears minimal, it was from a very low base and has been an important driver for growth in the local creative sector. The Council would recommend continuation of a policy of quotas and targets for Out-of-London production in the future to enable the BBC to fulfil its public purposes.

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