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Service Review of BBC News and Current Affairs

Analysis of Responses to Public Consultation

April 2014

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1. OVERVIEW OF KEY THEMES

The consultation period for this review of BBC News and current affairs was between 17th September and 13th December 2013 and the consultation received more than 9,000 responses. The views represented are not necessarily representative of the UK population as a whole: the majority of respondents to the consultation claim to be heavy consumers of news in general, seven in ten are male and two thirds are aged over 55.

The consultation asked respondents to consider a number of specific elements about the BBC's news and current affairs output including coverage of news topics, presentation of output and delivery against key commitments. The key findings include:

- **BBC news coverage consistently demonstrates strong values:** The core values of being up-to-date, accurate and trustworthy are felt to be generally characteristic of BBC news output. Although at times the reporting of breaking stories may not be seen as immediate as some other broadcasters, this is accepted as the BBC is largely felt to be the most reliable in the presentation of facts.
- **Distinctive news programming across BBC radio:** Respondents generally compliment the BBC's news output across its radio stations, with Radio 4 and 5 live receiving most praise. Radio 4 is seen to provide insightful and analytical news coverage across a range of different programmes across the day from *Today* to *PM*. Radio 5 live is particularly praised for presenting news and current affairs in an accessible and engaging manner for a range of different audience groups.
- **Broad praise for coverage of international events and issues:** Although much of the focus of the comments regarding BBC News and current affairs is generally about the coverage of domestic issues or UK politics, when prompted, the BBC's coverage of international issues was welcomed. Broadly, there is consensus that the BBC's coverage of international affairs is of a high standard and is relied upon to inform the wider audience about important global events. In particular, the local correspondents the BBC uses across the World Service, World News and Radio 4 current affairs programmes are felt to add expertise to the coverage and help convey issues using in-depth analysis in an engaging manner.
- **Range and availability of access points across the BBC portfolio are welcomed:** Respondents agree that the BBC can be relied upon to provide news across a range of platforms and in different formats. Respondents indicate that this means that news can be consumed in a manner and time that is convenient and suitable for them.
- **Current affairs programmes on the BBC demonstrate high journalistic values, and are perceived to cover important stories across a range of topics:** The range of stories and balance of topics are rated highly, with many respondents indicating that the BBC's current affairs covers important stories across a broad range of areas well, and agreeing that there is a good balance of different topics. Complex issues are felt to be explained in a way that the audience can understand and that coverage encourages a deeper understanding by putting issues into context.

Although many respondents are positive about some aspects of BBC News and current affairs output, much of the focus of the comments from those choosing to respond to this consultation was on suggested areas for improvement. Across the consultation and range of responses, some of the key suggestions include:

- **Broaden the range of issues covered:** Although generally the BBC is felt to cover news items well, throughout the consultation it is apparent that respondents feel the range of topics

covered on both news and current affairs programmes could be wider and that some news items can be overlooked.

This also applies to the range of content covered within particular topics, with suggestions including:

- in international coverage, the range of countries discussed to be expanded to go beyond English-speaking countries or the most influential nations;
 - in domestic news, primarily raised by those in the devolved nations, more items from across the different nations, including relevant devolved policy issues;
 - in business items, a broader range of industries to be included and explored;
 - in technology coverage, to go beyond the usual mobile device or gadget discussions;
 - in sports news, to go beyond the English Premier League and football in general to cover less mainstream sports; and,
 - in politics, to include a wider range of political voices.
-
- **Increase the range of perspectives to reduce perceptions of bias:** Throughout the consultation, perceptions of bias across BBC News and current affairs output are apparent; however there is no consensus on the direction of the bias. Respondents feel there can be a tendency for the BBC to take a particular stance when covering certain issues rather than offering balanced reporting of the facts. Respondents ask that a range of perspectives are included, in order that the audience can assess the situation rather than having to seek other sources for further information.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 About the review

The BBC Trust is the independent governing body of the BBC representing the interests of licence fee payers. Its role is to get the best out of the BBC for licence fee payers and to secure effective promotion of its public purposes. The Trust is required to represent the interests of licence fee payers, assess their views carefully and appropriately, and have regard to the competitive impact of the BBC's activities on the wider market. It must also ensure that the BBC observes high standards of openness and transparency.

Each of the BBC services has a 'service licence', which details its remit, outlining the overall format and particular characteristics the output of the service should embrace. The licence also indicates how the specific service should contribute to the overall delivery of the BBC's public purposes.

The BBC Trust is committed to reviewing each BBC service at least once during a five year cycle. This report will be considered as part of the review of the BBC's network news and current affairs for UK audiences across TV, radio and online services. It will examine the performance of the BBC's network news output against the commitments set by the Trust in the BBC's service licences and its broader public service role.

1.2 About the Public Consultation

As part of any service review, the BBC Trust considers a range of different types of evidence. This includes asking licence fee payers to respond to a number of specific questions about the services through a public consultation.

The review covered the BBC's network news and current affairs for UK audiences across TV, radio and online, including:

- On TV: the daily national bulletins on BBC One, relevant weekday morning output (such as the *Daily Politics*) and *Newsnight* on BBC Two, *60 second news* on BBC Three and *World News Today* on BBC Four. Also included were the News Channel and BBC Parliament.
- On radio: news bulletins and *Newsbeat* on Radio 1 and 1Xtra, news bulletins on Radio 2 and 3, Radio 4's daily news programming (*Today*, *World at One*, *PM*, *The World Tonight*) and daily politics output, 5 live's daily news output (largely its weekday daytime schedule) and news on the Asian Network.
- Online: the news sections of the BBC's website and the Red Button, including mobile apps and social media.

Current affairs output included *Panorama*, *This World* and around 40 hours of output on BBC Two and Three, as well as political strands such as *Question Time* and the *Daily Politics* programme. On radio this included the range of Radio 4 and 5 live's current affairs and politics programming.

Those responding to this consultation were given a range of questions to consider about BBC News and current affairs output. In order to help focus the responses to particular questions, additional information was provided alongside many of the questions such as lists of news topics, characteristics of the delivery of news and current affairs output and core values of news and current affairs coverage.

The consultation period for this review was between 17th September and 13th December 2013. In total 8,003 individuals responded using the online consultation form and a further 1,261 replied by

emailing or posting their responses to the consultation questions. Some respondents chose to submit general freeform comments via email or by post. These responses (136 in total) are summarised separately in Appendix A.

All responses to the public consultation were analysed by Public Knowledge, an independent research company, on behalf of the BBC Trust. This report summarises the key themes expressed by the public and provides an overview of the responses. It covers replies from individuals only; responses from stakeholders and organisations have been considered separately by the BBC Trust.

For this service review, the BBC Trust will consider a range of evidence, including the views summarised in this report, and will publish its conclusions on the Trust website (www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust).

3. SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Note: The following summary reflects the views of individuals who took part in the public consultation and should not be considered necessarily representative of all licence fee payers. Quotes from responses used to illustrate different themes are presented as verbatim.

3.1 News consumption

3.1.1. General news consumption

The respondents to this consultation are generally heavy consumers of news, with most claiming to consume news across any platform at least twice a day. Respondents claim to use an average of 3.1 different platforms to access news. The most used platform for news consumption among all respondents is television, followed by radio and then online (excluding social media). Although overall social media sites are used by fewer than one in four of those responding, they are more likely to be used by younger respondents, aged 16-24, with two thirds of those responding in this age group claiming to use these sites for news.

Convenience appears to be a significant factor for those responding, with over three quarters indicating it is important for them to be able to access news at any time of the day and from anywhere.

3.1.2. BBC News and Current Affairs consumption

On average, respondents to the consultation claim to regularly consume news and current affairs from 5.7 different BBC sources¹.

The longer news bulletins on BBC One (*News at One*, *News at Six* and *News at Ten*) are a main source for respondents with a majority indicating they usually watch at least one of these programmes. This is followed by Radio 4 news and current affairs programmes and then the BBC website and opinion programmes on television such as *Newsnight*. The News Channel and television documentary programmes such as *Panorama* are also watched by over half of those responding. A minority of those responding say they don't watch any news output across BBC television.

Younger respondents (aged 16-24) are more likely to say they use the BBC website to access news rather than any radio or television programmes. They are also more likely than other age groups responding to say they use the BBC News app or watch the shorter television bulletins such as BBC Three's *60 Seconds*

¹ From a prompted list

3.2 BBC News and Current Affairs

3.2.1. Perceptions of Quality and Distinctiveness

When asked to indicate the extent to which they think that BBC News and current affairs output is 'high quality', just over half of those responding agree with this description of the news provision. Just over a quarter of respondents say they disagree that BBC news output across all platforms is high quality. However, younger respondents (aged 16-24) are more likely to perceive BBC news output to be of high quality with around three quarters agreeing with this description.

Respondents are also divided in their perceptions of the distinctiveness of BBC News and current affairs with around two fifths agreeing that BBC news output offers something different to other providers and the remainder either disagreeing with this or being non-committal. As with perceptions of quality, younger respondents are more likely to agree that BBC news output is distinctive.

When asked to offer more detail on the basis of these perceptions a range of different themes emerge. Some of these are in support of particular aspects of the BBC News and current affairs provision while others highlight areas that are felt to be detrimental to perceptions of quality and distinctiveness.

Areas of strength

- **Distinctive offering across BBC Radio news provision:** Programmes spanning the breadth of BBC radio provision are highlighted by respondents as contributing to the perception that BBC News and current affairs are high quality and distinctive. In particular, programmes as well as presenters on Radio 4, such as *Today* and *PM* are cited by many respondents as featuring a good range of topics and facilitating a greater understanding of relevant issues. Radio 5 live also receives praise from many respondents as offering an accessible approach to delivering the news.

"Today on Radio 4 gives me clear, sharp news at the start of the day.. including grilling someone in the post 8am slot! PM is brilliant at giving me incisive news and interviews with a wonderfully humorous slant." (Male, 55-64)

"BBC radio news: superb. Caters for all kinds of audiences, from Today and The World at One to Five Live phone-ins. Excellent programmes catering for different audiences." (Male, 55-64)

"Five live is brilliant –approachable news, delivered by people who know what they are talking about. R4 Today – sets the standard. Still. After all this time." (Male, 35-44)

- **Current affairs programmes on BBC TV demonstrate high journalistic values:** Current affairs programmes available across BBC television such as *Panorama* and *Newsnight* are commended by respondents as demonstrating high journalistic values and getting to the heart of issues. The range of different formats and presentation of this type of journalism and coverage is also praised for making current affairs relevant to a wide range of audiences. Documentaries broadcast are noted by many respondents as generally being of high quality and covering a range of relevant issues.

"Programmes like Panorama offer more distinctive content compared to the main

daily news programmes like News at 10. Newsnight again is more distinctive going more in depth into subjects rather than skimming the surface.” (Male, 35-44)

“BBC TV current affairs can be superb - BBC3 unexpectedly so. Often the documentaries on BBC3 cover subjects only just emerging or do so in a ground-breaking way - party drugs, My Brother the Islamist, Our War, Horror of Helmand. Panorama is very strong. It's a privilege to enjoy this quality of public sector broadcasting. BBC2 documentaries are also very strong - I really enjoyed The Men Who Made us Thin / Fat for example.” (Female, 35-44)

“BBC news and current affairs coverage is generally very good. Newsnight is excellent almost all of the time. Allows time for more in depth coverage of topics and asks interviewees more challenging questions. BBC News channel is very good most of the time – both general news coverage and more specialist items like Click and the film review. Sunday Politics is a good format.”(Female, 55-64)

Areas for improvement

- **Impartiality:** A key area for many respondents where BBC News and current affairs coverage does not meet expectations of quality and distinctiveness is a perceived lack of impartiality. Although there was a general recognition amongst respondents who comment that the BBC does make recognisable efforts to be impartial, some respondents express concern at the level of perceived bias across a range of output and topics.

However, there is no clear consensus on the direction or nature of this bias with some referring to left-wing bias or a bias in favour of the Conservative party and others referring to pro-Europe, pro-monarchy, pro-America, pro-South East England or pro-climate change perspectives being apparent across BBC News and current affairs coverage. There is a recognition that the BBC tries to be impartial by including two extreme views on either side of the argument but this was not felt to be a particularly helpful way of meeting obligations for balanced reporting.

Similarly, some respondents comment on a general lack of balance in reporting of different stories with a perceived tendency to report a news item or topical issue from a particular stance rather than presenting the range of perspectives.

“BBC news coverage is less objective and always has liberal left bias. Question Time audiences seem overwhelmingly loaded with lefty plants. Newsnight offers slanted coverage and debates unbalanced.” (Male, 35-44)

“I used to trust and believe the BBC but I now know as I have access to much less biased reporting how biased and one sided (government/rich/power) the BBC is. Question time never has people who are not from the establishment. We rarely hear of atrocities overseas unless the government want us to.” (Female, 35-44)

“The BBC in my opinion consistently put forward a slant more in favour of one view of any argument than another. The BBC should put more effort into ensuring that debates are more balanced in respect of both parties who are debating an issue, far too often it is very evident which side and which topic the BBC appear to be promoting. A good example of this is global warming we the public are never put in the position to hear balanced views from both sides of the argument without

extreme individuals promoting one point or the other.” (Male, 65-74)

“Although I generally trust the BBC news/current affairs output they do not always interview both sides when reporting on topics or incidents, therefore they do not always give the complete picture.” (Male, 65-74)

- **Lack of depth in coverage of serious issues:** Some respondents feel there is a lack of detail provided when covering some news items. These respondents often feel that the information offered or the level of analysis of the issue can at times be shallow or superficial.

Related to this, there is some perceived lack of interrogative viewing on some BBC television programmes. Many of these respondents feel that the depth of coverage of some issues could be improved with more challenging interviewing, although this should be in a way that allows those being interviewed to respond fully.

“I feel coverage is often superficial. Sound bytes prevail. Questioners rarely seem to ask the questions I would wish them too.” (Female, 55-64)

“Content on the main TV news programmes - esp. Breakfast tends to be lightweight, when it does address important stories rather than 'froth', they are not examined in any depth and tending to just accept what guests say without any real critical questioning.” (Male, 35-44)

“Certainly not always high quality News and current affairs. Summarised and dumbed down and repetitive bite sizes of news without any background explanations or in-depth analysis e.g. Nine O’Clock News. BBC does not offer enough new angles or approaches to a news item and other formats from other competitors is much better at this.” (Male, 55-64)

3.2.2. Coverage of news topics

Respondents to the consultation were asked how well they thought BBC News and current affairs covered specific topics: they were given a list of thirteen areas that it covers, ranging from Arts and Culture to Technology.

Over two-thirds of respondents feel BBC News and current affairs covers Sport, Arts/Culture, Business, Crime and Entertainment well. Compared to the other topics, Education and the Environment fare less well, with around half of respondents agreeing that the BBC News and current affairs covers these topics well.

However, respondents vary in the way in which they comment on 'how well' BBC News and current affairs covers topics: some refer to the amount of coverage and others refer to how they are covered and the type of reporting. It should also be noted that for some topics, some respondents comment on that type of programming across the whole schedule rather than specifically how the subject is covered within news and current affairs reporting.

Summary of responses on each topic (presented in order of how well respondents think BBC News and current affairs cover each topic)

- **Sport:** The BBC is felt to excel in the way in which it covers some sports. Premiership football, the Olympics and Wimbledon are particularly noted for being of high quality with knowledgeable presenters and pundits.

However, some respondents feel that the range of sports covered can be too narrow and that some minority sports can be neglected. Some comment that within football coverage there should be greater diversity with less emphasis on the top tier teams.

Other respondents feel there is too much coverage of sport in BBC news programmes and that time spent on other issues has been sacrificed. These respondents suggest that sport should be covered in specialist programming instead.

"Sports: OK, London 2012 was great, Premier football is mentioned, but far less attention is given (in NEWS programmes) to lesser sports. You'd do better having a serious Sports news programme, and if it was daily, you might actually have to cover more sports, and especially more "minority" sports." (Male, 55-64)

"I get totally sick of the domination of sporting issues as being news. If it is a preoccupation of many people, that does not make it news as such and I think that kind of material should be shunted off into Sports programming, of which there is acres." (Male, 55-64)

- **Art / Culture:** Many respondents feel that the way in which arts and culture is presented in specialist programmes is excellent and this seems to influence their overall perception of Arts/Culture coverage within BBC News and current affairs. Radio 4's *Front Row* is particularly highlighted as being a good example of how to cover the subject in an engaging way.

The main concern around the coverage of art and culture stories within BBC News and current affairs output is its limited exposure. Coverage is also felt by many to be too mainstream and not covering serious issues. Some respondents also criticise the recent changes made to *The Newsnight Review Show* which was seen to cover the subject well.

"Arts programmes are on too late at night and are too few. However, they are

generally of a very high standard. I'd like more coverage in the news and current affairs programmes.” (Female, 65-74)

“Arts and Culture - a fantastic set of Reith Lectures (best I've heard) butwhat about festivals other than Reading/Glastonbury? Poetry without laureates?” (Male, 16-24)

“Arts/Culture news is often indistinguishable from 'entertainment' news, it lacks depth and seldom considers more challenging topics. It seems to be used as a relief or distraction in main news programs/extended bulletins from the regular diet of tragedy and controversy.” (Male, 45-54)

- **Business:** Generally, respondents feel that the amount of coverage is adequate across BBC News and current affairs programmes and that the way stories are covered is largely of a high standard. The dedicated business presenters are also praised for their ability to engage the audience in the topics they cover.

However, some feel that at times the coverage can be too light and that business leaders are not challenged enough in interviews. Others comment that the range of stories and types of industries covered should be expanded, as well as the geographical area covered, with some perceiving the coverage to be too focused on London.

“I think the strongest coverage is in business where correspondents appear neutral and technically capable.” (Male, 16-24)

“The business coverage is usually comprehensive and a wide range of leading lights are interviewed, usually without criticism. Less welcome is the absence of a similar amount of time given over to those who enable those leading lights to become successful and if there is an industrial dispute, the workers are usually portrayed in very negative terms (usually greedy) compared to those who actually take home an ever increasing share of the wage bill.” (Male, 35-44)

“There is virtually no meaningful coverage of small and medium business, even though this sector accounts for 99% of UK businesses and 50-60% of private sector employment. Spokespeople from organisations representing the small business community are not routinely included in news and debate. Multinational businesses and the Trade Unions tend to be over represented.” (Male, 35-44)

“There is also a disproportionate amount of airtime given over to 'business' (i.e. reporting from the square mile in London) and no similar balance to organised labour (i.e. trades unions - who are often presented as trouble makers and a drain on the British economy).” (Male, 35-44)

- **Crime:** Broadly, crime stories are felt to be handled well and given sufficient airtime. However, among those who commented on the coverage of crime stories, many feel that there can be too much focus on crime and that there can be too much coverage of particular stories because of a 'sensationalist' appeal.

Some also comment that reporting of some crime stories can be emotionally-driven rather than providing factual reporting. This is felt to be driven by a 'breaking news' agenda which some respondents feel can often lead to superficial information being delivered or to a tendency to speculative reporting.

“Crime is covered reasonably well. There is a danger of repetition of news stories motivated by rating and public voyeurism. Sensational murders get disproportionate attention and divert focus.” (Male, 45-54)

“Re crime: there is far too much reporting of violent crime in the news, particularly murders of women and children with sometimes too much information that is disturbing. Reporting of other crime such as fraud/political is satisfactory” (Postal submission – no demographic details provided)

“Crime reporting is consistently over dramatised, not given thoughtful, objective reporting and has far too much relative prominence, it is all too often presented in a ghoulish, sensationalist manner similar to a tabloid newspaper, there are usually much more important things going on in the world that deserve much more time.” (No demographic details provided)

- **Entertainment:** Mostly, when respondents comment on Entertainment as a category, they are referring to the broader genre of programming rather than as a news topic.

Among those who specifically refer to news reporting of entertainment stories, some comment that the coverage is done well though others refer to too much focus on either scandal or trivia and not actual news.

“Entertainment, sports and technology reporting is excellent, both online and on the 24 hour TV service.” (Male, 25-34)

“Popular entertainment is covered quite well, but is more related to either 'deaths' or 'scandal'.” (Male, 55-64)

“In my view entertainment is not news.” (Male, 45-54)

- **Economy and finance:** The coverage of the economy and finance matters is broadly praised by respondents, with many welcoming the way it is presented and how it helps them understand potentially complex situations. The presenters that specialise in this area are also praised for presenting the key facts in an interesting manner.

However, there are others who comment that there isn't enough reporting of the background and causes of certain issues, and that the information provided can be too limited or superficial. Others feel that the content or descriptions of a situation can be politically-biased (both left-wing and right-wing are mentioned).

“Your reporting of the current financial crisis has been very good and I feel happy talking about many aspects of it now than I would have before.” (Male, 25-34)

“The economy and finance reporting on the BBC is alright but there seems to be a sort of gap between stuff that “explains like I am five” and the presentation of figures and charts and things which if I have a sense of how they relate to a broader picture I can use. I would like a “mid-brow” option between the two which goes into more depth without expecting me to know what to make of given figures.” (Female, 25-34)

“If you were to do a public survey of basic knowledge around the financial crash of recent times I believe that apart from something along the lines of it was bad banks there would be a near zero knowledge of the reasons and that is due to the lack of

actual news content as opposed to summaries and instant reporting without context.” (Male, no age provided)

“Business and economics news does not reflect a party political neutral viewpoint. There is insufficient coverage of the views of trade unions, co-operatives and alternatives to a neoliberal perspective.” (Male, 35-44)

- **International events/issues:** When respondents comment about the BBC News and current affairs coverage of international issues they are generally very positive and consider it to be of high quality. BBC World News and Radio 4's *From Our Own Correspondent* are particularly highlighted by many respondents as providing a good insight and analysis into international issues.

However, some respondents suggest there should be more coverage of a broader range of countries across the main bulletins and that at times coverage can be too focused on English-speaking countries, especially the USA.

“On all your media, coverage of international issues and events is incisive, courageous and balanced in my view - well done!” (Gender not provided, 55-64)

“Your international coverage is much better than anyone else's, you have some intelligent commentators, and you do a good job of covering a broad range of issues.” (Female, 25-34)

“I rate International issues low because the information that is available is very limited. Compared to how the international affairs are covered in other countries, the information by the BBC seems very selective. Only news from some European countries and the USA hit the headlines (and those where Britons are involved). For any other country, it has to be a major event or disaster to get some coverage. This gives a true sense of isolation from the rest of the world.” (Male, 35-44)

- **Health:** Although many commend the news reporting of health matters including advances in medicines and treatments, other respondents feel that the overall reporting of health can at times be too narrow and also too focused on the NHS in England.

Some respondents also feel that the coverage can be too biased in favour of the Government of the day and that there is not enough reporting offering different perspectives. Specifically, many respondents commenting on health refer to the lack of coverage of plans to privatise the NHS and other NHS reforms.

“Across the board I never hear about education or health stories in Scotland Wales or Northern Ireland. For example if there are poor figures for A&E times in Wales it will not get national attention. If it happens in England there is.” (Male, 25-34)

“In health, reporting isn't as balanced as it could be, and there's not been enough investigative reporting about the rush towards privatising health and education and what this could do to services, as well as who stands to benefit..” (Female, 45-54)

“My lowest score is regarding health. This is mainly because the coverage given to the passage of Lansley's Health & Social Care Bill was virtually non-existent.”(Male, 55-64)

- **Technology:** Generally, respondents agree that BBC News and current affairs covers key and

interesting technology news stories across the range of outputs. *Click* is highlighted by many respondents as offering good coverage of the subject, though some comment that it could do more to broaden understanding of the use of technology around the world.

Some respondents feel that coverage of the subject within the main bulletins can be too limited and the terminology used can be too simplified. Others feel that the scope of areas reported on within technology news items can be too narrow and limited to gadgets and mobile phones.

"I have rated Technology "very well". This is reflected by overall reporting and the provision of key news items such as "Click" which has both short and long versions. Brilliant. If I want to know more, I can make the effort (and more importantly, the choice) of searching it out." (Male, 55-64)

"Your science and technology coverage is improving. I enjoy Click, it's a pity it's not treated as a separate programme in your listings. I don't think it's referred to anywhere in Radio Times, it's just wrapped up under News / Breakfast." (Male, 55-64)

"Science & technology coverage is good where it is done (e.g. via the online news sections for those topics "Science & Environment" and "Technology") but they are not treated so well through other outlets, or are strongly dumbed down." (Male, 45-54)

"Technology reporting has a heavy focus on mobile phones, video game releases and software and the activities of large software companies. There is much more news in the technology sector that would be of interest to the public." (Male, 25-34)

- **Politics:** Broadly, respondents feel there is adequate coverage of UK politics across the main bulletins with expert presenters. The specialist programmes such as *Daily Politics*, *Question Time* and *This Week* are also broadly praised for providing additional in-depth analysis and background.

However, the reporting can be seen as biased (with respondents referring to both left and right wing bias) and not enough coverage of politics affecting issues outside of party politics or Westminster, including the devolved nations, EU or global politics. Others, however, comment that too much time can be given to the coverage of political stories in the main news bulletins.

"The BBC is very strong for politics, with well-regarded journalists and programming (Question Time)." (Female, 25-34)

"The strongest areas are probably politics and international affairs. In both the coverage is beyond comparable. Programmes such as The Daily Politics, Newsnight, and the Parliament Channel offer a wide array of views and analysis." (Male, 16-24)

"I worry that the politics coverage is non-neutral and slanted and that presenters appear to be emotionally charged when interviewing politicians they appear to disagree with. I'm not saying there necessarily is a bias - just that it increasingly appears that there is and that this undermines my trust." (Male, 16-24)

"Politics shouldn't be just Parliament and talking to MPs, toing and froing between

the parties, like a game of ping pong. We learn very little about policies this way and it makes most MPs sound like squabbling brats. Let's hear what people such as political analysts and academics have to say about how the country is run.” (Female, 65-74)

“When covering parliamentary elections often refer to English only politics as the devolved nations have own system. BBC treats UK politics as UK politics and does not realise that it is now English politics. At elections, health, transport, education, crime are presented as though they are UK issues but they are not and fail to point out that they are not relevant to rest of UK as dealt with by devolved bodies.” (Male, 35-44)

- **Science:** Many respondents commenting on this topic feel the way the BBC covers science news stories is done well and that there has been an improvement in the amount of science coverage within news programmes.

However, other respondents feel that there are lots of science stories which are not included in any coverage, or that when science issues are discussed there should be a greater range of views presented as well as a greater depth of coverage.

“Science reports are excellent, keep them coming.” (Gender not provided, 65-74)

“BBC has improved science and technology coverage but still room for improvement in terms of breadth and depth of coverage. Stop interviewing politicians seemingly about the science when you’re actually interviewing them about the implementation of policy drawn from the science. You need to also interview scientists about the science separately away from the political confrontation.” (Male, 35-44)

“Science when covered in longer programmes particularly on radio is covered moderately well, but is always trivialised on TV news programmes.” (Female, 65-74)

“I believe your general coverage of areas related to Science and Technology is lacking. I feel there is significantly less news devoted to those areas in general. When there is more focus on those areas it is with a layman's eye and lacks the thoroughness, detail and expertise that is generally found at the BBC. I think the BBC has to play a more significant role in raising the level of public discussion on issues related to science and technology.” (Male, 16-24)

- **Environment:** Most respondents commenting on news coverage of this topic call for a greater range of stories to be covered. The main issue that is referenced by those commenting on this topic is climate change, with many suggesting BBC news coverage is too biased although there is no real consensus as to the direction of this bias. However, *Farming Today*, although out of scope of this review, is cited by some commenting on this topic as a good example of balanced, analytical presentation of environmental issues.

“Although many of the programmes on environmental issues are themselves excellent, I fear that the news reporting (Radio 4 morning news programmes in particular) of issues such as climate change suffers from trying to be too fair to the climate change deniers.” (Female, 55-64)

“BBC follows a green agenda with man being responsible for global warming. I find little evidence to support that assertion.” (Male, 65-74)

“Misunderstanding “balance” on scientific and environmental issues - e.g. it is wrong to give climate change deniers so much time and respect when scientific consensus is so overwhelmingly against them. Like treating flat Earthers and NASA equally.” (Female, 55-64)

- **Education:** Those commenting on education highlight a number of different areas where they feel the BBC News and current affairs coverage could be improved. Some respondents suggest that coverage is too ‘England-centric’ and does not adequately address the educational systems in the devolved nations.

Others comment that more detail and scrutiny of the policies presented and discussed is required, with these respondents suggesting that this type of reporting indicates a pro-Government stance. Others comment that the coverage can be focused on minority issues and does not cover the wider range of school types around the country.

“I would have given “higher” marks were it not for the anglo-centric nature of much of the news (also evident in this question). Education, Health and Crime are items which if you are in England are covered very well on “National”; i.e. UK bulletins. For those of us in Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland these are considered regional news items.” (Male, 55-64, Scotland)

“I find the coverage of education issues to be quite polarised and irrelevant to most viewers as it is seldom in depth and tends to focus on small issues without giving enough information for an informed opinion to be made. My own personal view is that the education system is far more complex than the glib generalisations that are made.” (Male, 45-54)

“Bearing in mind Education is a political hot potato the coverage is quite unchallenging of the government” (Male, 55-64)

3.2.3. Delivery against key commitments

Respondents were asked to consider the BBC's performance of News and current affairs output against a number of commitments: politics in the UK; UK nations, regions and communities; and international issues and events. Each of these broad areas was described by a series of statements and respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with these statements.

Respondents were also asked to provide commentary on the BBC's delivery against these different commitments.

A. Politics in the UK

There is broad consensus that BBC News and current affairs coverage of politics in the UK keeps respondents informed about relevant UK political issues and events. Generally, respondents also agree that BBC News and current affairs coverage encourages people to talk about UK politics, political issues and to share their opinions. However, respondents are less positive about the way the BBC output explains the UK's role in European politics, the political institutions across the devolved nations and the range of perspectives covered across the output.

As such, a number of areas for improvement are highlighted by respondents:

- **Improve perceptions of bias:** The main concern among those commenting on BBC News and current affairs coverage of politics in the UK is a perception of bias. However, as seen throughout the consultation, there is no clear consensus as to the direction of this bias.

Some respondents also refer to journalists and presenters reporting their personal perspectives, rather than a balanced view of a particular story. Some respondents comment that they source other news providers in order to offer a different perspective.

"Too often the news in relation to politics is presented from the perspective of the presenter. It is annoyingly subjective. More objectivity and impartiality would be appreciated." (Female, 55-64)

"Political coverage is heavily skewed with most reporters failing to present unbiased views. Interviewees and contributors are rarely equally balanced and the interviewers' tone regularly reflects their personal bias." (Male, 55-64)

"I tend to look at the BBC app to see what the "established view" is on UK political issues and then look elsewhere (politics websites, Channel 4 news) for more balance." (Female, 45-54)

- **Improve coverage of politics in the devolved nations:** Some respondents comment that policies relevant only to England are covered too frequently and the reports do not explain the equivalent situation in each of the three other nations.

Many respondents also comment that policies only seem to be reported if they relate to England, and that equivalent policies relevant only to a devolved nation are not covered or given the same status.

"The BBC seems to forget that English issues like housing, education, health and planning are devolved in the regions, and are not the same as national UK issues like benefits, taxation, defence and foreign policy." (Male, 45-54, Scotland)

“Too much English focus of all programmes which treat English issues as British issues far too limited coverage of Scottish, Welsh and Irish issues.” (Male, 45-54, England)

“The coverage of devolved administrations is particularly bad at a national level. It is rarely made clear when stories only impact on England, and even rarer to cover stories Wales / Scotland / NI stories (outside of Scottish independence).” (Gender not provided, 25-34, Wales)

- **Broaden the political perspectives:** Some respondents comment on the over-reliance on the same experts across the range of output, which they feel can impact on the range of voices to which audiences are exposed. In addition, some feel that the BBC can give some extreme or minority perspectives too much air-time and this is not proportional.

“The BBC restricts its reporting largely to covering the Labour, Liberal and Tory parties and does not give enough coverage to the smaller parties even though under due impartiality those parties should receive coverage.” (No demographic information provided)

“Political perspectives stick to the three main political parties and then quite often the opinion of a lay member of public. Occasionally UKIP might get a look in if they've done something silly.” (Male, 25-34)

“Too much coverage is given to the minority right (UKIP, BNP) compared to the minority left (Green Party, Left Unity).” (Female, 35-44)

- **Greater emphasis needed on explaining the wider UK political system:** Some respondents suggest that more could be done by the BBC to explain more about how a particular issue moves through the political system, including the types of debate, decisions to be made and how policy becomes law. Others comment that little is discussed about regional politics which many feel would be useful to help people understand the value of engaging with politics at a local level.

“I do not think we get a full view about how the UK is run. There is a lot about Westminster. We do not hear about the Civil Service or local government much, except for criticism on specific failures- very little on progress or successes.” (Female, 55-64)

“The educational component of actually explaining how politics works in the UK is frequently lost. An uninformed viewer must wonder what terms such as 'whips' and 'back benchers' actually mean in context. Now, I know what they are, but many won't and I think it would do no harm to find ways to explaining how these work in context or finding ways of describing them that make things clearer.” (Male, 35-44)

“As you no doubt already know, the BBC is incredibly London-centric. People outside the south east of England have no stake in the BBC. It neither represents their views and lives nor informs them about local politics.” (Female, 65-74, Scotland)

B. UK nations, regions and communities

Around half of those responding to this section agree that BBC News and current affairs cover stories that matter across the UK's nations and regions. A similar proportion also agree that the output features journalists and presenters who reflect the diversity of the UK. However, a smaller

proportion of those responding agree that there is a UK-wide network of journalists who are expert in their region, that the coverage is presented in a way that appeals to a wide range of audiences or that the degree of analysis of issues relevant to the devolved nations is adequate.

A number of areas for improvement are highlighted by respondents who provide additional comments here:

- **Widen the geographic perspective:** As with the responses related to politics in the UK, many respondents commenting on the BBC's commitment to represent the UK nations, regions and communities reiterate their feeling that the news agenda seems to be London-focused with little coverage given to other English regions or the devolved nations.

In addition many of these respondents also comment on the lack of regional voices heard across the BBC output.

"If I came from NI or Scotland I would find the programmes not just Anglo-centric but London-centric." (Male, 65-74, England)

"I think the BBC coverage at a national level fails to give attention to local issues that might have a national impact." (Male, 65-74, England)

- **Widen the representation of different types of people:** Generally, respondents feel that presenters reflect a range of demographics. However, there seems to be a perceived lack of representation of women across the news output, both in terms of news presenters, but also the wider pool of contributors and experts that are used.

Other respondents would prefer to hear from a wider range of voices from across the social spectrum. While some acknowledge that presenters and contributors need to be articulate, many of these feel that this should not mean that the representation is limited to those who are perceived as 'middle-class'.

"BBC has very poor representation of older women across a wide range of news presenters, journalists, commentators etc. Bringing back a token older woman is not good enough. Male reporters & presenters are older, grey haired & are being employed because of their experience. Why not their female counterparts? Stop judging women by their youth & good looks." (Female, 65-74)

"How many major news presenters or reporters on the main radio & TV news programmes are non-white? There are more on local news programmes and on the News Channel but, in general, there are too few. This matters because many licence-payers feel ignored and unrepresented." (Male, 55-64, white)

"Where are the ethnic minorities and older women especially on the flagship national news programmes whether in the studios or out reporting? Sadly, there appears to be an identikit appearance for news presenters especially women. The same could also be said for sexual orientation and religion." (Female, 55-64, white)

"I think it's impossible for anyone to say you present material in a way that appeals to other groups - I can only really comment on what appeals to me. It seems fairly

balanced to me, but since I am white middle class female how would I really know. What I do know is that the presenters are definitely not representative of these diverse groups. There are very few disabled, black or old amongst them.”(Female, 55-64)

However, a smaller proportion of respondents comment that there is too much emphasis on diversity, which some suggest is the BBC being too ‘politically-correct’. These respondents feel that the focus should be on quality rather than recruiting particular types of demographic.

“Clear over-representation of several minority groups to the edging out of much larger groups of the population.” (No demographic information provided)

C. International issues and events

The majority of respondents agree that the BBC covers important stories from around the world and features international journalists who have expert knowledge about their region. Around half of respondents agree that global issues and politics are clearly presented, with a good depth of analysis of international issues using journalists and independent experts. A smaller proportion agree that BBC News and current affairs explores political, social and economic issues from across the globe and puts international issues into context to enable greater understanding by the audience.

Respondents who provided additional comment on this commitment generally feel that the BBC is unrivalled in the provision of news and current affairs about international issues. Although out of scope for this consultation, the output on the World Service is praised by many in the context of the coverage of international issues. In terms of the domestic output, specialist programmes on Radio 4 are particularly highlighted as being distinctive. However, key areas of improvement highlighted in responses to this commitment are:

- **Extend the use of expert journalists:** Many respondents suggest that expert journalists based in other countries should be used more across the main UK television news programmes in order to broaden the range and depth of international stories covered. Some also comment that the quality of presenting of these journalists can at times seem better than the UK correspondents.

Similarly, many respondents also criticise the practice of taking a lead news presenter and taking them on location to be the anchor of a major story. Many of these respondents suggest that it would be more cost effective to use local correspondents, as well as benefiting from their vital local knowledge.

“You have some really experienced, knowledgeable and articulate correspondents. Give them more scope to do considered planned programs, we can't take it all in when they are just reporting in short in the middle of news programs.” (Female, 55-64)

“The BBC's network of international correspondents and expertise is unrivalled. More should be made of them in bringing emerging international stories to a UK audience earlier, ahead of competitors.” (Male, 35-44)

“International news coverage is often presented in an adult way with in depth analysis. Why is it home news can't do this?” (Male, 35-44)

"A real strength. Foreign correspondents seem to be given much greater freedom to tell it as they see it." (Male, 45-54)

"You'd be better employing people from the countries and regions you are reporting about who have a much greater knowledge of culture and politics of their region, rather than fly out at our expense people who simply want a holiday abroad, and have little knowledge of the politics of the regions they are reporting from." (Female, 65-74)

"Why does the BBC waste money by sending out News Readers when they have knowledgeable local correspondents who can do the job! The presenter adds nothing to the item and sometimes looks like a fish out of water and just make inane remarks." (Male, 65-74)

- **Broaden the range and depth of international coverage:** Some respondents comment that the current provision of international news on the main programmes can be too limited and can be focused on the USA. When other countries or issues are covered, some suggest that this is only when there has been a disaster or if there is a British citizen involved. Respondents also suggest there could be more background and analysis provided within the main bulletins.

"Unless it is a war, potential for a war or major issue: famine, tsunami, earthquake. International news rarely features on the BBC in any real depth with often the undercurrent x is good and y is bad. The USA features more than Europe and even then we don't know what is the main story in France or Switzerland" (Male, 35-44)

"The international emphasis is very much the US, followed by old colony countries. Coverage of international stories is seldom (if ever) in any depth - just a cursory glance." (Female, 35-44)

"The BBC has massive resources yet only seems to report from obvious and often easy-to-report regions and issues. There seems to be an obsession with the US and the Middle-East and I think it would be great if every week there were good quality reports from those regions of the world which tend to go unreported - unless there is some kind of disaster." (Male, 55-64)

"It only covers the issues around the world when UK citizens are affected or the government wants it too so they can start a war or sanction something. Rarely hear about typhoons in Asia but in America.... Rarely hear of ferry deaths, unless a westerner on. I find it really sad how insulated we are. The journalists I believe are good but should be used more. What is happening all through Africa, Asia etc" (Female, 35-44).

- **Improve impartial coverage of international issues:** Although broadly the international coverage is praised, some respondents feel that at times the reporting does not present the full range of perspectives which can influence the understanding of a situation.

In particular, news events in the Middle East and Syria are referred to by many in this context as either being presented from one perspective or in such a condensed way that it omits particular facts.

*“Most overseas stories are either reduced in content to make them superficial, or they are presented as sob-stories, or they are presented from a UK perspective.”
(Male, 55-64)*

“BBC coverage of international news is extremely limited in scope and heavily biased. Important stories, such as the daily US drone attacks, the frequent clashes in Israel or Bahrain or the daily bombings in Baghdad are routinely ignored. The perspective is entirely pro-British/US/Israel. Every other view is marginalised. Context is rarely given and superficial at best.” (Male, 45-54)

“There is no context given to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, I only know the background to this because I studied it at school” (Female, 45-54)

3.2.4. Values demonstrated in BBC News

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt that BBC news output could be described as: trustworthy, accurate, up-to-date and impartial. Of the four words presented, the majority of respondents agree that BBC news can be described as 'up-to-date', around two thirds agree it can be described as 'accurate' or 'trustworthy', while a smaller proportion agree that BBC News can be described as 'impartial'.

Summary of responses on each value (presented in order of how well respondents think they describe BBC News)

- **Up-to-date:** Overall, the majority of respondents to this consultation agree that BBC News keeps them up to date across its different platforms. However, Sky News and social media are often highlighted as breaking news more quickly than the BBC, but respondents acknowledge and accept that the BBC tends to check the detail before reporting.

Some respondents comment that the *News at Ten* can sometimes repeat the early evening news, rather than providing any new stories or alternative perspectives. BBC Breakfast and the News Channel are also observed by some respondents as repeating stories too frequently.

"The BBC can always be relied upon to provide up to the minute coverage on the news channel, and would always be my first choice when seeking coverage of national events. The BBC news website would also be an early port of call when looking for video clips of current news, and the news ticker when looking for breaking news. The breaking news app on the iPhone is an excellent development, and very much appreciated." (Male, 35-44)

"You tend to favour accuracy over being the most up to date news source, I'm not sure that this is an issue." (Male, 25-34)

"Up to date? I may be 1-2 days ahead of BBC on issues of interest to me (e.g. conservation) through Twitter and RSS feeds." (Male, 55-64)

"News Channel bulletins often behind Sky and again lack a variety of visual material, repeating the same package throughout the day, failing to update as the story develops. Sky and others incorporate a wider variety of clips throughout the day." (Male, 55-64)

"As the day develops the news is just repeated with the same phrasing and comments. There is very little development of items and this lacks any kind of immediacy. Headlines at six in the morning are virtually repeated throughout the day until midnight with the same phrasing and comment." (Female, age not provided)

- **Accurate:** Overall, respondents comment that stories reported on BBC News are generally accepted as correct and accurate most of the time. It is noted by some as perhaps taking time to ensure facts are correct before reporting a breaking story more fully.

However, some comment that with some news items, facts may not be included which would offer a broader perspective on a particular story or provide context or further explanation.

“The BBC is not always first on a breaking new story (usually this is Sky News), but I would always pick BBC News for accuracy and trustworthiness. I don't mind waiting a little while longer for a more accurate story from the BBC.” (Male, 25-34)

“Accuracy is often poor, because so much is omitted.” (Male, 45-54)

“Don't just take stories, statistics, opinions of sources as accurate or comprehensive; often only half the truth! Need to qualify extent of accuracy eg we have been informed by XXX that...” (Male, 65-74)

- **Trustworthy:** There is a general sense among respondents that BBC News can be trusted, particularly when there is a breaking news story. However, some feel that there have been recent stories which highlight some errors in editorial judgement and therefore have impacted on the overall trustworthiness of BBC News. Others refer to lack of trustworthiness because of their perceptions of lack of impartiality.

“The BBC are not the fastest provider of news - yet this is certainly not a negative thing. When I see news on the BBC news/on its website, I feel I can trust that the information provided is verified, edited and is trustworthy.” (Male, 16-24)

“The Newsnight programme concerning Jimmy Savile and the wrongful accusations made against Lord McAlpine has shown the BBC to be untrustworthy and their editorial competency inadequate.” (Male, 65-74)

- **Impartial:** Although some respondents agree that the BBC News is impartial and trust it to provide a range of perspectives, many of those commenting perceive the BBC to have a particular viewpoint when it reports on particular stories. As seen throughout the consultation, there is no clear consensus on the direction of this perceived bias and a range of topics are mentioned in this context including the Middle East, Europe, climate change and UK politics. In addition, some respondents feel that too much reporting comprises presenter opinion, rather than the facts of a story.

“Sometimes feel that reporting is one sided. Would welcome more input from opposing sides to make up my own mind instead of feeling directed.” (Female, 55-64)

“Everything seems to be skewed and poor in its reporting without opinion and dramatisation. News should be factual not littered with comments and personal opinion and nonsense from overpaid journalists.” (No demographic information provided)

“The BBC news provides an overview with some patronising explanations of some of the issues. All views should be expressed and covered and time should be available for this. The BBC spends a disproportionate amount of time presenting rather than reporting and debating. A correspondent only expresses a view, they are not experts in a field. It is better to have an expert talking than a presenter.” (Male, 55-64)

3.2.5. Characteristics of BBC News output

Respondents were asked to comment on particular characteristics of news coverage and how well BBC News offers these characteristics. Access at any time of day and on a range of platforms is the characteristic that the majority of respondents think BBC News does well. However, only a minority think that BBC News reports on stories not covered by other news providers.

Summary of responses on characteristics of news output (presented in order of how well respondents think BBC News reflects each characteristic)

- **Allow access to news at all times of the day, across a range of platforms:** The range of services and platforms offered by the BBC is praised by many respondents as they allow the BBC to offer news and current affairs to suit the convenience of the audience.

“Dynamic linking of content between platforms (e.g. read a headline on twitter then click on link to read full article online then click on video to see interview on iPlayer) allows a far greater depth and understanding than is available from other providers.” (Male, 25-34)

“In terms of ease and use and accessibility the BBC, especially its digital content is exceptional.” (Male, 25-34)

“The great advantage of the BBC is it is good over a broad range of media. Really the only radio choice outside London. TV on a par with others. Online is probably the best overall.” (Male, 45-54)

However, other respondents comment that there can be too much repetition across the News Channel and in Breakfast in particular and that there should be a broader range of topics covered and in greater detail.

“Access to news may be available at all times but it's the same news repeated all day, stories are not developed as days pass, they just disappear. There is no variety or depth in area of interest in new stories.” (Female, 55-64)

“Because of cuts there seems to be less variation in news items across the BBC.” (Female, 65-74)

“Your coverage is generally good, but does tend to be rather repetitive, which makes me switch to other sources such as Al Jazeera and RT, where I can learn about stories which you never touch.” (Male, 55-64)

- **Cover important stories across a broad range of areas, including domestic and international news:** Although the majority of respondents feel that this is done well, many comment that more depth is needed. Also, as seen in the responses to the question about topics such as arts and culture or business, there are some who comment that some issues are not covered adequately across BBC news or that the BBC is selective in what is classified as ‘important’.

“I consistently see a wide range of news content across all BBC delivery channels, and feel Arts/Entertainment, Science, technology, politics, current affairs etc. are all given good representation.” (Female, 35-44)

“You do well with the range, less well with the depth of coverage. News 24 tends to repeat the same superficial snippets every 15 minutes rather than taking the



opportunity to go into greater depth - fine for a quick catch up but actually that can be achieved more effectively online.” (Female, 45-54)

“BBC does not cover the wide range of international events and incidents in its main bulletins I therefore watch Al Jazeera and France 24 and Euronews.” (Female, 55-64)

“Fails to cover important stories, including international news. It is overly interested in US affairs. Will not fully report issues relating to Russia, Iran or Syria. BBC is sometimes willing to give people a simple view of world events.” (Male, age not provided)

- **Include a good balance of topics e.g. finance, politics, arts & entertainment, crime, sport, the economy:** The majority of respondents feel that this is done well. However those who do comment often feel that BBC news does not always cover a range of different topics. Others feel that there can be too much focus on a particular topic to the detriment of depth of coverage of other issues, though there is no consensus on which topic.

“There is no balance of topics, as politics and business far exceed interest in arts, entertainment or environmental issues. This is what applies to TV News, but there is a greater broader swathe of news and stories on Radio 4.” (Male, 55-64)

“There is not enough emphasis on public, political and social policy - too much emphasis on less substantial issues.” (Male, 35-44)

“Far, far too much sport - on News 24 at least. Not enough explanatory features which could usefully replace 90% of sport coverage.” (Female, 55-64)

Feature reporters and contributors who are expert in their subject/area: The BBC’s feature reporters are generally praised by many respondents as demonstrating expertise in their field. Some respondents, however, would prefer to see these journalists scrutinising field experts and politicians more, rather than they themselves being interviewed by other BBC news presenters as the expert.

“BBC News has some superb reporters. This is your major strength.” (Female, 45-54)

“I do feel that world, political, technical and economically complex issues are often made more accessible by your reporters.” (Female, 45-54)

“The BBC has some excellent feature reporters who have a deep understanding of their subject area..... Their reports tend to provide a good overview and context on issues.” (Male, 55-64)

“I do wish so many presenters would listen to answers from interviewees before interrupting with another question, making it obvious that they have little interest in their subject but a lot in the sound of their own voice.” (Female, 65-74)

“Stop presenters of news interviewing reporters. It is the silliest habit you have got into. Leads to inane questions and inane answers and general dumbing down.” (Female, 55-64)

- **Explain complex issues in ways that people can understand:** Over half of respondents think that BBC News does this well but those respondents who commented on how well BBC News

fulfils this characteristic generally feel that the BBC sometimes goes too far in trying to simplify a story and can be perceived to be patronising. Some respondents feel that the aim to be simplistic can mean that there is insufficient depth of coverage of an issue.

Picking the correct level at which to explain complex issues is really hard, and I think the BBC generally makes good choices.” (Male, 55 to 64)

“BBC news generally doesn't explain complex issues in ways that people can understand, but instead simplifies issues to the extent that issues are distorted and reports biased.” (Female, 45-54)

- **Encourage a deeper understanding of issues by putting them in context to help explain the ‘bigger picture’:** Comments regarding this characteristic broadly echo those of the previous one, where respondents feel that the BBC can at times over-simplify the reporting of a particular story and fail to offer sufficient depth of coverage. Others feel that the ‘bigger picture’ of some news items is rarely conveyed due to biased coverage of those issues.

“Deeper understanding is not given on complex issues as you seem to worry about the intelligence of your audience.” (Male, 55-64)

“The Israel/Palestine issue is never put in context to give viewers/listeners a 'bigger picture' and reporters/contributors on this topic are often deemed to be experts, when in fact they are actually hiding (intentionally or not) the facts from their audience.”(Female, 55-64)

“When 'bigger picture' efforts are made, this is when tonal biases come in. It is difficult to be fair in assessing this. I am from the north of England and usually feel a slightly southern bias; someone from the south-east may feel there is too much regional emphasis.” (Male, 55-64)

- **Cover stories and issues that other channels/news providers would not:** Around one in four of those responding to this question feel that the BBC does this well. Some of those providing additional feedback here suggest the BBC should do more to broaden the range of stories covered in order to provide a greater understanding of important issues in the UK in particular.

As with the characteristic aimed at providing a broad range of stories, some respondents feel that BBC news could do more to widen its coverage of topics and avoid repeating the same news item in the same way throughout the day.

“I would very much welcome BBC news, in addition to the current main news items, straying away from reporting the same things that all other news providers deliver. Investigating and reporting on alternative issues that have as significant an impact on society but are less well reported, also it would be good to hear more alternative opinions and scenarios.” (Male, 25-34)

“In general terms, and this pertains to all the BBC news programmes, the idea that it 'Cover stories and issues that other channels/news providers would not' is laughable. There's far more content available via newspapers, Sky News and foreign networks. The way the BBC operates is that instead of having rolling news items, it seems to go back to the same things over and over throughout the day.” (Male, 25-34)

3.2.6. Characteristics of BBC Current Affairs output

Respondents were asked to comment on particular characteristics of current affairs output and how well the BBC fulfils these characteristics. The range of stories and balance of topics covered by BBC current affairs are most highly rated, with many respondents indicating that it covers important stories across a broad range of areas well, and also agreeing that there is a good balance of different topics.

Around half of those responding feel that complex issues are explained in a way that the audience can understand and that coverage encourages a deeper understanding by putting issues into context. However fewer respondents agree that it investigates and scrutinises issues sufficiently, and as reflected with BBC News, only a minority feel BBC current affairs output covers issues other news providers would not.

Summary of responses on characteristics of current affairs output (presented in order of how well respondents think BBC current affairs reflects each characteristic)

- **Covers important stories across a broad range of areas, including domestic and international news:** Among those who offer additional comments to this question, many refer to specific programme titles by way of example. On BBC television, *Panorama* is lauded as an outstanding current affairs programme and many comment that it has shown improvements. BBC Three documentaries are referred to by some, particularly younger people or those who watch television with younger people, as good examples of engaging young people in current affairs by presenting relevant issues in compelling and creative ways.

Many respondents also comment on the high quality and distinctive current affairs coverage across BBC radio, in particular Radio 4 and Radio 5 live, because of the engaging way they debate and discuss issues in greater detail.

"I think that the BBC is one of the best broadcasters for such programming. BSkyB and CNN concentrate more on rolling news and forget current affairs programming. The BBC makes excellent use of its mainstream channels which I think is what really makes people watch these programmes. The BBC should try and make more of its current affairs programming available on BBC three I think this will get more people interested in such programmes." (Male, 15 and under)

"Overall I think that news coverage across BBC current affairs is very good. I particularly like This Week and The Sunday Politics show, and one off documentaries especially the Men Who Made us Fat. Stacey Dooley Investigates stands out as the best documentary series that makes issues accessible to young people and I would like to see this re-commissioned, and maybe run on a different channel like BBC 2 or 1" (Female, 45-54)

"BBC Radio 4 output is exceptional and is incredibly informative. It often brings light to world issues and stories not covered elsewhere which expand my knowledge on subjects." (Male, 25-34)

- **Includes a good balance of topics e.g. finance, politics, arts & entertainment, crime, sport, the economy:** while the majority of respondents think this is done well, as with BBC News, some respondents suggest that BBC current affairs coverage does not offer the range of perspectives when presenting different stories and could still do more to cover a greater variety of stories and in greater detail. Others comment that BBC current affairs should not only



scrutinise topics that have been on the main news but should introduce new issues which have not been given any prominence on the main bulletins.

Some responses also refer to a perceived bias in the coverage of particular issues, which can lead to an omission of some topics or some topics being covered too much.

“Not enough about Arts and environment or just showing people how to be 'good', too much scrutiny of news topics, too much talking about it all, too much politics and current affairs so not well balanced” (Female, 45-54)

“Most current affairs programmes tend to be about London or abroad. Any local stories that concern me are kept local and only shown on BBC NORTH. I feel that I am expected to care about London, but they don't wanna hear what's going on in Yorkshire.” (Male, 25-34, England)

“You are ignoring the issues affecting great swathes of the population. The changes proposed to the NHS will affect the whole country. This is not about hearts and minds but has strong underpinning clinical evidence to support it. Yet the BBC do not offer fair and reasonable coverage.” (Female, 45-54)

- **Explains complex issues in ways that people can understand:** Although some feel it is good that the BBC conveys issues in a simple fashion in order to inform a broad audience, others feel that this can sometimes affect the depth and coverage of a particular issue.

“Current affairs programmes often promise much, but fail to deliver in depth. This is mainly due to the lack of detail, or a small number of interviews, or the desire to “skim over the surface” of the issue.” (Male, 55-64)

“Too much simplifying of issues, too much explaining background that we already know, too much making things `easier` to understand, and all without the in depth background investigation that would make these programmes more informative to people who are not just after simplified snapshots of events..” (Male, 65-74)

- **Investigates and scrutinises issues and institutions:** Generally the BBC's current affairs programmes are praised for getting to the core of an issue and challenging key people.

However, there are some who feel that bias or the personal opinion of journalists can at times impact on the degree of scrutiny or the direction of the investigation.

“Investigations such as Analysis, File on 4, Profile are very well researched and enlightening.”(Female, 65-74)

“Investigation and scrutiny only seem to apply when they chime with an agenda that seems to have been internally set.” (Male, 45-54)

““Investigate and scrutinise issues and institutions” - it never objectively questions those people/lobbies who are opposed to its basic institutional mind-set. The BBC should attempt to choose staff which come from outside the narrow Left wing/metropolitan mind-set.” (Male, 55-64)



- **Covers stories and issues that other channels/news providers would not:** Among those providing additional comments here, many do not feel that BBC current affairs offers different topics compared to other channels, with some suggesting other channels can be more distinctive. However, generally the BBC is seen to tackle issues well compared to other broadcasters.

“I would rate BBC as no different to other channels and some (e.g. Al Jazeera & Russia Today) cover stories only touched on (or not covered) by the BBC.” (Male, 65-74)

However overall the BBC does quite well in its coverage of current affairs and no channel does it better. “From our own correspondent and crossing continents are two of the best programmes on the BBC covering really interesting topics by people who know what they are taking about and enjoy communicating it. Panorama does not go deep enough into the topic and sometimes seems to have a made its decision beforehand. ..but BBC way ahead of other channels in this area” (Female, 75-84)

“The BBC doesn't cover stories or issues that other channels won't provide. At the end of the day, with all the resources the BBC has, much of its output across channels is remarkably homogenous.”(Male, 55-64)

4. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Freeform responses

In addition to those taking part in the consultation by completing the online questionnaire or by sending a proforma response by email or post, a further 136 more general comments were received by email.

The comments offered broadly reiterated many themes received through the main consultation: perceptions of bias, too England/London-centric, repetition of news items throughout the day and limited range of topics. Additional comments included:

- Protests against the licence fee
- Update the formats / presentation styles to make them more relevant
- Improve coverage of rural issues
- Too much time given to weather forecasts
- Schedule programmes earlier in the evening
- Too celebrity-focused
- Improvements needed in use of grammar/English language
- Duplication in coverage across BBC One and News Channel
- Use of distracting background music
- Accusations of ‘dumbing down’
- Pointless use of outside locations
- Praise for specific programmes (including Dateline London, Radio 4)
- Sexism in coverage
- Announcing sports results without warning

APPENDIX B – Respondent profile

The BBC Trust is committed to ensuring that it listens to the views of a wide range of licence fee payers and therefore the consultation also gave respondents the opportunity to indicate their gender, age, location by nation of the UK, national identity, disability, religion, sexual orientation and ethnicity.

The following tables show the available demographic information for the 9,264 respondents to the consultation. Please note some respondents did not supply this information.

Gender	Number of respondents	% of overall total
Male	6,007	70%
Female	2,323	27%
Prefer not to say	280	3%
Total	8,610	100%

Age	Number of respondents	% of overall total
15 and under	31	0%
16-24	198	2%
25-34	471	5%
35-44	795	9%
45-54	1,489	17%
55-64	2,293	27%
65 and over	2,919	34%
Prefer not to say	447	5%
Total	8,643	100%

Disability	Number of respondents	% of overall total
No	7,003	82%
Yes	992	12%
Prefer not to say	531	6%
Total	8,526	100%

Location	Number of respondents	% of overall total
England	7,469	87%
Scotland	618	7%
Wales	386	5%
Northern Ireland	66	1%
Other	17	0%
Total	8,556	100%

Sexual Orientation	Number of respondents	% of overall total
Heterosexual/Straight	6,427	76%
Gay man	292	3%
Bisexual	130	2%
Gay woman/Lesbian	44	1%
Other	120	1%
Prefer not to say	1,401	17%
Total	8,414	100%

Religion/belief	Number of respondents	% of overall total
No religion	3,511	42%
Christian	3,255	39%
Jewish	66	1%
Buddhist	61	1%
Muslim	37	0%
Sikh	13	0%
Hindu	12	0%
Other	346	4%
Prefer not to say	1,057	13%
Total	8,358	100%

Ethnicity	Number of respondents	% of overall total
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	6	0%
Asian or Asian British: Chinese	7	0%
Asian or Asian British: Indian	39	0%
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	25	0%
Asian or Asian British: Other Asian background	15	0%
Black or Black British: African	15	0%
Black or Black British: Caribbean	17	0%
Black or Black British: Other Black background	3	0%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Asian	33	0%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black African	8	0%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black Caribbean	5	0%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group:	35	0%

Any other		
White English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh	6,560	79%
White: Irish	96	1%
White: Other White background	310	4%
Gypsy / Irish Traveller	5	0%
Other ethnic group	129	2
Prefer not to say	1,010	12%
Total	8,318	100%

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