

BBC Four

This service licence describes the most important characteristics of BBC Four, including how it contributes to the BBC's public purposes. Service Licences are the core of the BBC's governance system. They aim to provide certainty for audiences and stakeholders about what each BBC service should provide.

The Trust uses service licences as the basis for its performance assessment and as the basis for its consideration of any proposals for change to the UK public services from the BBC Executive. A service may not change in a way that breaches its service licence without Trust approval. The Trust presumes that any proposed change to a stated Key Characteristic of a licence will require it to undertake a Public Value Test. Should it decide not to carry out a Public Value Test before approving any such change, then it must publish its reasons in full.

Part I: Key characteristics of the service

1. Remit

BBC Four's primary role is to reflect a range of UK and international arts, music and culture. It should provide an ambitious range of innovative, high quality programming that is intellectually and culturally enriching, taking an expert and in-depth approach to a wide range of subjects.

2. Scope of this Licence

BBC Four should be available from 19.00hrs - 04.00hrs every day. It should be transmitted free to air for general reception in the UK as a live broadcast on digital television and it may be simulcast on fixed and mobile internet protocol networks. It may also be simulcast as a high definition (HD) channel.

It may also offer its broadcast content on fixed and mobile internet protocol networks or via other platforms¹ for 30 days after it has been broadcast. On the same platforms, it may allow users prospectively via pre-booking to download multiple episodes of a series.

It should offer programme-related content on bbc.co.uk.² Some programmes should have interactive television features available on digital platforms.

¹ In accordance with the Trust's Syndication Policy for BBC on-demand content.

² This includes the offer of some news and current affairs output on-demand for an unlimited time period after initial broadcast. It may also offer programming including archive, for an unlimited time period after initial broadcast as part of a permanent collection of on demand content

3. Service budget

BBC Four has a service budget of £44 million in 2014/15.

Any planned or actual change in annual expenditure on the service of more than 10% in real value requires approval from the BBC Trust and may entail variation of this Service Licence.

4. Overview of aims and objectives

BBC Four programmes should exhibit some or all of the following characteristics: high quality, original, challenging, innovative and engaging, and it should nurture UK talent.

BBC Four should deliver its remit through a broad range of culturally enriching and innovative programming including philosophy and ideas, science and nature, politics, social issues, art, performance, music, film, media and news – in particular global news and current affairs. Within the defined scope of the service, it should stimulate, support and reflect the diversity of cultural activity in the UK.

BBC Four should offer a news and current affairs programme covering UK and international stories in peaktime on weeknights. It should offer the best international and foreign language feature films, programming and documentaries.

The channel should offer a significant proportion of originally commissioned, UK originated programming, nurture new presenting talent and experiment with new comedy. It should frequently provide factual and arts programming that complements output on BBC Two, by adding greater depth and context. The channel should not develop at the expense of music and arts programmes on BBC One and BBC Two.

BBC Four should place an emphasis on interactivity as a means to deliver its diverse and in-depth content to those who might not otherwise seek it out.

BBC Four is committed to commissioning output from outside the M25 area and from independent suppliers, in accord with the BBC's statutory commitments³ and the operation of the BBC's In-house Guarantee and Window of Creative Competition.

³ All statutory commitments are set out in Annex II of this licence

Part II: Contribution to public value

5. Contribution to the promotion of the BBC's public purposes

5.1 Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence

BBC Four should make a very important contribution to this purpose amongst its audience. It should commission programmes from a diverse range of suppliers across a wide mix of genres and contribute to the BBC's statutory commitments to independent producers, and producers outside London. The channel should build relationships with new independent suppliers who may then go on to win commissions from BBC Two or BBC One. It should aim to bring on new presenter talent and to experiment with new comedy that aims to be literate and intelligent.

Within the defined scope of the service, it should stimulate, support and reflect the diversity of cultural activity in the UK. It should offer a diverse musical agenda with a commitment to classical and specialist music of many kinds and a world music agenda which reflects the multicultural tastes of UK audiences.

Drama should occasionally feature on the channel, and it should widen the choice of film available on television, particularly world cinema. Its documentaries should explore new forms of storytelling and its arts and cultural coverage should have a wide range, including painting, architecture, photography, literature and ideas.

Conditions

BBC Four should:

- Broadcast at least 150 hours of new arts and music programmes each year⁴

5.2 Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK

BBC Four should make a very important contribution to this purpose amongst its audience, primarily by bringing the world to the UK.

It should offer international and foreign language feature films and a range of foreign language dramas and documentaries. As part of the channel's commitment to world cinema it should regularly premiere international and foreign language feature films, help to support their distribution and appreciation in the UK and should provide context and review on screen and online.

⁴ This output includes acquisitions

BBC Four should contribute to the BBC's ambition to co-produce or acquire the best programming from around the world by frequently broadcasting new documentaries from around the world.

Foreign language output should regularly be subtitled, including in peaktime, to allow people from around the world to be heard in their own voices.

BBC Four's nightly news and regular current affairs programming should demonstrate a distinctively international perspective. Within its own commissions, BBC Four should include UK perspectives on international culture and life.

5.3 Promoting education and learning

BBC Four should make an important contribution to this purpose amongst its audience by offering a broad range of factual programming.

The majority of programmes on BBC Four should be factual and should aim to build viewers' knowledge by offering greater context and depth than any other BBC channel and by using leaders in their field to describe and explain their areas of expertise.

BBC Four should feature an ambitious range of subject matter, including science, business, social issues, ideas, politics and global affairs. Within this range it may give different emphasis to genres in different seasons, examining issues of particular depth or complexity, including global and minority cultural perspectives.

It should work closely with BBC Two, in particular in factual and arts output. For example, between the two channels there will sometimes be complementary programming during thematic seasons or alongside landmark output. They will also show a range of pre-planned cross-channel repeats designed to increase the reach and impact of its programmes with the audience.

BBC Four should also create space in peaktime to do things that mainstream channels find difficult, such as exploring a single theme in great detail, offering a forum for debate and opinion, and broadcasting subtitled foreign-language output or programming of a long duration.

Conditions

BBC Four should:

- Broadcast at least 60 hours of new factual programmes each year⁵

5.4 Reflecting the UK's nations, regions and communities

⁵ This output includes acquisitions

BBC Four should play its part in supporting this purpose amongst its audience. Within its defined remit, the channel should stimulate, support and reflect the diversity of the UK. It should provide a platform for local celebrations in the nations and regions and should also create occasions that bring people together and allow them to express local culture. It will also cover issues of faith, spirituality and ethics.

BBC Four should help to create and sustain communities of interest by enabling online exchange of ideas and opinions stimulated by its output.

BBC Four should support the BBC's statutory commitment to commission a range of output from outside the M25.⁶

5.5 Sustaining citizenship and civil society

BBC Four should play its part in supporting this purpose amongst its audience through its provision of impartial, accurate and independent news and current affairs.

BBC Four should offer an in-depth news and current affairs programme in peaktime on weeknights, that significantly broadens the BBC's television news provision by focussing on an international news agenda and appealing to those who are interested in global news and current affairs.

5.6 Emerging communications

The BBC's sixth public purpose is defined in the Charter as "in promoting its other purposes, helping to deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services and, in addition, taking a leading role in the switchover to digital television".

BBC Four should contribute to the promotion of this purpose in a variety of ways which are described in this Service Licence.

⁶ All statutory commitments are set out in Annex II of this licence

6. Annexes to this Licence

6.1 Annex I – Performance assessment

The performance of BBC Four will be assessed by the Trust using the framework described in Annex I. BBC Four's compliance with any Conditions, as described in section 5, will also be measured on an annual basis and reported in the Annual Report and Accounts.

The BBC Trust will expect BBC Four to comply with the commitments described in sections 4 and 5 of the Service Licence. The BBC Trust will monitor compliance with these commitments retrospectively as part of its periodic service reviews and/or on an exceptional basis if there is evidence or allegation of non-compliance.

6.2. Annex II - Statutory commitments

Details of statutory quotas and other obligations to be fulfilled by BBC Four, in conjunction with other BBC services, are set out in Annex II.

Annex I: Performance measurement framework

The BBC Trust has the function of assessing the performance of the Executive Board in delivering the BBC's services and activities and holding the Executive Board to account for its performance.⁷ It uses the framework described below as the basis for its assessment of BBC Four.

The framework uses a range of metrics based around the four drivers of public value:

- Quality
- Reach
- Impact
- Value for money.

The Trust can amend this framework without this constituting formal variation to this Service Licence.

⁷ Charter, article 24 (c)

Annex II: Statutory commitments

In addition to the conditions and commitments described in this Service Licence, BBC Four has, or contributes to the fulfilment of, a number of statutory commitments each calendar year.

- A minimum percentage of all hours, and peaktime hours must be originations (original productions include all BBC-commissioned programming, excluding repeats of programming first shown on another BBC public service channel)
- A minimum percentage of relevant programme production budgets, representing a percentage of hours of productions by volume, must be spent outside the M25
- To maintain the current broad range of programmes produced outside the M25, and broad range of different production centres used across the UK.
- A minimum percentage of qualifying hours to be provided by independent producers
- A minimum percentage of qualifying hours to have subtitling, signing and audio description television access services