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## Response to The BBC Trust Consultation on Delivering Quality First



### What they say:

*"Providing outstanding children's content is one of the BBC's five editorial priorities as set out in the 'Putting Quality First' strategy. We believe it is very important that the BBC serves children across all its platforms as part of its public service mission"* **BBC Trust Decision on BBC's Strategy for Children's Audio, 2011**

*"The BBC has one mission: to inform, educate and entertain audiences with programmes and services of high quality, originality and value ..."* **Mark Thompson, BBC Director General, 2010**

*"You could argue that we should have launched a children's channel as part of our DAB [offering]... I think that would be a legitimate thing to argue. As it is, we did a partial service and that has not quite worked"* **Caroline Thomson, Westminster e-Forum, 2009**

*"Radio is at the heart of the BBC's public service mission and millions of listeners rely on its quality, range and integrity every day..."* **Mark Thompson, Director General of the BBC, 2008**

*"The BBC should be encouraged to increase the amount of original children's programming on BBC7, and, as the audience appetite for its children's radio services becomes clearer, consider increasing investment and hours broadcast".* **Tim Gardam's recommendations for BBC Digital Radio, 2004**

*"When children and young people experience high-quality arts, it helps them to develop not only their own artistic skills and cultural understanding, but also encourages the development of their talents in other aspects of their lives. The future of the creative economy depends on opportunities for children and young people to participate in arts and creativity being provided today"* **Arts Council Manifesto**

*"Our culture brings audiences from across the world and we are particularly adept at producing world-leading performers and artists. "To remain in such a strong position we need to be sure that we are giving children the best start in their cultural education".* **Culture Minister, Ed Vaisey**

*"Every child should be exposed to rich cultural opportunities. Too often, this is a privilege reserved for the wealthy few. This must change"* **Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove**

*"The number of children with language delay is worryingly high. Radio is an ideal medium to help them learn to concentrate and to listen without visual distraction. Parents often tell us they don't know enough stories or nursery rhymes, and shared radio listening would support them and give them confidence".* **Speech and Language Therapist, Gila Falkus**

**Delivering Quality First:** The BBC is claiming that no services will close in the cuts. In fact a key service was closed in February when the **BBC's Children's Audio Strategy** eliminated a core remit to provide children with a commercial-free radio home and forced immediate cuts of 75% to their content and 50% to their budget. This contrasts sharply with the proposed DQF cuts averaging 12% across local radio and 16% to 20% across the BBC - all to be spread over five years.

A rebranded 'family friendly' hour was scheduled on R4Extra, which is also designated *home for fans of Horror, Sci-fi; Fantasy and Stand-up Comedy*.

**See Appendix 1:** BBC Harm and Offense.

Rewriting the R7 Service Licence to delete licence-funded radio for children and replace all references to *content for children* with the more ambiguous *content that appeals to children* has altered 'key characteristics' that were designated as 'significant' but neither Public Interest Test [PIT] or PVT was applied. At the same time as shelving its remit to provide advertisement-free content for children, the BBC prioritised the sale of publicly funded archive to third parties, including commercial rivals, thus commercialising young ears, in direct contravention of Reg Bailey's recommendations in his Government sponsored Report: Letting Children be Children [06/06/2011] \*

Treating children's audio in advance, and separately, has avoided any mention of these radical changes in the DQF Report: side-stepping the public consultation and divisive comparison between children's and adults' radio funding.

BBC executives believe children under-seven need television and internet content but not radio and the much vaunted *additional £25m for BBC children's* is ring-fenced for these. Of £125m on BBC children's services just £1m is allocated to children's radio.

Defending the BBC's Audio Strategy for Children, executives postulated that today's children may no longer be able to listen without visual stimulation: apparently oblivious to this alarming wake-up call and the BBC's culpability in it.

The two remaining hours of daily radio for this age-group were replaced in July by internet downloads which, parents say, need extra equipment, knowledge and grownup-time and are a poor substitute for the pre-programmed push button radios that some parents had purchased specially for their children to listen to.

These podcasts average 16 minutes, consisting of prolonged intros., outros., and repeated songs, stories and rhymes. The majority are sourced from TV and are of mediocre quality in both sound and content.

Songs and games are interrupted by copious plugs for CBeebies, parroted by children too young to understand they are selling a Worldwide brand. One of the five pillars of the BBC's future editorial strategy is: *to provide outstanding services for children*, which these downloads really do not.

Radio should not hang on the coat-tails of television. It is a distinctly different medium, which child-care experts consider to be of equal if not greater importance to this age-group. The prevailing screen and keyboard culture is blamed for increasing listening and language delay; attention deficit and childhood obesity but high quality radio can bring necessary balance and choice to children's leisure and cultural life: generating a lifelong love of listening and a loyal audience for the future.

The BBC's remit is to serve all communities across all its delivery platforms with high quality content for others to aspire to. This must include children, who, despite the vast expansion of radio space, now have less licence-funded radio than 'Children's Hour' provided in the 1940s, when the Home Service was the only platform of delivery.

Three independent research studies have placed a licence-funded radio network for young children and their families on the top line of public preference compared with the BBC's digital offerings. Delivering Quality First should include an in-depth evaluation of radio's potential in young listeners' lives, rather than conniving to sacrifice their radio rights and minimal resources on the altar of adult savings.

The BBC wants partnership with others to build shared digital public space and here is the ideal platform to put this into practice. The Sound Start Group's proposal for collaboration, using shared public space and content, is outlined in **Appendix 2**.

**Notes:** [Our highlighting]

**BBC Radio Budgets:**

£638m - all BBC radio

£400k - podcasts for children aged under-seven years

£600k - 'Family Friendly' radio content for children aged seven to 14 years

**PQF:** *Putting Quality First* concluded that the BBC should increasingly concentrate its creative energy and resources on five editorial priorities defined by the Director-General. They represent the five things which the public say they most want from the BBC and which most clearly speak to its public service mission. The five pillars of the BBC's future editorial strategy are therefore to provide:

*The best journalism in the world*

*Ambitious original British drama and comedy*

*Inspiration and commitment in the fields of knowledge, music and culture*

*Outstanding services for children*

*Events that bring communities and the nation together.*

**BBC Children's** has an annual budget of £125m, and is responsible for two digital children's channels, CBBC and CBeebies, and contributes output to BBC One and BBC Two. Of this £1m is allocated to CBeebies audio podcasts and a 'family friendly' radio hour.

**The BBC states:** We want to protect the five editorial priorities that the Director-General has identified: news; children's programming; UK drama and comedy; knowledge programming; and the coverage of events of national importance. These are the heart of the BBC, where it most clearly distinguishes itself from other programme makers.

A BBC ready to partner with others to build a shared digital public space.

A BBC which, in uncertain times for audiences and media alike, is more determined than ever to bring the best to everyone.

**MORI and Capibus Ipsos MORI research:**

2001 Research Data: <http://www.sound-start.co.uk/?p=71>

2010 Research Data: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/poll-public-demand-for-a-childrens-radio-network-ipsos-mori-tables.pdf>

2011 Research Data: [http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/Sound\\_start.pdf](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/Sound_start.pdf)

**[Letting Children Be Children: the Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood](#)** - Reg Bailey, Published 6 June 2011.

**Appendix 1: BBC Harm and Offence**

**Appendix 2: Sound Start Group Plan**

**S.S. 27/12/2011**