

AUDIENCE COUNCIL ENGLAND

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 11 March 2008 at BBC Birmingham

IN ATTENDANCE:-

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| Alison Hastings | Chair |
| Clarke Willis | Chair, East |
| Dwain Neil | Chair, London |
| Frank Swinhoe | representing North East & Cumbria RAC |
| Jacqui Francis | Chair, West Midlands |
| Julie Panagarry | Chair, North West |
| Phillippa Denton | Chair, East Midlands |
| Ted Wright | Chair, Yorkshire & Lincolnshire |
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| Stuart Paterson | Acting Chair, West |
| Thelma Holland | Chair, South West |
| Rob Fryatt | representing South RAC |
| Sioned-Mair Richards | representing Yorkshire RAC |
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| <i>Andy Griffee (part)</i> | <i>Controller, English Regions</i> |
| <i>Chris van Schaick (part)</i> | <i>Head of Programming, English Regions</i> |
| <i>Professor Bill Osgerby }</i> | <i>London Metropolitan University</i> |
| <i>Dr Anna Gough-Yates} (part)</i> | |
| <i>Jana Bennett }</i> | <i>Director Vision</i> |
| <i>Philippa Gay } (part)</i> | <i>Head of Production Strategy</i> |
| <i>Louise Hall</i> | <i>Head of Governance & Accountability, England</i> |
| <i>Frances Bryant</i> | <i>Public Accountability Manager, South & South East</i> |
| <i>Carol Webster (part)</i> | <i>Public Accountability Manager, Midlands</i> |

APOLOGIES

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| Elizabeth Peacock | Chair, Yorkshire |
| Annette Priestley | Chair, South |
| Sue Kelly | Chair, North East & Cumbria |
| David Claridge | Chair, South East |

1. APOLOGIES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Alison Hastings welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Sue Kelly, Annette Priestley, Elizabeth Peacock and David Claridge. There was also an apology from Hannah Eyres who had been going to stand in for Sue but had had to pull out at the last minute because of work commitments.

She welcomed deputies Rob Fryatt, Sioned-Mair Richards and Frank Swinhoe.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

2.1 The minutes were approved as a true record.

2.2 Matters arising

Reports on outstanding action points from the previous meeting were heard:-

- the 2008 list of local accountability link members would be sent to Andy Griffie once finalised;
- the attendee list for the 30 April Chairs' Induction Day was still being drawn up;
- headlines from the February/March outreach events which had already taken place would be verbally reported on later in the meeting.

3. REPORTS

3.1 Trust meetings

Members had received the December Minutes and January summary. The following was raised:

Ref: 178.2 December Minutes Digital Switchover - it was important that the lessons learned from Whitehaven should be reviewed as switchover continued its rollout.

The Chair highlighted the importance of the ACE contribution to the final decision on the Gaelic PVT. The Council had also contributed to the bbc.co.uk review which was nearing completion.

A Service Review programme for this year had been drawn up and 26 service licences were to be reviewed over the next four years. Services and content for children and young people would be reviewed in 2008/09, beginning with CBeebies and CBBC in the spring and the remainder later in the year.

ACE Appointments Panel

The Chair reported that all 57 nominations to the Regional Audience Councils had been approved. Confirmation of terms of appointment were to be agreed with the Regional Chairs. There had been a discussion of the selection process including selection criteria, registering possible conflicts of interest, and total terms of service. The Chair congratulated the RAC Chairs and accountability team on their efforts in improving overall diversity.

3.2 Report of the Head of Governance & Accountability, England

Louise Hall drew members' attention to the following:

Audience Council Day 2007: Progress Report

The latest update was awaited; it would be forwarded to members as soon as possible.

Maximising Audience Councils' Effectiveness Review (MACE)

The final report was going to the Trust on 19 March; copies would be circulated once approved. The main concerns identified during the review were: the impact of council work; councils' visibility; feedback from the Trust; and council workload.

The key points under each of the four workstreams were summarised as follows:

- Business Planning
 - A new business cycle with the Audience Councils Day moving to December, in order to feed into the development of the Trust's work plan for the following year
- Audience Engagement

- More structured engagement plans across all councils, with members using their own networks more
- Selection & Recruitment
 - Agreed selection criteria for all Audience Councils and the sharing of best practice
- Business Support
 - Review of local induction; publication of council minutes and submissions; and feedback from members on the support they need.

Action was also planned on raising councils' profile by illustrating the impact of councils' work on the Trust in publications, enhancing the web presence and aligning the profile-raising plans for the Trust and the Councils.

BBC Journalist Training

An invitation had been received from the BBC's College of Journalism to RAC members to assist with journalist training and the audience-centred focus. The accountability team would take this forward.

3.3 Report of the Controller, English Regions

Andy Griffie reported on his Performance Review for the year. He highlighted the connection with the accountability structure and the impact made:

the South West RAC had been asking for subtitles on the Channel Island news – this had been delivered..

SuperLeague – this had previously only been shown in the North of England. There had been steady feedback that other parts of the country would like to see this and Director of Sport Roger Mosey had agreed to a Sunday night BBC Two repeat.

Distribution Issues:

The roll-out of FreeSat would begin in May. This was co-owned by the BBC and ITV and would plug the gaps for those with poor Freeview reception. Members were concerned that in certain areas the wrong regional programme would be provided. Andy explained this should not be an issue with FreeSat as the BBC had control over the signal and was providing the postcodes, so any previous anomalies should be corrected. This was a parallel service to Sky's FreeSat, and the same free- to-air channels will be available. Andy agreed to provide a distribution timetable.

Andy outlined a major project, *Made in England*, to be launched on St George's Day (23 April). This was co-funded by the Arts Council. There would be six independent landmark programmes and Local Radio would develop ideas with community arts projects who can bid for grants from the Arts Council; these projects would link back to Local Radio. Andy would welcome feedback on the project.

Diversity:

Progress had been made in the English Regions with an increase overall from 6 to 9% of ethnic minority staff and some specific examples of regional improvement: BBC London 27.5% and BBC West Midlands 14%.

Ethnic minority representation in senior management was 12% (three people out of a management staff of 22) and disability representation stood at 5.7% against a BBC wide target of 4%.

Performance:

TV News has a 47.5% reach against a target of 45%. This figure now included the breakfast news which was three minutes long.

Across the year regional TV was down 1.6%, which was still considerably better than ITV but shows a steady and slow decline of linear regional news viewing.

Andy informed members that the weekend and lunchtime bulletins would increase in duration, but with the loss of the weekday 3pm bulletin.

Inside Out: this had been a very good year with 3.2m viewers a night. There had been concerns that *The One Show* would impact on the audience, but this had not proved the case. There had been a number of strong exclusive stories.

The Politics Show: again this had delivered a strong audience of 830, 000.

It had been a good year for landmark programmes: two half hours on the commemoration of the Bill to Abolish the Slave Trade; and two *Nation on Films specials* – Bollywood Festival and the Munich Air Disaster. Network partnerships were *Nature's Top 40* and *Helicopter Heroes* which had recently been recommissioned.

Local Radio: listening had fallen 242,000 to 9.5million. BBC Local Radio stations continued to be distinctive.

Online: This was 39% up year on year. January 2008 was English Regions' most successful month for New Media, with a record 18.5 million Unique Users and 203 million Page Impressions to News stories and Where I Live sites.

In summary Andy said English Regions output was at a crossroads; TV and Local Radio were in slight decline while online was going through the roof. The BBC needed to keep the linear audience but feature more of its audio and video online, making output more available and for longer periods.

Members raised the following:

Diversity: the figures were pleasing and mentoring would improve staff recruitment. With the right staff, portrayal would improve. Andy agreed and referred to a podcast called *UKBlack*, a compilation of Local Radio output specifically for ethnic minorities.

BBC Buses: there was continued concern that these were going. They had promoted the stations and got them out into communities. Andy was equally sorry but core programming had to be the priority at a time of efficiency savings. It was hoped other plans with BBC Learning might go some way to mitigating their loss.

Local Radio Link: members discussed the Local Radio Link representative on the councils. Andy asked for a description of the role. It was important that the person was a regular listener to Local Radio, had an understanding of the Service Licence, developed a good dialogue with the Managing Editor, and had a clear understanding of the role in reporting to the RAC.

3.4 Head of Radio Development Presentation

Chris van Schaick outlined Local Radio's position today, holding a very strong place in the market with its purpose described in the service licence, but it was important to raise the bar of a quality product.

Members still felt the 50 plus target audience for Local Radio was too prescriptive. Chris agreed that today's 70 year olds were more like the 50 year olds of the seventies – many were prosperous, young at heart and active. Retired people could be as active as the working population. It was vital that the production quality was maintained and made available to this more active generation through DAB, streamed or 'listen again', for example via podcast.

The relationships between presenter and listener, personality and content was crucial. Local Radio was an important area for bringing on new talent and speech was its underlying ingredient: however, people liked speech with a small amount of music that was familiar and there was room for the specialist music programmes.

(Presentation will be despatched separately)

The Council then gave approval to and signed off the Statement of Programme Policy for 2008 - 09.

4. RAC ANNUAL REPORTS

Members queried if a consensus or a range of views was required. It was agreed this was dependent on the topic being discussed: the Gaelic Digital Service Public Value Test and i-Player needed a consensus, but when discussing output it was important to bring the different views from the regions.

4.1 Review of Local Radio

Members highlighted the following: praise for the Local Radio coverage during the floods which had provided excellent reporting and good reliable information; and relationships between Local Radio and network radio which needed to be encouraged as Local Radio had the knowledge and understanding of their area.

5. PRIORITY ISSUES FOR THE BBC TRUST

5.1 Audience Priorities 2008/09 (Summary attached)

Louise Hall tabled the draft ACE Annual Report and thanked members for their work over the year which had resulted in an impressive volume and range of feedback. In drafting this year's report, she had taken into account the Chairs' Introductions to their own regional reports and the Audience Priorities from the RACs.

Members were invited to agree the draft Priorities on page 16 and identify which should be taken to the Trust for action.

It was agreed that 13 key issues was too many and further comments on the Priorities and the Report could be made up to midday on Monday 17 March.

5.2 Annual Performance Review Presentation

This would take place in London on 23 April, preceded by a dinner hosted by the Chairman on the evening of 22 April. The ACE representatives would be Phillippa Denton, Dwain Neil and Julie Panagarry. Further details and briefing would be sent to the three in due course.

6. OUTREACH ACTIVITY

6.1 February events: Entertainment

Two events had taken place in the North West (with three generations), one in the South (grandparents), and one in the south East (three generations). Ages ranged from 16 to over 80.

There had been a number of definitions of 'entertainment': 'something that gives you a laugh/keeps me amused' (all generations); 'something that puts people on the spot' (young people); 'light entertainment makes you laugh/ entertainment makes you sit and watch' (grandparent).

Programmes cited were: *Dr Who*; *Gavin & Stacey*, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, *EastEnders*, and *Life on Mars*. Documentaries of social and personal relevance could also be considered entertaining, for example *Life in Cold Blood*, *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Panorama*.

6.2 Literature Review: Interim Report

The Chair welcomed Professor Bill Osgerby and Dr Anna Gough-Yates to the meeting and invited them to introduce the topic and summarise their approach to the research.

There were five distinct themes:

- Representation and depiction – how far the media may be biased, distortion of truth, how people deal with reality.
- Regulation and Control – broadcasting shaped by views of the state: public service Reithian doctrine – educate, entertain and inform.
- Economic and business organisations – shifting economic media organisations, global empires and narrow casting catering for niche markets.
- Technological changes and developments – changes in technology impacting on audiences and their relationship with media entertainment.
- Listening and viewing habits – moving away from traditional family audiences to more fragmented consumption.

They would also be looking at how people behave and interact with technology and how broadcasting organisations look at their audiences: how these were inter-related: how had focussed research changed over time and why had these changes occurred? How did people use the media in their own personal circumstances: how people decode what they watch; why do people watch soaps?

Part One of the review would be available by 17 April and Part Two by the end of August.

7. **BBC Vision Presentation**

The Chair welcomed Jana Bennett and Phillipa Gay to the meeting. Jana summed up the purpose of BBC Vision as enabling the BBC to be at the centre of development and to take the opportunity to produce content across all platforms: web, TV and radio. She then gave an overview and presentation to council members, divided into the following areas:

- The creative future for Vision
- The relationship with audiences
- How the BBC intends to deliver content in the digital age
- Commissioning.

Q&A

Had the focus of *The One Show* changed from regional coverage to celebrity? Jana assured members that the show was still a regional magazine programme but was also driven by science, history, natural history and arts; celebrities now wanted to be on the show because of its success.

Would the regional network production centres would be lost as a result of indies moving closer to Salford? Jana explained that the BBC worked to encourage the development of regional production centres but it was not for the BBC to impose on indies where they operated from.

There was strong support for the move to Salford but why wasn't one of the mainstream channels moving to Salford? The move of children's services to Salford was significant and influential; the work was cutting edge, it fostered new talent, connected strongly with audiences, achieved diversity and covered all genres. The same could be said for Sport. Channels were 'virtual' constructs and what was more important for economic impact was programme commissioning. There was a difference between economic investment and portrayal; no channel should be about one region – that would prevent it being a network channel. However it was recognised that approval of the BBC generally falls the further north one went, and representation was important in addressing that.

Did the reduction in licence fee spend affect the commissioning process, for example was a programme's suitability for the worldwide audience, especially comedy, taken into account? Such considerations did not affect commissioning; decisions were not taken on a commercial basis.

How was the balance between commercial and licence fee payers' interests struck with programmes like *Maria* and *Joseph* which delivered a ready made audience to the west end? The BBC's Editorial Policy team had advised on the collaboration and the aim had always been to ensure that the public interest was protected. The collaboration had also nurtured new talent.

Was *Strictly Come Dancing* a BBC or American idea? This had been a BBC idea; when BBC Worldwide, the commercial arm of the BBC, had sold the concept to the American market there had been a name change to *Dancing with Stars* as the British title had no resonance in the States.

Was there a potential to bring more contemporary, gritty drama onto BBC One alongside the more predictably popular adaptation of the classics? Jana acknowledged the recent cluster of classics and said that literary adaptations were a strength of the BBC. BBC One still stood for the greatest range of drama. Not all contemporary drama had to be gritty; this needed to be an ongoing theme, with a variety of exciting drama which continued to explore different themes.

How might convergence affect BBC Vision and iPlayer in the future? There were planned improvements to iPlayer which would incorporate news on its front page. The BBC was also working on a children's iPlayer which would address child protection issues. The iPlayer 'categories' could be more intuitive on Amazon lines, for example 'people who watched this also watched programme X'.

Recent RAC outreach activity with young people showed that their channel of preference was Channel 4; BBC Three did not feature. Could the BBC learn from this? Jana said that Channel 4 was focused on younger audiences; the BBC didn't have the freedom to be as upfront and out there as Channel 4; the BBC's primary imperative was to be impartial and unbiased.

Why had network commissioning fallen in the Midlands in 2007? Jana undertook to look into this and respond to the Council. She accepted the need for more regional portrayal, for an authenticity and sense of place, on network TV.

8. Trust Business: Trust Draft Workplan 2008/09

Members were asked to consider the questions set out in the covering paper and give their feedback by Monday 17 March.

It was pointed out that there was a lack up of joined-up thinking in the document; the Audience Councils needed to be integrated more. The Chair noted that this point would be addressed as part of the MACE review.

The Chair undertook to look into the question of consultation on licence fee collection and feed back to the Council.

9. BURNING ISSUES & ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 9.1** The 'parachuting' in of network presenters to cover big regional news stories was raised again with reference to the Ipswich murders trial and the Jersey children's home; the Chair suggested that two or three members meet with Helen Boaden, Director BBC News to discuss the issue; it would also be raised on the Audience Councils' Day.
- 9.2** Members wished to regain a balance on RAC agendas between Trust consultations and service review; this would form part of the forthcoming review of RAC work.
- 9.3** The council websites were failing to raise the visibility of the English Audience Councils. There was a commitment to making a significant improvement by the next ACE meeting.
- 9.4** In response to concerns about possible topslicing of the licence fee, the Chair confirmed that the Trust was encouraging a public debate to take account of audience views; these would include those of the Audience Councils.

- 9.5** Minority representation among BBC staff was improving but this was not reflected on-screen. The Council would return to the subject once the annual figures were published later in the year. It was also agreed to invite Andrea Callender, Head of Diversity, to an ACE meeting.
- 9.6** Julie Panagarry invited her fellow members to feed back on the coverage of Liverpool, Capital of Culture, over the year.
- 9.7** It was reported that Elizabeth Peacock had asked if the three northern councils could meet for a seminar on Project North, perhaps to coincide with the Trustee's visit in September. This was agreed.

The Chair then thanked members for their RAC Annual Reports and all the work that went into them; they made good reading. She would give feedback on the MACE Report as soon as possible. She also asked members for their feedback on this meeting.

In conclusion she paid tribute to the three retiring members, Dwain Neil, Jacqui Francis, and Sue Kelly, for their hard work and invaluable input to ACE over the years and wished them luck in the future.

DETAILS OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Monday/Tuesday, 12/13 May 2008 in London.

The meeting closed at 3.35pm.

