

BBC East Midlands Regional Audience Council
Venue: BBC Nottingham

Wednesday 7 January 2009, 6.00pm

Present:

Phillippa Denton – RAC Chair	(PMD)	Katharine Stewart	(KS)
Tracey Davenport – Deputy Chair	(TD)	Sarah McCann	(SM)
Nigel Hallam	(NH)	Jonathan English	(JE)
Glennis Taylor	(GT)	Lillian Nevins	(LN)
Paul Dickerson	(PD)	Pip Ostell	(PO)

Aziz Rashid – HRLP	(AR)
Carol Webster – Public Accountability Manager	(CW)
Frances Bryant – Accountability Adviser England	(FB)

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

PMD welcomed members to the meeting and introduced Frances Bryant.

Apologies: Del Shorley.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Matters arising:

AR had sent the RAJAR figures for *The Beat* to CW, but these had not been circulated and were held over to next meeting.

Concerns over the possible ramifications for England caused by the management restructuring in Nations and Regions: this was addressed in the ACE minutes that had been forwarded to members in advance.

The formal ACE response to the PSB review had been circulated.

Weather map: members had been pleased to see that Nottingham, Leicester and Derby were now regularly represented on the touring map; they agreed to continue to monitor this.

The minutes were accepted as a true record.

3. Programme & Service Review

• ***Beautiful People***

Review of *Beautiful People*

The majority of members liked *Beautiful People*, with one member being indifferent, and three saying they did not like it at all and found no merit in it. For most this was the first time they had seen the programme, having missed it during transmission at the end of 2008.

Those who liked it felt that the programme was well developed and tackled issues that wouldn't normally come forward. They liked the format, the characters and the pace of the show. The music that accompanied the programme was felt to be appropriate to its setting and contributed to moving the action forward. They found the programme funny, funky and colourful; one saying they would describe it as 'a weird and wonderful patchwork quilt' that made them laugh out loud. For some

members the programme was reminiscent of *Adrian Mole* and also the character Jack from the show *Will and Grace*.

Those who disliked the programme commented that they were pleased the programme only lasted half an hour and that the credits at the beginning had been the highlight for them – a strong cast that didn't deliver! They did not like the suicide scene or the street fighting and were 'disturbed' by the husband encouraging his wife to drink saying she 'was a nicer person when she was drunk'. They were disappointed that a blind actor wasn't used in the role of Aunt Hayley, and also expressed concern at the pillorying of the class teacher. Otherwise there were some funny moments but nothing to hold the attention and nothing to take from it.

Is Comedy alive & well?

The resounding answer was that when the BBC does comedy, generally it is very good. Over the holiday period most members felt that the offering had been good and varied. The majority of these programmes had been broadcast after the watershed although in practice older children watched these on YouTube or downloaded them anyway. Nevertheless the quality and availability of a pre-watershed offering ought to be considered. The number of times particular programmes were repeated was commented on; members wondered if this was to allow people who were out and about to catch up on their favourite programmes! The *Wallace and Gromit* Christmas programme was thought to be very good and was watched by most. One member had recently started to listen to *The Now Show* on radio which she found quite amusing.

- **Local Radio Link Members Reports**

The link members were invited to talk to or add to their reports.

Derby:

NH had attended the carol service at Derby Cathedral and had enjoyed the experience. Radio Derby will be having new studio desks (analogue) as a temporary solution. He also noted that the Big Screen in Derby had featured on the front page of *Ariel* and mentioned the news of Nigel Clough's appointment as manager at Derby County.

Nottingham:

JE talked to his report giving some highlights. He reviewed comments from his Facebook contact group including one he had received from a Mr Young asking for gay focused programmes.

Leicester:

There was no report from the Radio Leicester link person due to the member's holiday absence. LN informed the meeting that she had attended the carol service that was covered by Radio Leicester, noting that the coverage had been good and the event was enjoyable.

Definition of regional and local: It proved hard to define what constituted "local" as opposed to "regional", although members were able to highlight news stories that they felt showed the difference. One difficulty was that the East Midlands, as a region, does not have a strong identity which might affect how people feel about this issue. Ultimately the key parameter was felt to be personal experience of a familiar area or location.

"Local" was defined as 'more or less on your doorstep, is identifiable and will have a personal impact'. Stories with these features would be of primary interest and were likely to be local. However people remained interested in areas they had known well earlier in their lives, whether these were elsewhere in the region or in other parts of the UK. Furthermore members were still interested in stories from across the region and wanted to know what was happening regionally. For example there was a sense

of regional pride in the achievements of Rebecca Adlington and Tim Brabants that resonated more strongly than those of other British competitors at the Olympics.

Some recent news stories demonstrated the different treatment local, regional and national perspectives would provide for example, the current economic problems, rail fare increases and the over 60's free bus fares.

4. Reports:

- **ACE draft minutes:**

The draft ACE minutes had been emailed to members prior to the meeting and comments were invited.

Nottingham and Bristol had held Sports Awards ceremonies as public ticketed events and PMD asked for comments from the three council members who had attended on behalf of the RAC. All found it very enjoyable but were surprised that not all seats were taken. The overall content of the evening was excellent and the entertainment was good. PMD explained that many regions did not hold this event in 2008 because of the various compliance issues and the constraints around sponsorship etc. There was a question of whether these events were important both to the audience's appreciation of sport in the region and to the profile of regional sporting bodies. Members felt that *EMT* covered sports well including minority and disabled sports and the Sports Awards were a significant part in this: the success of prominent regional sports personalities had already been highlighted in the discussion on local and regional definitions. The "Unsung Hero" award was of great community importance by recognising the achievements and commitment of ordinary people and members noted with pleasure that the East Midlands' candidate had been placed third in this category on "*Sports Personality of the Year*" on BBC1. Overall, members felt there was considerable audience value in the event continuing in the future.

Impartiality Review: PMD explained that ACE members were asked to review network news on all BBC platforms during the week beginning 5 January by monitoring specific programmes or output. The East Midlands was looking at *Five Live Drive*. RAC members had been invited to participate in this and PMD thanked TD, KC and PD for agreeing to take part in the exercise.

CW circulated copies of the response from Mark Thompson to the Trust regarding the role of the Controller, English Regions, following the appointment of the three other Controllers in the Nations as Directors. Additionally the post had been restructured and the Controller, English Regions would now sit on the UK Forum.

The Chair informed the meeting that Mark Thompson would be attending a future ACE meeting and asked members to consider any issues of major interest for the region to be raised with him.

- **Accountability Review:**

FB explained about the review and asked if members had any questions arising from the paper circulated with the minutes. She reminded members of the consultation that had taken place last year to which PMD and some members had contributed, and talked of the findings which highlighted the strengths of the RACs (real people, diverse, robust discussions etc.). As a result of the proposals, it was suggested that RAC agendas should change to reduce involvement in Trust consultations although the RACs would still be asked to contribute to some consultations at the request of ACE. This would allow more time to focus on output and discuss matters of great importance to the regional audience. It was proposed that there should be more emphasis on outreach and engaging with the wider audience by moving from six meetings a year to four scheduled meetings and two scheduled outreach events – one linked to Trust business and the other to focus on a local/ regional issue.

There were also implications for ACE in the proposals. It had become clear that ACE needed to function more coherently and strategically to ensure that the Trust and by extension BBC Management

were fully aware of the concerns of the English audience. To achieve this, it was proposed that ACE should meet eight times a year in future, moving as near as was practical to the work plan of the other three national audience councils which meet monthly.

FB emphasised the importance of the RAC structure to the National Trustee for England and that Alison Hastings felt that the maintenance of RAC contact is crucial to her as a means of identifying emerging audience issues through the extensive network of people on the ground.

Some members said that reducing to four meetings implied the RAC was being diminished, undervalued and that there was a loss of power. Members agreed that outreach is very important and having advance diary dates for these would help to get more members involved. However it was felt that depending on the format of the outreach, too many people involved could be very intimidating and counter productive.

Head of Region's Report: The HRLP's report had been circulated. AR was invited to highlight any additional points. He reported that it had been a busy time overall. The week long series on WWI fronted by Dominic Heale and Ben Jackson, the *Children In Need* event at the Derby Westfield Centre and the carol concerts staged by the local radio stations had been particularly successful.

6. Trust business & feedback:

• **Local Video:**

Members were disappointed with the Trust's decision not to support the Local Video proposal. The money ring fenced for this is being overseen by the Trust and will be re-allocated, with Controllers bidding for additional funds. Members agreed that they would like to see the funding staying local with more money made available for regional programmes such as *Inside Out*, the *Politics Show* and *EMT* as well as better equipment for Radio Derby.

• **Impartiality Review: covered earlier**

7. Outreach: Younger Audiences The DVD showing highlights from all 12 RAC outreach events was shown at the beginning of the meeting.

8. Burning Issues/Any Other Business:

KS had received a complaint from someone in her online network that the volume of background music appeared to be becoming so over powering that it was drowning out the spoken word. She also asked if anyone knew why BBC Green had stopped.

The meeting ended at 8.05pm

9. Date of next meeting: Wednesday 25 February 2009:
Venue: BBC Broadcasting House, Nottingham

End note:

We aim to make as much of the minutes available as possible. However, there will be times when sections of the minutes will be withheld from publication. These will be kept to a minimum and clearly marked.

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