

Regional Audience Council for BBC London

Meeting : Tuesday 16 September 2008
Meeting Room 5, BBC Television Centre
Wood Lane London W12 7RJ

MINUTES

Present

Steve Ashton
Christine Fanthome Chair
Elizabeth Heath
Ivor John
Jonathan Kewley
Christiana Ominiya
Emma Palmer
Amir Shah
Shelley Ward Link to BBC London 94.9

BBC:

Michael Macfarlane – Executive Editor BBC London
John Sparrow, Public Accountability Manager

Absent: Patricia Adley, Paul Chapman, Michael Davenport, Tasneem Saiki, Jennifer Vidal

1. Chair's welcome, introductions and apologies

Christine Fanthome welcomed everyone to the meeting. Patricia Adley, Paul Chapman, Michael Davenport and Tasneem Saiki had given apologies.

2. Minutes: 10 June meeting and matters arising

Copies of the minutes were circulated. They were approved with one minor amendment. There were no matters arising.

3. Chair's reports

3.1 July ACE meeting – video conference
Draft minutes of the whole meeting were circulated.

3.1.1 Report summary

Christine Fanthome highlighted the following –

- The quality of radio programmes for children, but a general lack of awareness of them because of minimal promotion.

- The risk of on-air failures in BBC local radio due to ageing equipment
- Concern about the implications of the proposed quotas for BBC Scotland, BBC Wales and BBC Northern Ireland as part of plans to increase out-of-London television programme production.
- The call from RAC members to clarify the hierarchy of importance of Audience Council input to the BBC Trust compared to the other input it receives.

3.1.2 Member's question: the reason for the lack of 1830 regional programmes when a key Wimbledon match overran.

BBC response

Regional opt-outs (so that all English regions can broadcast their own regional programme to their service areas simultaneously) are only possible on BBC One, which is also regarded as the channel of record. Because a key match was overrunning, the 6pm news was transferred to BBC Two but most regional programmes were either cancelled or deferred, which meant that the London programme was shown throughout the English regions. Mike Macfarlane agreed that this eventuality had not been considered or anticipated, resulting in a confusion of coverage. Alternative arrangements were made for other match play that continued during the 6-7pm period.

3.2 ACE Salford seminar, 21/22 September

Christine Fanthome explained that its purpose is to examine the benefits to audiences of this major investment in a production centre outside London. She and two other council members will represent London.

3.3 .Executive Editor's report

3.3.1 report

Michael Macfarlane tabled his report.

He highlighted –

- Coverage of new mayor elections
- Investigative journalism that led to the exposure of deputy mayor Ray Lewis
- Olympics coverage and the effectiveness of BBC London's reporter Adrian Warner in highlighting lessons for London 2012
- Matthew Wright signed to present *Inside Out London* for another year
- Juniper productions awarded the contract to produce the London segment of *The Politics Show*.

He noted that though there had been controversy and complaint first about perceived bias towards Boris Johnson and recently about the exposure of Ray Lewis, this kind of investigative journalism was a key part of BBC London's role – holding people in public life to account.

3.3.2 Members' comments

a) Does BBC London get financial benefit and credit from investigative journalism that's taken up by network news?

BBC response: Credit, but no financial benefit, because BBC London is part of the whole BBC and in particular part of the news operation. However if network news picks up on a story at an early stage it can contribute production resources to improve breadth and enable national and regional angles to be pursued.

- b) Exposé of police racism appreciated
- c) Suggestion to investigate funding for minority associations in police.
- d) What is the purpose of the BBC Box?

BBC response: It's a container of the kind transported on board container ships. It will be used in exactly the same way as all other containers, but its travels throughout the world are being monitored to illustrate the complex patterns of world trade.

- e) Appreciation for the *Panorama* investigation into the GCHQ monitoring of the Omagh bombing perpetrators.

4. Half year report

The complete report was circulated.

Christine Fanthome invited comment about her draft summary (first page) which will be compiled with those from other Councils and submitted to ACE.

Members approved the content.

5. Trust business

5.1 Audience Priorities

Copies of the BBC Trust Audience Priorities document were circulated. Christine Fanthome explained that these had been proposed by Audience Councils and accepted by the BBC Trust for action or referral as appropriate. Many were ongoing, carried forward from the previous year.

She invited all members to think about additional or modified Priorities, which should be forwarded to John Sparrow by next meeting (early November)

Action: all members

These will be raised at the next Audience Council Day, January 2009, when the BBC Trust considers priorities for 2009/10.

5.2 Member's question: How much agreement is there over topics and issues between regional councils?

Christine Fanthome explained that in her limited experience it seemed that each RAC had its own distinct set of issues and concerns, some of which resonated with other RACs. There is no expectation that all councils should conform or agree – indeed differences are more important than agreement since that illustrates diversity.

5.3 Accountability Review

The consultants who joined the June meeting have now completed their report. ACE expects to discuss this at the October meeting, after which it will be distributed to members for information.

6. Outreach

6.1 Children's outreach report

The ACE submission to the BBC Trust, based on RAC reviews of CBeebies and CBBC, was circulated, together with the executive summary of the children's outreach conducted by RACs in June.

Ivor John and Steve Ashton commented on their experience of meeting children aged 6-12 at Northwold Primary, Hackney.

Key points they highlighted were:

- The number of children who had television sets in their bedrooms
- The number who were allowed to watch television unsupervised
- The children's observation that the programmes they watch don't reflect their lives.

6.2 Services for young people : outreach among 13-16 age-group.

John Sparrow outlined the approach, which would invite creativity and performance from children in this age-group in response to themes and statements that emerged from the BBC Trust questionnaire.

The Weekend Arts Club in Belsize Park, which attracts diverse group of children, many from underprivileged backgrounds, had agreed to devote part of an evening course to this purpose. Tutors will receive a briefing by the end of September, providing time for comprehension, creativity and rehearsal. Recordings of the performances will be made on **Tuesday 14 October** from 6pm Six RAC members are invited to attend and take part.

7. Programme and service review

7.1 services targeted at young people

Christine Fanthome explained that all RACs were taking part in a BBC Trust consultation about services for young people, which is in two parts - reviews of BBC services intended for people aged between 13-34 (not all services are intended to interest everyone in this age-range) The range includes BBC Radio 1, BBC Switch, BBC Three, Bitesize (online revision resource) Formal learning (website material) Secondly people within the 13-34 age range are asked general questions about their expectations of and relationship with the BBC.

7.1.1 BBC Blast

A majority of members had visited the installation outside the National Theatre on the South Bank.

- Everyone had found it impressive.
- Many were not sure what to expect and didn't have particularly high hopes.
- The children and young people attending were engaged in stimulating and enjoyable activities
- The trainers were enthusiastic, expert and with appropriate people skills
- BBC Staff from channels and programmes also took part in activities
- The range of activities on offer was comprehensive and well matched to need, broadening young people's horizons.
- Most people felt there was a comprehensive follow-up arrangement, which continued a relationship between this branch of the BBC and participants after their visits.
- It was clear that participants found it inspiring.
- BBC Blast seen as a very effective way of building a close and direct relationship with young people – an investment in the next generations – though it is labour-intensive, relatively high-cost and not well advertised – or so it seemed in London.
- Members expressed a minor concern about raising false hopes of a career in broadcasting, though at least it presented young people with another career option.
- One member described an acting workshop, which the participants said had built their confidence.
- Members reported their impression that little had been done to raise awareness of BBC Blast in London, though it was acknowledged that the city is rich in activities.

Chair's summary

With little idea of what to expect, even after exploring related website pages, members were universally impressed by the scope, depth, range, quality of engagement and achievement of this initiative. Its style, look and feel fitted young people's expectations; the way in which sessions were conducted was well judged and a continuing relationship with individuals was maintained after their visit to the installation – including a regional mentoring system. Everyone recognised its inherent benefits – experience that only the BBC can provide, given in a non-patronising way; building direct links between the BBC and young people; training in contemporary communications; educational and confidence-building. Low awareness was highlighted as a major concern in London. Minor concerns were expressed about cost-effectiveness and raising false career hopes.

7.1.2 BBC Radio 1Xtra

A CD-Rom sampler the station's output was distributed, together with a summary of its service licence.

Individual comments:

- Music good – not quite “street” especially compared to pirates. Probably well targeted
- Enjoyed music, DJs tedious, news patronising and irrelevant
- Clearly aimed at young black audience. Music not to my taste. Approves of news. Recognise a shift between current and next generations.
- Widely listened to in Black community; helping to overcome social exclusion; will develop (cf Asian Network). Fulfils Citizenship public purpose
- Not my choice, but I recognise the appeal.
- I enjoyed it – light, chatty trying to sound like a pirate station.

Chair's summary

This is clearly a developing service with a very specific purpose and reach, that is building engagement with a hitherto hard to reach section of the audience. It indicates that the BBC is willing to reflect their culture in a credible way, with a content mix that includes news. Fulfils citizenship and cultural excellence purposes.

7.3 BBC London 94.9

Shelley Ward's report was distributed and tabled.

She invited members to send her feedback on three programmes –

Paul Ross

Lesley Joeph/Christopher Biggins

Eddie Nestor without a co-presenter.

Feedback in time for distillation before the next meeting, please.

Action: all members

8. Burning issues/any other business

8.1 Access to BBC audience programmes

One member wished to raise concern about *Question Time's* use of St Johns Smith Square London, which was inaccessible to people with disabilities.

- Discussion deferred to the following meeting as the member concerned was not present

9. Date of next meeting:

Members were asked about the suitability of days other than Tuesdays for the meetings. Mondays emerged as a possibility, subject to the views of members who were unable to attend this meeting

Action: JS to e-mail all members

[later: the response is universal approval for Mondays as the regular day for London RAC meetings. The next meeting is therefore **Monday 3 November 2008**

Venue: Marylebone High Street (room TBC) 6.15 for 6.30-8.45pm

10. Content for review:

A review of BBC Radio London 94.9

Losing It (BBC Two) Griff Rhys-Jones' experiences in anger management. (DVDs to follow)

Endnote

[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.

The reasons for withholding information are consistent with the Freedom of Information Act which applies to some of the BBC's information. See www.bbc.co.uk/foi for further explanation.]