

London Regional Audience Council

Meeting : Tuesday 16 April 2007
35 Marylebone High Street, London W1H 4QA

MINUTES

Present

Patricia Adley
Steve Ashton
Paul Chapman
Anthony Curran
Michael Davenport
Dr Christine Fanthome
Ivor John
Dr Dwain Neil Chair, London RAC
Amir Shah
Alexandra Tham
Jennifer Vidal

Observing: Huma Shah

Absent: Anne Fendick, Angus Fox, Elizabeth Heath, Christiana Ominiyi

BBC: Michael Macfarlane, Head of BBC London
John Sparrow, Public Accountability Manager, England

1. Chair's welcome, introductions and apologies

Dwain Neil welcomed everyone and introduced Amir Shah's sister Huma, who was attending to observe.

Apologies were received from Anne Fendick, Angus Fox, Elizabeth Heath, Christiana Ominiyi.

2. Minutes: 6 March 2007 meeting and matters arising

2.1 Minutes

The meeting were approved the minutes as a true record. They were signed by Dwain Neil.

2.2 Matters arising

None

3. Programme review

3.1 Public purposes (PPs)

Dwain explained to members that at ACE meetings he and other Chairs had hitherto interpreted council comments in terms of the PPs, but he felt that in doing so he was denying members direct involvement - which many agreed was unsatisfactory.

Members said they would pay particular attention to individual PPs on a continuing basis from now on:

Public purpose	Volunteer member
Sustaining citizenship & civil society	Steve Ashton Ivor John Jennifer Vidal
Promoting education and learning	Michael Davenport Christine Fanthome
Stimulating creativity & cultural excellence	Steve Ashton Amir Shah
Reflecting the UK (nations, regions etc)	Anthony Curran
Emerging communications	Alexandra Tham Paul Chapman Patricia Adley
UK to the world, world to UK	Patricia Adley Paul Chapman

In discussion, members commented that this approach risked becoming a tick-box exercise, that there would be programmes that satisfied many criteria but simply didn't engage audiences while others (*Life On Mars* cited) related to hardly any PPs (creativity) but were distinctive, popular and must-see. Some wondered whether a consensus was expected, compared to free-running discussion which usually revealed a range of opinion.

Dwain emphasised that diversity, difference and above all honesty were most important and that discord and varying views were the lifeblood of the council's work. It was therefore always important to say whether programmes were enjoyable and/or valuable as well as assessing them in terms of PPs.

3.2 Abolition

A series of programmes on radio and television with website support focusing around 25 March 2007, the bi-centenary of the bill to abolish the slave trade.

Overall comments:

- A majority had seen and heard a cross section of programmes and found them engaging and informative. For many, they had highlighted uncomfortable issues.
- The website had provided valuable support and in-depth information
- The range of programmes had been designed to attract broad and specific audiences eg Miss Dynamite (teenagers) Angellica Bell (children)
- For some, trailing had not been sufficiently effective, either in pointing to the range of output or having a recognisable motif
- A minority commented that a view/listen-again facility would have been useful in view of the wealth of programmes
- Only one member commented that too much output had been concentrated into a short period
- All agreed that this was exactly the kind of the programming they expected of the BBC

Programmes that prompted individual comment

Moira Stewart In Search of Wilberforce (BBC Two)

- Its strength was the presenter's and emotional involvement, revealing the range of people involved in the slave trade and giving a realistic assessment of Wilberforce's role.

- 'Exceptional'

Simon Schama (BBC Two)

- Powerful and informative, but not particularly personal

Angellica Bell :Time Traveller

- Used a DNA test to trace her ancestors. Powerful and engaged with children

Rageh Omaar –Child slavery

- A *This World* documentary featuring five of the 8.4 million children around the world who are enslaved today.

Trade Roots (sic) (Radio 4)

- Enlightening, with engaging and informed contributors

The Politics Show (London)

- Several members appreciated the political context and modern element

Other individual comments

- A concern that coverage became too political as discussion around an apology developed.

Fulfilment of Public Purposes

Citizenship – high

Education – high

Creativity – high

Reflecting UK - medium

Emerging Comms - medium (no view again facility)

UK/world/UK- high

3.3 School News Day

Year 7 & 8 students in 100 secondary schools across UK produced news reports for inclusion on a special BBC website, or national or regional television or local radio. There was extensive support material on a special School News Day website and each school had received training from a member of BBC staff. Its purpose was to give an insight into the process of newsgathering as a way of informing students about their role in citizenship

Members had seen reports on BBC News 24 the special website and on BBC One's One o'clock and six o'clock news.

- A consensus that this was a valuable experience for children, but low standard of television
- The children had not been sufficiently inquisitive
- Some members had found difficulty in identifying the reports
- Some members noted that more successful reports are already an established part of *Newsround*
- Members felt that it did connect with tomorrow's voters and therefore should be repeated

BBC response

This was a BBC News project operated jointly with BBC Nations & Regions, with the aim of engaging children and giving them an insight into the news process. BBC staff had given training at each participating school.

Fulfilment of Public Purposes

Citizenship – high

Education – medium

Creativity – high for children, low compared to expected standards

Reflecting UK - medium

Emerging Comms - low (used established systems)

UK/world/UK - limited

3.4 *Comic Relief - The Big One*

- For a majority the comedy was strong and well staged, with high production values. (Catherine Tate/Prime Minister and Ricky Gervais sketches highlighted)
- Approval of cyclical presenter change and only one presenter prompted any adverse comment.
- The comedy was pitched at younger audiences and was not to the taste of older members
- Reports (how money was spent) were powerful and poignant – eg Ant & Dec's report from Africa. For some, their repetition reached a threshold beyond which they were not effective.
- After discussion, an acceptance that heart-rending pictures were an effective medium to encourage donations

Individual comments

- Though the comedy was stronger than two years ago, the appeals for money were not handled as well
- Would reports be more effective if presented by ordinary people?
- Wish for a highlights programme
- Could there be a follow-up programme halfway between each *Comic Relief* day (which is broadcast every other year) showing what had been achieved?
- *Fame Academy does Comic Relief* had been embarrassing and unattractive
- Before long the format may need review

Overall assessment

- An effective way of attracting a younger audience to a BBC service
- Broadcast of *Comic Relief* by the BBC is a positive statement vis-à-vis other broadcasters.

Fulfilment of Public Purposes

Citizenship – high

Education – medium

Creativity – undecided

Reflecting UK - medium

Emerging Comms - medium

UK/World/UK - to some extent

4. Chair's report

4.1 March ACE meeting

Minutes not complete. Key points included –

External Assessors' report on Sport. - headlines

- Four exemplary regions, BBC London not included
- Others had provided very mixed sports coverage during the reporting period under review.
- Football still dominated coverage followed by cricket and rugby.
- Lack of grass-roots sport

Sir Bernard Crick had talked to the ACE about citizenship - he had been Chairman of the advisory group leading to citizenship being introduced into schools.

RAC Programme Reviews:

- *Sport/Nature's Calendar* - similar views expressed across the regions.

12,000 individuals had responded to iPlayer consultation. Final report in preparation.

Consultation Documents: Purpose Remits; Service Licences; Audience Engagement Protocol; Audience Communication & Engagement. These were signed off by ACE. Louise Hall (Head of Governance & Accountability, England) summarised comments from all councils in ACE submission to the Trust

In discussion about introducing Public Purposes into the programme review process, Dwain Neil suggested asking the London Council to conduct some live experiments.

- Template to be shared with ACE before use at RAC meetings.

5. Executive Editor's report

Mike Macfarlane's report had been circulated.

- BBC London had encouraged the British Museum to find and display its Wilberforce material.
- A special Olympics correspondent had been recruited, because the story will be current for five years.

Individual members' comments and questions

- Approval of the new BBC London set
- Concern about some inaccurate captions

BBC Response

Mike Macfarlane acknowledged that mistakes occasionally did happen but they were considered seriously during the post-programme review.

- How did the BBC deal with accusations that it is anti-American?

BBC Response

The BBC had a two-tier complaints system – if the complaint were about the content of a BBC London programme Mike Macfarlane would respond initially. If the complainant remained dissatisfied, the issue could be escalated to the BBC's Editorial Complaints Unit (ECU), provided it was specific. The BBC Trust's Complaints Committee reviewed outcomes of ECU adjudications if complainants were still dissatisfied.

The BBC Trust also initiated broad reviews of impartiality in coverage of major topics. To date these have included Rural Affairs, the Middle East and Europe.

- The weekend entertainment coverage seemed a bit highbrow. What about including clubs etc?

BBC Response

The aim was to feature the cream of what was going on, but music wasn't excluded – reports by Gary Crowley on bands and other music-related topics were often included.

5. Trust Business

None

6. Outreach

6.1 Junior Chamber of Commerce (JCI) event – review of BBC business programmes

A report on this had been circulated.

Six council members led by Dwain Neil attended the London meeting of Junior Chamber International on 28 March. Twenty-five of its members attended - young business people and entrepreneurs, average age 30. Dwain introduced the topic, divided everyone into small groups comprising council and JCI members, distributed lists of current BBC programmes and invited discussion on awareness, quality and impartiality. Each group nominated a JCI member as rapporteur; council members took part in discussions and made notes.

Outcomes and observations included –

- JCI members had limited awareness of available programmes. Most were broadcast at inconvenient times.
- Little radio listening among JCI members, which limited choice and range further
- Relatively high proportion of foreigners (eg Australian, New Zealand, South Africa, Eastern Europe) who only had general awareness of culture.
- JCI members pleased to have opportunity to comment
- Council members felt the event had been a good bonding exercise.

Opportunities

- Better promotion of existing programmes
- Availability of programmes eg via download, *Listen Again*

BBC response

Mike Macfarlane noted the dilemma which the BBC faced in using its airtime to promote groups of programmes, including those of a specialist nature, and the complaints generated by trailing in general.

6.2 Council outreach programme

Members were invited to suggest topics for outreach events:

Gay community (30 June London Gay Pride event)	Information for young people eg advice for students; young parents
Sport and young people	Representation and portrayal of older people
Chinese community	Gang culture

Notting Hill Carnival / black press

Joint activity with GLA / Ken Livingstone (his quarterly London Issues meeting)

A joint initiative with *the Voice*

Outer London awareness.

Dwain, Mike and John Sparrow agreed to create a shortlist from this selection of proposals

Action: DN, MF,JS

7. Any other business

7.1 BBC Jam

One member wished to record disapproval of the Trust's decision to end BBC Jam so abruptly, commenting that this action would adversely affect the education of children who had been using the site, since their work was stored within it. It seemed a timid decision, one which could at least have been deferred until the end of the academic year.

8. Date of next meeting

June, BBC London Marylebone High Street

9. Workplan for next meeting

National:

- *How We Built Britain* (David Dimbleby series – BBC One)
- Panorama – *White Flight* (tx Monday 7 May BBC One)

National/regional:

- *Play It Again* (BBC One + local events)
- Politics (inc *The Politics Show*)

Regional/local:

- How we are Building Britain

ends

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