

**BBC Strategy Review
BBC Trust
Public Consultation**

Response from UK Film Council

May 2010

Getting the best out of the BBC for licence fee payers

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The BBC Trust usually publishes organisational responses in full when we reach our conclusions. If you would prefer that all or part of your response is treated as confidential, please complete the confidentiality section below.

What do you want the BBC Trust to keep confidential?

Nothing	Nothing need be kept confidential
Whole Response	
Part (please state which part)	

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The BBC Trust will retain and use your name, address, email address and organisation you work for (if applicable) for the purposes of administering the public consultations on the BBC's Strategy Review. Your personal details will not be passed to any third parties for marketing purposes.

1. The BBC's strategic principles

The Director-General has proposed five high level principles which would set the future direction of the BBC. These are:

- putting quality first, including five areas of editorial focus for all BBC services
- doing fewer things better – including stopping activities in some areas
- guaranteeing access for all licence fee payers to BBC services
- making the licence fee work harder – being efficient and offering better value for money
- setting new boundaries

The Trust agrees that the BBC should have a set of published principles and, when these are agreed, we will ensure that the BBC is held to account for them.

Some of proposed principles are in response to challenges the Trust has set the BBC – such as focussing on high quality programmes and considering whether the current range of services is too large. We endorse these five principles, although we have not yet agreed to the specific proposals in each area.

Do you think these are the right principles?

The UK Film Council is the Government-backed lead agency for film in the UK ensuring that the economic, cultural and educational aspects of film are effectively represented at home and abroad.

We believe that a strong, securely financed and independent BBC is one of the cornerstones which helps maintain the vitality and variety of civic life and of British culture. The BBC also plays a crucial role in supporting the UK's creative industries, notably through its investment in high-quality content and services across all platforms.

The principles set out above seem to us to be fit-for-purpose. In particular, we welcome the emphasis on quality and on innovation (“setting new boundaries”), as this will help to ensure that the BBC delivers a distinctive service to licence fee-payers. In a digital world, the BBC must retain a duty and a capacity to innovate, both in terms of content production and distribution if it is to meet the needs of licence fee payers in a fully digital world.

Should the BBC have any other strategic principles?

The UK Film Council strongly supports the concept of the “public space” as outlined in the Executive’s proposals (p.2 and *passim*). In particular, we welcome the recognition that the public space is broader than the BBC and “includes many other public institutions.” (p.2). The UK Film Council, as a public body, considers itself part of this public space and would very much welcome the opportunity to partner with the BBC in taking forward in a concrete way, proposals around the public space generally, and the “digital public space” in particular.

We strongly agree with the view expressed in the proposals that “partnerships with other cultural and civic institutions should no longer be peripheral and ad-hoc but strategic and central to the BBC’s idea of itself.” (p.3). If this view is to be honoured, it will require a step-change in the BBC’s approach to partnership. Too often in the past these partnerships have felt like marriages of convenience, timed to coincide with Charter Review or other external reviews, in which the BBC saw itself very much as a dominant partner.

Partnership should indeed be the Corporation’s “‘default setting’ for most new activities” (p.5). We welcome the commitment to partnership around training (p.15), new technologies (p.16), Project Canvas (p.32) and archive (p.47). In particular, the UK Film Council and the Arts Council England are already in discussion with executives at Project Canvas about a partnership that would create a major opportunity to expand public access to, and engagement with, artistic and cultural content and applications.

The BBC has an extremely important role to play in supporting investment in both creative talent and skills, through training and lifelong learning of all kinds. At a time when there is severe pressure on the public finances, a continuing commitment by the BBC to invest in the development of creativity, talent and skills is more important than ever.

Given the importance that the BBC is now placing on partnership, the UK Film Council believes that a commitment to partnership, particularly within this digital public space, should be made explicit in an additional high-level principle. If the BBC is serious about making partnership a “default-setting” then there are very strong arguments in favour of making this explicit, along with its commitment creating and enabling digital public space, in its high-level principles.

2. Proposed principle: putting quality first

We know that you have very high expectations of BBC programmes and services. We also know that most BBC programmes and services meet audience expectations, but that some do not. The Trust will always push the BBC to do better in this respect and we're keen to know what you think.

Which BBC output do you think could be higher quality?

Films on television (all platforms) remain popular with the average person in the UK watching 63 films a year on television. The UK Film Council welcomes the BBC's proposed commitment to redirect spend away from "acquired programming and films from abroad" and to invest more heavily in "original British content" (p.8). The redirection of current spend on film from abroad should include a firm commitment to increase the spend of the BBC (including BBC Films) on UK material. As part of the commitment to original British content and to "ambitious UK drama" we would like to see BBC Films place more emphasis on creative excellence and risk-taking. The BBC also has an important role to play in nurturing talent and supporting the development of skills which benefit the UK film sector.

We would also like to see a strong and explicit recognition in the current strategic review of the importance of BBC Films in helping to deliver the proposed increase in investment in high-quality and original British content in any future strategy. BBC Films, along with the UK Film Council and Film4, is one of the cornerstones of financing for the production of independent British films. At the moment, the pivotal role of BBC Films in this respect is simply not acknowledged in the strategy review.

(The UK Film Council has submitted detailed views on BBC Films' strategy as a whole to the BBC Trust's closed consultation on BBC Films and we await the published outcome of that consultation with keen interest).

The quality of film review programmes on mainstream channels and specifically British and specialised film, especially on BBC Television remains variable and compares badly with the attention provided to other cultural activities and assets; e.g. music in the form of the annual Proms, theatre and museums. Indeed, the graph on p.20 of the Strategy Review shows that film is more highly valued than music. Therefore, we would like to see the bar of quality raised significantly in this respect.

3. Offering you something special

The Trust believes that the BBC needs to do more than offer high quality programmes and services.

We know from our previous research that your expectations of the BBC are that it offers something special to you – something distinctive and better than other broadcasters. For example, the BBC should offer you thoroughly independent and impartial news, it should introduce you to new talent in drama and comedy, and its radio stations should play pop music that other radio stations don't.

The Trust knows that you think the BBC could do more to be original and different in some areas.

Which areas should the BBC make more distinctive from other broadcasters and media?

The UK Film Council agrees with the proposition on p.8 that the BBC should increase its investment in high-quality, original UK content, including films, (by delivering on its proposals to divert money away from foreign especially mainstream US acquisitions), thereby helping to maintain its distinctiveness in a fully digital world.

In relation to content for children, as referenced on p.30, we would wish to see reference to the BBC's important role in making available a diversity films (including foreign-language films) for children.

4. The five editorial priorities

The Director-General has proposed that all BBC services should be focussed on some or all of five editorial priorities.

- The Director-General’s proposed editorial priorities are:
- the best journalism in the world
- inspiring knowledge, music and culture
- ambitious UK drama and comedy
- outstanding children’s content
- events that bring communities and the nation together

The Trust thinks that the proposed editorial priorities fit well with those things you have told us are important to you in our previous research but we want to consider how these priorities should be delivered to you in the future.

Do these priorities fit with your expectation of BBC TV, radio and online services?

Yes, these priorities fit well with our expectation of BBC services.

The UK Film Council wishes to underline however that the BBC must maintain its focus on investing the highest possible proportion of its income on high-quality UK content, including feature film, across a variety of platforms. This will benefit both audiences, by ensuring access to a diversity of content that the market will not provide, and the creative economy by helping to stimulate the growth and success of independent content production companies in the UK. In a digital world, when the challenges of funding high-quality content for diverse audiences are greater than ever, the BBC’s role in supporting the production of such content is commensurately greater.

5. Proposed principle: doing fewer things and doing them better

The Trust believes that the BBC must offer the highest quality programmes. We have previously told the Director General that we think that the pursuit of higher quality may mean doing less overall.

The Director-General has proposed some areas where the BBC could reduce or stop activities altogether. The suggestions are to:

- Close Radio 6 Music and focussing the BBC’s pop music output on Radio 1 and Radio 2
- Close Asian Network as a national service and aiming to serve Asian audiences better in other ways on other BBC services
- Change BBC local radio stations, by investing more in breakfast, morning and drivetime shows, but share content across local stations at other times of the day
- Close the BBC’s teen zone, BBC Switch
- Close the teenage learning offer Blast!
- Make the BBC’s website smaller, with fewer sections. (We do not yet have the details of what will be cut)

We can assure you that decisions have not yet been taken in any of these areas and that we will consider each one very carefully before doing so.

We welcome your views on these areas

The UK Film Council does not wish to offer views on the cessation of individual services. We would however like to see the BBC’s online presence in respect of film made more relevant to the needs of audiences for British and specialised film – with less emphasis on mainstream Hollywood film as we believe that this is a subject area which receives extensive coverage in market-based media of all kinds.

6. Proposed principle: guaranteeing access to BBC services

The growth of digital technologies and platforms has led to greater choice and convenience for many people in terms of how they receive and consume TV and radio programmes.

Many of the BBC's TV, radio and online services are now delivered to you in several ways. For example, many BBC radio services are available on AM, FM, DAB radio, digital television and online devices. However, the Trust recognises that some BBC services are still unavailable on the main platforms, such as FM or DAB, in parts of the UK.

The Trust believes that there is a fine balance to be struck here – between giving you the chance to receive BBC services in all the ways and devices you may have – and between making sure that the BBC doesn't spend too much on delivering its content to you, rather than on the content itself.

If you have particular views on how you expect BBC services to be available to you, please let us know

As this question is directed principally at the individual licence fee-payers we do not feel it is appropriate to express a view.

7. The BBC archive

The BBC is always considering ways in which it can make its programmes available to you at no extra cost. For example, recent TV and radio programmes are already available to you soon after broadcast on the BBC iPlayer.

The Trust is not considering specific proposals from the Director-General in this area at this point, but welcome any views you may have on having access to recently broadcast and to older BBC programming.

Please tell us if you have views on this area

The UK Film Council welcomes the emphasis on opening up public access to the BBC's archive as set out in Section 5.1 (p.45 ff.). The UK Film Council believes that the public should have maximum access to content which is stored in publicly-funded archives and or has been funded by the public purse. The content has significant cultural and educational value and can also help to drive the creation of new digital businesses and applications.

In particular, archive content – not just programming but also written materials, photographs etc – should be at the heart of the digital public space.

The British Film Institute (BFI) is delivering the Screen Heritage UK strategy on behalf of the UK Film Council and we are pleased to see that the BBC's involvement in this strategy is explicitly referenced in the Executive's proposals (p.47). The UK Film Council also welcomes the references to the existing partnerships with the BFI and others in the field of archive, in line with the comments above about the value of partnerships in a digital age. It is clear that the BBC has a very powerful distribution platform – which other public bodies cannot hope to match – which should be utilised to make archive material as widely available as possible, using its distribution technologies such as the iPlayer wherever possible.

The BFI, which is funded by the UK Film Council to deliver cultural and educational objectives, has made its own submission to this Consultation and we endorse the comments which it makes in respect of archives and the digital public space, especially its comments on the importance of the BBC "providing the leadership, technology and other resources" to make the archive collections from the BFI and others available to the public.



8. Proposed principle: making the licence fee work harder

One of the Trust's priorities is to ensure that the BBC offers excellent value for money, by being efficient and by making effective use of its income. We think that it is right that you expect this of the BBC.

The Trust welcomes the Director-General's proposals to ensure that the BBC offers value for money and, specifically, we support the aim to maximise the proportion of the licence fee that is spent on programming. However, we know that there is more to do, in order to achieve this.

If you are concerned about the BBC's value for money, please tell us why.

The UK Film Council believes that, taken as a whole, the BBC offers excellent value for money to licence-fee payers, but as set out above in response to other questions we want to see spend on high-quality content maximised in a digital age.

9. Proposed principle: setting new boundaries for the BBC

The Trust has asked the Director-General to consider where the BBC could be clearer about the limits to its activities as we know there is considerable demand for this from other broadcasters and media companies and the BBC has a responsibility to consider its competitive impact on others.

The Director-General has set out a list of proposed limits to BBC activity. These are:

- Reducing the BBC offer in pop music radio by closing 6 Music,
- Closing niche services for teenagers: BBC Switch and Blast!
- Reducing BBC expenditure on programmes bought from abroad (e.g. American films and dramas)
- Limiting BBC expenditure on sports rights
- Not offering any more localised services than the BBC already does – e.g. new services for individual towns or cities
- Making the BBC website more focussed on particular areas.

The Trust has carried out work in some of these areas already and we support some of these limits: making the BBC's website focussed and distinctive and setting limits to the BBC's local media offer.

In many other areas, we recognise there are trade-offs. For example, buying a US drama can mean that viewers are offered a high quality programme at lower cost than would be possible with a new British programme.

The Trust has not taken decisions in any of these areas and we will consider each one very carefully before doing so.

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Do you think that the BBC should limit its activities in these areas?

As stated in response to question 2 we support the reduction in expenditure on programmes bought from abroad and would like to see the money saved to be redirected into original and high quality UK content, including films, across all platforms.

As stated in answer to question 5, we support the refocusing of the BBC's website on areas which the market does not provide to an optimal extent – e.g. we would like to see improved coverage of British and specialised films.

Should any other areas be on this list?

The UK Film Council has not identified any other such areas.



About You

This information is optional, will be kept entirely confidential and will only be used to assist us to promote equality and diversity.

We have a duty to engage with and represent all licence fee payers in all their diversity.

We want to collect information about you so that we can:

- Understand more about what the diversity of licence fee payers think about BBC services
- Identify and make improvements to how we consult with licence fee payers

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Please tick			
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is your ethnic group best described as....

Please tick			
White British	<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>
White Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
White traveller	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black African	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed white and black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed white and black African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed white and black Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladesh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

Your gender?

Please tick			
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your age?

Please tick			
16-24		56-64	
25-34		65-74	
35-44		75-84	
45-54		85or over	

Where do you live?

Please tick			
England		Scotland	
Northern Ireland		Wales	
Other			