

Ballymena independent local radio licence applications

Questions and responses: Tower FM

These are the responses received from Tower FM to the non-confidential questions asked by Ofcom regarding the group's application for the Ballymena licence.

1. Your Format document makes no distinction between local news provision on weekdays and local news provision at the weekends. Is this correct? (i.e. that the news schedule will be the same at weekends?).

The short answer to this question is yes. We plan to put important emphasis on the local news presentation and production and the weekend news provision is viewed as just as important as the weekday.

While we will have one full time and one part time news production and presentation weekday team, the weekend news team will consist of, and utilise the weekend presenters, along with journalism and media trainees from the North East Institute of Further and Higher Education and local grammar schools. The part time news team member will also have duties covering the weekend period to ensure the accuracy and quality of the news production and output. This is consistent with our strategy for training as set out in page 34 of the application document and OFCOM's objective of "*ensuring the provision of a high quality local news service and maintaining a local journalistic presence.*" *Phase 1 Consultation: Developing a new framework Dec 2004.*

It is our intention to work closely with these local education establishments and give the students valuable exposure to on-going real time journalistic working conditions under the direction of our news team during the week. These students will then have the opportunity to hone their skills in a live environment at weekends.

Our news schedule for the weekend will be dominated by local sports news and roundup on a Saturday with an additional Shopping News item scheduled for Saturday mornings but will also include the 'traditional' news items associated with our local news room. As per our Strategy for News (page 31 of the application document) we will schedule the hourly bulletins and include extended news coverage during our lunchtime and teatime programs. There will also be an extended local farming news bulletin on our Sunday schedule along with an opportunity for the Ballymena Youth presentation team to include news and features relevant to the younger listeners of Ballymena during their show. We feel this is important to promote an inclusive approach to the wider audience of Tower FM.

2. Can you clarify that the market gap study (page 42) was undertaken in a geographical area much bigger than Tower FM's proposed TSA and, if so, why this wider area was selected for the research?

To clarify, the market gap study was taken in an area bigger than the proposed TSA. We believe that comparison between the larger area and our own smaller target audience would confirm our own data regarding what listeners want as expressed during our 2

RSL broadcasts. Since our group was formed over 5 years ago, we have analysed every application for a radio licence in Northern Ireland (advertised by The Radio Authority and OFCOM) and looked at the data supplied. Using this data that is readily available in the public domain; in local libraries or on the OFCOM website; we can see that wherever you go in N.I. the data tells the same story...or similar... As stated in our application, P30 *"We believe that Ballymena, Co Antrim being only 25 minutes drive from Belfast, would share a significantly high correlation when analysed."*

What listeners want is largely the same throughout Northern Ireland, we intend using OFCOM's own definition of "**Localness – what it isn't**" to enhance our service. While formats, types of music and content may be similar to other stations we will not be *"Vox popping in one area and playing it out as if from another, or inserting local place names into national stories"*, but we will, using OFCOM's definition of "**Localness**", by using *"content drawn from, and/or relevant to, the area which is often the major point of difference between stations, and therefore licensees, should be able to identify a range of local aspects of their stations and how they are providing output specific to their area."* This is clearly our intention as demonstrated by our typical weekday and weekend schedules. We feature Ulster Scots material juxtaposed with Celtic Folk, both highly relevant in this area. We recognise the large farming community and the religious background and heritage of the town.

Even though we have stated our music as "appealing to listeners aged 35 to 64" we will not ignore the younger age groups as demonstrated in our schedules when we feature "latest chart sounds, Dance, Hip Hop and Pop, Local DJs" and also on Sundays with "weekly chart shows, new local up & coming music talent and features like "Its my show" Ballymena Youth FM / The young people of Ballymena take the air and deal with issues the way they see them.

As OFCOM states *"The major outcome of localness delivery is the feel for an area a listener should get by tuning in to a particular station, coupled with confidence that matters of importance, relevance or interest to the target audience in the area will be accessible on air"*. With our listeners telling us what they want to hear during our 2 RSL broadcasts in Ballymena and analysis of information readily available from this wider area, we believe that how we deliver, is what will set us apart from applicants who wish to appear local yet have never broadcast in the area. We firmly believe in "Local People shaping Local Radio"

3. Please could you supply a copy of the questionnaire used for the market-gap study described above.

While a copy of the questionnaire is not available, questions posed in the published survey that Tower FM believes are most relevant to our listenership are:

"How important they thought it was for local people to have the opportunity to express their views on subjects on a local radio station?"

"What radio stations listeners in Co. Antrim would tune in to, to source the music they want to hear?"

"Have they listened in the last seven days?"

“What media source that they most relied on for news about what’s happening in Co. Antrim?”

“Respondents were asked to rate their favourite station with regard to the level of news it provides for the local area and for UK and International news?”

“What they would be interested in hearing on the radio?” (Breakdown of categories on P43)

“What was not adequately supplied by existing stations?” (Breakdown of categories on P44)

The statements used in the market gap survey are listed below. Statements were read and scores were applied to responses to enable calculation of average scores:

Agree Strongly 100

Agree Slightly 50

Disagree Slightly -50

Disagree Strongly -100

Don't Knows were accorded zero points

1: “I would rather listen to a chat and music programme presented by an intelligent, entertaining, amusing and knowledgeable presenter than a mainly music programme with pointless DJ babble”.

2: ‘I normally listen to music stations on the radio, but it would be nice to have the option of listening to a radio station that plays a mixture of good music but also has interesting discussions and amusing or informative chat along with news and information that is relevant to me’

3: ‘I want to listen to a station that reflects the interests of all communities in Belfast and the surrounding areas, providing unbiased news and information coverage’
(The survey area extended as far as Ballymena, only a short distance away and has various ethnic and diverse communities like Belfast and would be expected to promote similar responses)

4: ‘I would like to hear extended news bulletins at regular intervals during the day so I can get more in depth information’

5: ‘I would listen to a station which varies the length of news bulletins, keeping them short when there is no news, but extending them to give more in depth information when a major news story breaks’.

6: ‘I would listen more to a station with regularly updated news bulletins, not just the same bulletin repeated over and over again’

7: ‘I would listen if the station plays a variety of different music styles rather than just current ‘Top 20’ music’

8: Importance of local news specifically about Northern Ireland

9: Importance of local news specifically about Belfast and the surrounding areas (Again this is relevant in OFCOM's definition of "Local" the response will be the same if the question is asked in Coleraine, Cookstown or Ballymena)

10: Importance of national UK and international news and information

11: Importance of what's-on information on events for people of all ages in your local area (Again, as demonstrated in previous existing research throughout Northern Ireland, "Local" prompts the same response wherever that question is asked)

12: Importance of a mix of the best current melodic music and 'Classic' tracks of a variety of styles from the 60's through to the present day

13: Importance of local traffic and travel information, including road traffic 'hotspots' and airport, ferry and other public transport information

14: Importance of 'phone-in discussions on topical issues that allow local people to express their views

15: Importance of entertaining and intelligent chat & music programmes in a similar style to David Dunseith or Gerry Anderson.

16: Importance of 'phone in shows with unbiased and knowledgeable presenters

4. Why was your music research (page 45) not sub-divided by genre for contemporary hits? (as the other eras tested were).

In the broadest sense, we view contemporary hits as any music being played in the present day. To sub-divide by genre while most tracks sit comfortably beside each other in the charts, would create divisions where they no longer exist. 2000's or current pop, with the growth of satellite TV and web/internet radio, today involves many crossover artists e.g. Nelly (rap artist) f/t Tim McGraw (country artist) and Shania Twain, a major seller in the Country, Pop and Rock markets. Current Irish Country & Western acts now feature in the U.K. charts e.g. Daniel O'Donnell. These artists and their music sit happily back to back on radio station playlists.

The distinction between music genres nowadays, we believe is becoming more blurred with the cross fertilisation of musical ideas. Some artists today have a sound based on their predecessors, Oasis compared to The Beatles, Muse to the riff laden power trio of Cream, Fountains of Wayne and The Cars, yet they still fall into the popular music category. In 2005 we now have acts as diverse as Bruce Springsteen (90's), Shakin' Stevens (80's), Tony Christie (70's) and G4 fighting for the top positions in the current Top 40 Album Charts. The Top 40 singles chart also features a similar age range of artists including Elvis Presley and Kylie Minogue. We are now faced with an audience who listen to Elvis hits from the 60's topping the current Top 40 charts of today.

5. Please could you supply the list of tracks used for the montages in the music research described above.

Montage 1: 90's Pop

Nothing Compares To You Sinead O'Connor

Torn Natalie Imbruglia

Angels Robbie Williams

Montage 2: 60's Pop/Rock

Help Beatles

Satisfaction Rolling Stones

Keep On Runnin' Spencer Davis Group

Montage 3: 80's Rhythm

Give Me The Night George Benson

Give Me The Reason Luther Vandross

Dancing On The Ceiling Lionel Richie

Montage 4: 70's Rock/Pop

Alright Now Free

Hotel California Eagles

Another Brick In The Wall Pink Floyd

Montage 5: 2000's Pop

In Your Eyes Kylie Minogue

Have A Nice Day Stereophonics

Thank You Dido

Montage 6: 90's Rock/Pop

Don't Look Back In Anger Oasis

Bittersweet Symphony Verve

Streets Of Philadelphia Bruce Springsteen

Montage 7: 60's Pop

I'm Into Something Good Herman's Hermits

Glad All Over Dave Clarke Five

Downtown Petula Clarke

Montage 8: 80's Pop

Every Breath You Take Police

Come On Eileen Dexy's Midnight Runners

Billie Jean Michael Jackson

Montage 9: 70's Rhythm

You're The First, The Last, My Everything Barry White

Young Hearts Candi Staton

Theme from Shaft Isaac Hayes

Montage 10: Current Pop

Everybody's Changing Keanne

Lola's Theme Shapeshifters

Leave Right Now Will Young

Montage 11: 60's Rhythm

Tears Of A Clown Smokey Robinson

Respect Aretha Franklin

Mustang Sally Wilson Picket

Montage 12: 80's Rock Pop

Losing My Religion REM

Don't Speak No Doubt

I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For U2

Montage 13: 70's Pop

Stayin' Alive Bee Gees

Crazy Little Thing Called Love Queen

Go Your Own Way Fleetwood Mac

