

Belfast independent local radio licence applications

Questions and responses: Innovate

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

1. Could you please clarify the maximum extent to which Innovate would automate programming?

We examined the possibilities offered by automated programme production and presentation. This consideration included the running cost implications of automated overnight programmes and programmes from national and international sources. We also examined the range of experiences available through externally produced programmes.

Against those ideas, we examined the potential of over night and weekend programming as opportunities to develop the talents of our local trainee producers and presenters. We did feel that programme material from outside our transmission area would broaden the local listening experience, particularly with reference to new and emerging music, music charts, lifestyle trends and features from other parts of the world.

Having considered all of the above, we decided that all our programmes would be produced locally and presented live, although we will use pre recorded inserts during news and programmes. Some of our programmes will involve our experienced “pre – graduate” trainees and some will include link ups with radio stations in other parts of the world including America as outlined in our application. We will also use the latest programme production technology as an aid to live local programmes, but we will not run any fully automated programmes.

2. Please clarify the correlation between the group's research findings and its music policy as defined in the Format, notably in terms of 'R&B' and 'alternative' music neither of which appear to have been tested.

Innovate's music policy is totally driven by the findings of the independent research carried out to inform the application. RnB tracks and alternative tracks were included in both phase two and phase four of the research in the main dance and contemporary rock categories respectively.

Eminem was tested in the dance category in Phase 2 as an example of contemporary RnB and Kings of Leon was tested as alternative in the contemporary rock category. When those and the more mainstream tracks in dance, contemporary rock and pop achieved high positive levels of response, it was decided to research the extent to which these genres might be mutually exclusive in the greater Belfast market. This was done in Phase 4 - the auditorium research with encouraging levels of response.

In the auditorium research we also combined Dance, Rock and Pop – including RnB and Alternative to test the policy of playing the best contemporary tracks regardless of genre. Two RnB based tracks were tested. 'Where's your head at?' which is an RnB / Dance crossover hit and 'Millionaire' which is straight ahead RnB. Ash and Snowpatrol were included both to test whether alternative rock tracks blended with the RnB pop sound and to check the appeal of local music as potential daytime material. Again the tracks researched well and informed the music policy as outlined in the Format.

The demand for truly alternative sounds was uncovered in our depth research by the demand for more up and coming and local artists together with the repeated opinion that local radio lagged behind national stations. Our monitoring has shown us that local stations lack this edge because the more alternative tracks and edgy RnB cuts are not as prominent on local stations or are missing completely. We have also been influenced by the number of potential listeners in our TSA currently listening to Radio 1. Innovate will additionally provide airtime for the less mainstream - more alternative and specialised sounds through evening and weekend programming strands.

We did mention RnB and Alternative separately in the Format because while they are included in the broad definitions of dance and contemporary rock, they also researched as being important to the target audience, especially those aged under twenty-five. It would also be fair to say that the boundaries between contemporary music genres have become more blurred and harder to define. However our main priority will be to provide a fresh alternative sound that excites our listeners and is also a recipe for commercial success.