

Liverpool independent local radio licence applications

Questions and responses:

These are the responses received from RockTalk to the non-confidential questions asked by Ofcom regarding their application for the Liverpool licence.

1.The application states that the “budget for presenters is significantly higher than in other GMG stations, reflecting the investment required to broadcast high quality heavily speech based programmes”. Is the driver of this increase higher than average salaries for more skilled presenters, or more producers and broadcast assistants? If the former, what specific additional skills is the incremental salary increases paying for ?

The increased budget covers both of the aspects outlined in your question. Presenters with the necessary skills to successfully handle speech based programming are a rare commodity and this rarity increases their value and therefore they command significant salaries. These presenters have to be intelligent and well read with an intimate knowledge of the area and of course, have a certain level of experience. We envisage that the minimum level of “on air” experience for such a position in order to perform at the highest level in this format, to be a minimum of ten years, and its our view that, they are more likely to be currently employed by the BBC rather than another commercial station.

We also understand that experienced does not necessarily mean talented when applied to this role but there are a number of people who we have earmarked as potential candidates for this position and it’s our view that they have both the talent and at least ten year experience in similar roles. GMG does have a track record of being able to attract high calibre presenters to its stations such as Real Radio which also has relatively high speech commitments, and we are aware through experience of the high premium required to reflect the calibre of work and in particular for RockTalk with an even greater speech commitment in its Format.

We are also aware that in order to complement the skills of such presenters it is essential to have experienced production staff to work alongside them, thereby ensuring that the presenter has full confidence that the back-up and production values required to create a show which has a true empathy with the audience and is also entertaining, is present at all times.

These values constitute an absolute necessity to employ experienced technical and telephone operatives, all of which enhances the budget requirements when compared with other stations.

2.Assuming that this is indeed the case, please confirm that the draft station Format should read that news will be broadcast 'at least hourly' (so as not to make the broadcasting of additional bulletins a technical breach).

We are happy to change the wording of the draft format to read: "news will be broadcast at least hourly" to ensure we are not in technical breach by broadcasting more than one bulletin in an hour.

3. For the purposes of this Format, please clarify how each of the following music genres would be defined: rock (e.g. “guitar-led music with a strong beat”); Merseybeat; and current (presumably in number of months post-release – e.g. “tracks that were released 3-18 months previously”).

Rock: "Guitar based music with a rhythmic beat and strong back-beat"

Merseybeat: "Popular Rock 'n' Roll music originating from the Merseyside area"

Current: "Popular rock tracks released within the last 18 months"

4. How were the rock genres tested in both the qualitative and quantitative research?

Our quantitative measures of music were tested via our auditorium music test, with full details of the responses obtained detailed on pages 59-61 of our licence application.

With regard the methodology, 128 respondents aged 40-69 year olds, all of whom listened to music radio regularly and were core (most often) listeners to either Radio City 96.7, Magic 1548, BBC Radio Merseyside or BBC Radio 2, were recruited to attend our music evening. 200 music tracks, spanning a wide variety of music styles and eras, were tested with respondents scoring each song on a likeability scale of 1 to 6, where 1 represents ‘Don’t Know It’ through to 6 ‘Really Like’.

From the responses obtained Cluster analysis was conducted, highlighting the existence of a rock music cluster in the Liverpool radio market. Subsequent Music Style/Era Correlations then allowed us to develop our initial Rock Variety music concept.

To drill down these music test findings we used the opportunities afforded by our qualitative research to play out further rock-based music clips to our group participants, all of which had been recruited on the basis that they had expressed a likelihood of listening to our initial RockTalk station concept first tested in our quantitative Listener Requirement survey.

After exploring the concept of ‘Classic Rock’, the music montages described in our response to question 8 below were played. Respondents were handed a sheet with the list of the eleven categories (listed by number only, not name) and, as each montage was played, the respondents was asked to rate the particular category in terms of its appeal (like a lot, a little or not at all). They were also asked to describe/classify each music montage.

After all the music had been played the group moderator showed a card listing the music descriptors and the bands included in each. Group participants were then asked to what extent they agreed with the classifications, what were their preferred categories, what (if anything) was missing from the list and how these rock genres might be structured in an ideal rock station schedule.

The combination of these two sets of research findings led to the development of our Liverpool Rock Variety music policy.

5. What were the different breakfast options given to the respondents?

The following A. to D. breakfast options were tested in each of the quantitative and qualitative research projects:

- A. A pure news format along the lines of BBC Radio 4 but based on local and regional, as well as national and international, news stories
- B. A local, regional, national and international news format but less formal than the first option and along the lines of BBC Radio Five Live
- C. A format that falls halfway between the pure news format of Radio 4 and the less formal style of Radio Five Live with an emphasis on news from Liverpool and the surrounding areas
- D. A show based on phone-ins with news bulletins included, as they would be on a music radio station

The E. and F. options were also included in the quantitative research but, unlike options A. to D. above, E. and F. were not shown to respondents; they were merely options available to the interviewer to allow all possible responses to be recorded.

- E. Would not listen to any speech breakfast show/only listen to music
- F. Do not listen to the radio at breakfast time

6. How many songs were played in the montage CD, and what genres were covered? Was any speech content covered?

In the qualitative stage of our research plan, eleven rock genres were tested using three typical song hooks for each. This gives a total of 33 song hooks.

The rock genres included were:

Alternative Rock; Country Rock; Heavy Rock; Indie Rock; Nu Rock; Popular Rock; Progressive Rock; Punk Rock; Soft Rock; Sixties; Mersey Beat

The speech content was not tested by audio clips. To determine reactions to speech generally we first explored the understanding of, and reactions to, the 'RockTalk' station concept. We then went on to gauge reactions to each of the tiers of speech content first tested in our quantitative research, followed by specific reactions to various breakfast format options and presenters and style of presentation.