
Thematic review of representation and portrayal on the BBC

Terms of reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

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About this document

One of the Public Purposes of the BBC is for the BBC to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the UK, and in doing so, support the creative economy across the UK.¹ All audiences should feel that the BBC offers something for them, but our research shows that several groups feel that it doesn't adequately represent their interests or lives. We are conducting this thematic review of representation and portrayal to understand in greater detail what audiences expect from the BBC, and whether the BBC reflects and portrays the lives of all people across the whole of the UK. Looking at representation and portrayal in detail now will provide a baseline to inform whether further measures are needed to ensure that the BBC is delivering for all audiences.

This document sets out the terms of reference for the review. We are seeking views by 29 March 2018. Our final report will be published in autumn 2018.

¹ Public Purpose 4, BBC Charter

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577829/57964_CM_9365_Charter_Accessible.pdf

Terms of reference

We are conducting an in-depth review of how the nations, regions and diverse communities of the UK are represented and portrayed in BBC TV programmes

- 1.1 The BBC Charter² contains the Public Purposes for the BBC. Public Purpose 4 says that the BBC must reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the UK, and in doing so, support the creative economy across the UK. The Charter states that the BBC should reflect the diversity of the UK both in its output and services. In doing so, the BBC should accurately and authentically represent and portray the lives of people across the UK and raise awareness of the different cultures and alternative viewpoints that make up its society. It should ensure that it provides output and services that meet the needs of the UK's nations, regions and communities. It should bring people together for shared experiences and help contribute to the social cohesion and wellbeing of the UK.
- 1.2 In 2017, we set an Operating Licence for the BBC,³ which contains the Regulatory Conditions that Ofcom considered at that time appropriate for the BBC to meet Public Purpose 4. These Conditions are aimed at ensuring robust oversight of the BBC's representation and portrayal of the UK's diverse communities.
- 1.3 Within the Operating Licence, we committed to conduct an in-depth review of how different audiences are represented and portrayed on the BBC. All audiences should feel that the BBC offers something for them, but our research⁴ shows that several groups feel that it doesn't adequately represent their interests or lives.
- 1.4 Conducting this review will allow us to understand, in greater detail, how audiences feel the BBC reflects and portrays their lives. It will provide a baseline to inform whether further measures are needed to ensure the BBC is delivering for all of its audiences. Building a baseline is especially important given that there will be a gap before the reporting requirements, set by our Regulatory Conditions, come into play.
- 1.5 The review will look primarily at television. Visual media play a key role in showing us how the world works – and our place within it. In looking at representation, we will consider who and what is seen on screen, while in looking at portrayal, we will consider how authentic this representation is. We will also use this review to better understand the relationship between what we see on screen and how programmes are made.

² BBC Charter

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577829/57964_CM_9365_Charter_Accessible.pdf

³ Operating Licence for the BBC https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/107072/bbc-operating-licence.pdf

⁴ Ofcom PSB Annual Research Report 2017 https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/103919/annex-a-audience-opinions.pdf

It is important that the broadcasting landscape fully reflects the diverse communities of the UK

- 1.6 Debates around representation and portrayal often evoke strong feelings and widespread interest, because they are linked to fundamental aspects of who we are and how we see ourselves.
- 1.7 The people who we see on television should be broadly reflective of those who are watching it. Our research shows this isn't always the case. While three in four viewers say it's important that our public-service broadcasters show the different kinds of cultures present within the UK, only two-thirds see this happening⁵.

The BBC should meet audience expectations of programmes that authentically portray modern life across the UK's nations and regions

- 1.8 Most people are satisfied with BBC TV services. However, our 2017 distinctiveness research found that some people felt that the BBC often has a London-focused perspective. It was felt that the BBC could do more to move away from this approach and be more geographically diverse.

A range of audiences have expressed concern about how they are represented and portrayed by the BBC

- 1.9 Our research also found that while older and middle-class participants were generally more positive about BBC services, some younger and working-class participants, as well as people from minority groups, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds, the LGBT community and people with disabilities, were more likely to view the BBC less favourably. It was felt that the BBC could do more to represent all of society, by also becoming more ethnically diverse and more representative of younger generations.

We are commissioning new research which will help us to build a picture of the current situation

- 1.10 Given the challenges of gathering sufficiently detailed information on representation and portrayal, we will undertake new research to inform this review.
- 1.11 It is important that the BBC represents the different nations, regions and communities to the rest of the UK. We will speak to audiences across the UK to better understand their reflections on how the nations are represented and portrayed. We will also speak to people with a range of characteristics to better understand the concerns outlined above by different minority groups.

⁵ Ofcom PSB Annual Research Report 2017 https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/103919/annex-a-audience-opinions.pdf

- 1.12 New quantitative data, collected through our broader BBC performance tracking survey, will provide high-level information on how well different groups of people feel they and their communities are represented and portrayed by BBC content.
- 1.13 We plan to build upon this survey data by speaking to people from a wide range of backgrounds and communities, to understand in greater detail why people feel the way they do about representation and portrayal.
- 1.14 In addition, we plan to conduct content analysis to understand, where measurable, how frequently different groups appear on screen. This data, in combination with the research we set out above on how people feel, will help us to build a more complete picture of representation and portrayal on BBC television programmes.
- 1.15 We recognise that what ends up on our screens is influenced by every decision throughout the content creation chain, from idea generation to commissioning, through to production and scheduling.
- 1.16 To better understand this link, we will talk to people involved in the production process, both behind the scenes and on screen. We aim to get their views on a range of issues, such as organisational culture, the commissioning process, and equality of gender, race and other characteristics. We will explore how these and other factors may affect the quality, range and diversity of what audiences see on BBC TV programmes.

We welcome views on what Ofcom should consider as part of this review

- 1.17 We welcome written submissions on the considerations that Ofcom should take into account as part of this review of the BBC's representation and portrayal of the diverse communities of the UK.
- 1.18 The closing date for submissions is Thursday 29 March 2018.
- 1.19 Our findings will be published in autumn 2018.