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Representation and portrayal on BBC television

Thematic review



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Summary

Ofcom has been reviewing how the BBC reflects and portrays the whole of UK society on television.

This review is our most detailed piece of work in this area. It offers insight into how the BBC represents and portrays different people on TV. It will act as a baseline for assessing the BBC's future performance and helps identify where the BBC can do more.

One of the BBC's objectives is to serve, reflect and represent people across the UK. Further, our research shows that audiences value programmes that reflect their lives. Representing the full breadth of UK society allows the BBC to resonate as a distinctive broadcaster with unique content. The BBC's future success also depends on its continued ability to remain relevant and to connect with a range of audiences.

As part of this review, we spoke extensively to viewers, as well as people working off-screen, and combined their insights with various data sources to build a multi-layered picture of how the BBC is representing and portraying UK society on television. Some of the people that we spoke to referred to content and services from other providers beyond the BBC as well. Our work therefore provides a detailed resource to help identify how the industry as a whole can better reflect UK society. The reports published alongside this document provide additional detail, on the BBC and others, beyond the findings highlighted within this report.¹

¹ [Representation and portrayal on BBC TV 2018](#)

What we have found

- **People feel that the BBC, and TV in general, is better at representing and portraying a wider mix of people than it used to be.** While historically some groups were marginalised on TV, people feel that the situation has improved, and things are changing for the better.
- **This sense of change reflects the range of diversity and inclusion initiatives that the BBC has in place.** People that we spoke to at the BBC told us that diversity and inclusion are an increasingly core focus of the BBC's agenda and much is being done to drive change.
- **But some people still feel less visible on TV.** Representation of older women is felt restricted to a subset of roles and genres, and some people feel BBC content reflects the lives of middle class people more than those from other backgrounds. The BBC itself has previously identified room for improvement in these areas.
- **Others raised concerns about being presented in one-dimensional, inauthentic or stereotypical ways.** Some disabled people said the BBC, and TV in general, tends to focus on their difficulties and struggles. Portrayal of transgender experiences is felt to focus on the negative and the medical. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people said TV often gives a skewed impression of them and their experiences. Some people from Black African and Black African-Caribbean backgrounds often feel portrayed negatively.
- **While the BBC is seen to compare well to others in representing and portraying the nations and regions, there is clear appetite to do more.** In particular, people want to see representation of the UK outside of its major cities, and especially London. Portrayal of people from the UK's nations can be felt to rely on stereotypes, with people citing examples of characters from Scotland who were aggressive and from Wales who were perceived as being ridiculed.
- **There is no simple fix to ensuring people are represented and portrayed authentically on TV.** The complexity of identity and the range of views from different people mean that improvement requires ongoing thinking on how best to connect with audiences.
- **It is important that content that reflects the whole of UK society can be found where and how people expect to find it.** Where and how content can be found can affect what people think about it. Our research found that BBC Three represents a wider range of people than BBC One and Two, but that moving it to online-only had some unintended consequences. Some viewers of BBC Three claimed to watch the channel less or not at all following the move² and regretted the change, with some interpreting it as reflecting a dismissive attitude towards diversity.

² Kantar, 2018, BBC representation and portrayal qualitative research for Ofcom

- **‘Box-ticking’ stands out to audiences, who react against it. Simply introducing wider representation is not enough to ensure authentic portrayal.** People are wary of ‘tokenist’ attempts to make a programme appear more diverse and can find it patronising.
- **Repeating the same storylines or focusing on the same themes for any one characteristic or background results in limited and inauthentic portrayal.** The BBC should consider how specific backgrounds and characteristics are represented and portrayed across its programmes collectively, to ensure they reflect the full range of perspectives and characteristics of different backgrounds.
- **Authenticity is not just about who we see on screen – it can be influenced by who is behind the scenes too. Some** people said they could sense when those creating content did not come from the same background as those they were watching. Similarly, some BBC programme-makers said portrayal resonates better when the people involved off-screen reflect those we see on screen.
- **Our findings advocate a more nuanced approach to understanding and measuring representation and portrayal.** Labels that group people together based on certain characteristics are not always helpful and can mask important details and differences. It is also important that programmes reflect more diversity within groups as well as between them. A more granular approach to analysis helps broadcasters better understand their audiences.
- **We will continue to monitor the BBC’s performance.** We set a number of enforceable conditions in the BBC’s Operating Licence to ensure that it delivers for all UK audiences. However, as some of these conditions have not been in place for the entire year, a full picture of how the BBC is performing will not be available until our 2018/19 annual report. If we find that the BBC is failing to meet its objectives, or if we decide progress is too slow, we may consider it appropriate to take action under the Operating Licence.



Background to Ofcom's thematic review

This review aims to understand in detail how the BBC reflects and portrays the lives of people across the UK

It is Ofcom's role, as regulator of the BBC, to ensure that it is held to account for its performance in delivering its mission and Public Purposes, which are contained in the BBC Charter.³ One of the Public Purposes of the BBC (Public Purpose 4) is to serve, reflect and represent the diverse communities of the UK.

The Charter states that in fulfilling Public Purpose 4, 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.

In 2017, we set an Operating Licence for the BBC, which contains the Regulatory Conditions that Ofcom considered at that time appropriate for the BBC to meet Public Purpose 4.⁴ The Operating Licence includes Conditions which are aimed at ensuring robust oversight of the BBC's representation and portrayal of people across the UK. Within the Operating Licence, Ofcom committed to conduct an in-depth review of how different audiences are represented and portrayed on BBC TV.

For this review, when we have looked at representation we have considered who and what is seen on screen. When we have looked at portrayal we have considered how people and places come across.

We have built an extensive evidence base for the review that provides an insight into these topics. Looking at representation and portrayal in detail now will provide a baseline against which we can

³ Article 46 (3), [BBC Charter](#)

⁴ Ofcom, 2017, [Operating licence for the BBC's UK Public Services](#)

assess the BBC's performance over the Charter period⁵ and help identify areas where the BBC can do more. Building this baseline is especially important given that the first annual reports by the BBC on diversity, audience portrayal and representation, as required by the Operating Licence, will not be received by Ofcom until 2019.

The findings and insights presented within this report illustrate those areas where more can be done and represent a snapshot of the research behind our work. Alongside this, we have published a range of reports that provide a more detailed insight into the research underpinning the review.

UK society is diverse and individual identities are complex

"It's way important because again [how people see you] can dictate your mood. It can dictate how you're approached. It can dictate how people view you. And that can all have a huge effect on your day" (male 18-34, Bristol)

We have shaped our review to reflect the UK's diversity. Our society is made up of a wide range of people who live across the UK's different nations and regions. People are defined by many characteristics, including but not limited to, their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status and whether they have a disability.

Around 15% of the UK population live in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland,⁶ and around 13% of people are from a minority ethnic background.⁷ Over one million people in the UK identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.⁸ And nearly 14 million people report having a disability.⁹

However, people's perspectives and experiences don't depend on just one characteristic; they are driven by multiple, intersecting layers of identity, location and background. We sought to reflect a wide selection of people in our research by speaking to a diverse cross-section of society. Each component of their identities is important and any one of them can take on more relevance in different contexts. Our qualitative research has allowed us to explore some of the nuanced views this leads to, by going further into detail than our quantitative findings are able to.

The broadcasting landscape should reflect the make-up of the UK

"I think if you don't get people that have different stories to tell, with a different background from you, I think you're always going to be the same, you're going to be stagnant, and we're always going to be employing our mates"
(BBC programme-maker)

⁵ Between 2016 and 2027

⁶ ONS, 2017

⁷ ONS, 2011, UK Census

⁸ ONS, 2016

⁹ Family Resources Survey, 2016/17

TV is important for a number of reasons, including providing entertainment, escapism, relaxation, education and information. It can also act as both a mirror to and a window on society, reflecting the UK back to itself so that we see ourselves on screen, and offering insights into different cultures and alternative viewpoints.

Yet previous Ofcom research¹⁰ found that several groups felt that the BBC did not adequately represent their lives or interests. The BBC acknowledged that some of its audiences were under-represented and underserved. In light of these findings this review explores in detail how the BBC represents and portrays people across the UK.

We have talked extensively to viewers and programme makers during this review

Neither quantitative research nor qualitative research alone can give a full picture of representation and portrayal. In order to build a detailed understanding of how people feel about BBC representation and portrayal, it is important to consider a range of research findings together.¹¹

We have undertaken new qualitative research to inform this review.¹² We spoke to people from different locations across the nations and regions to help understand views in different parts of the UK and especially outside the major cities in each nation. We sought the views of people from different age groups, including younger and older viewers, and people from different socio-economic backgrounds, including those who described themselves as working class. We spoke to people from white ethnic backgrounds and also to people from different minority ethnic backgrounds, and we spoke to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. We also sought the view of people with a range of disabilities, all in order to explore different people's feelings on representation and portrayal.

This review is focused on BBC television, but people naturally referred to content and services from across their TV diet to make their points. We have included examples from other broadcasters throughout the report where they offer lessons to the BBC, and to the wider TV industry.

We have complemented these audience insights with new content analysis for BBC One, BBC Two and BBC Three which estimates how frequently people with different characteristics appear on screen.¹³

Additional quantitative data from our BBC performance tracking survey provides nationally representative data on audience views about the BBC's delivery of its Public Purpose 4.¹⁴ This,

¹⁰ Ipsos MORI, June 2017, [BBC Distinctiveness](#)

¹¹ See our research methodology annex for further details

¹² Kantar, 2018, [BBC representation and portrayal qualitative research for Ofcom](#)

¹³ CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#)

¹⁴ Article 6(1), [BBC Charter](#)

together with our analysis of television viewing figures, has helped to build a more complete picture of representation and portrayal on BBC television programmes.

We recognise that what audiences see on-screen is influenced by who is involved off-screen. We spoke to people behind the scenes, both at the BBC¹⁵ and from independent production companies, to get a better understanding of the considerations given to representation and portrayal when programmes are being commissioned and made.

Throughout this report, we have used direct quotations from the different people that we spoke to as part of our series of focus groups and interviews. These quotes are used to bring to life the views we heard and are focused on those that were representative of common views, or otherwise particularly pertinent to the discussion.

¹⁵ Craft Strategy, 2018, *Off-screen research: Interviews with BBC staff working in commissioning* for Ofcom



Understanding representation and portrayal is important for the BBC's future

Accurate representation and authentic portrayal of the whole of the UK is vital to the BBC's future success as a leading broadcaster

Audiences have high expectations of how the BBC should represent and portray the UK. They hold it to higher account than they do other broadcasters and expect it to get things right.¹⁶

Content that connects with people brings broadcasters benefits, both reputationally and in terms of attracting viewers. Audiences enjoy watching programmes that reflect their local area. The BBC's *Still Game* and Channel 4's *Derry Girls* – two comedies with distinctive settings in Glasgow and Derry/Londonderry – were the most watched programmes¹⁷ among audiences in Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively. South Asian language channels feature highly in the most-watched channels for audiences from Asian ethnic backgrounds,¹⁸ while newer providers such as Netflix are mentioned by LGBT people, people from minority ethnic backgrounds more broadly and younger audiences as providing good examples of authentic portrayal.

People we spoke to cited a range of on-screen characters and personalities who they identified with and not just those who were from the same background. Audiences connect with those who feel authentic – regardless of their similarities or differences.

Understanding and representing UK society in full, across the nations and regions, helps the BBC resonate as a distinctive broadcaster.¹⁹ Given its unique position and funding, the BBC must keep striving to lead the field, producing content that connects with people right across the UK.

¹⁶ Kantar, 2018, [BBC representation and portrayal qualitative research for Ofcom](#)

¹⁷ BARB (1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018). This analysis is based on all adults aged 16+. BARB analysis in Ofcom's Annual Report on the BBC is based on all individual aged 4+ and covers the calendar year 2018.

¹⁸ For example, Star Plus, a Hindi language Asian TV channel, was the fourth most watched channel among Asian TV viewers. Ten South Asian language channels such as Colours TV, Rishtey and Star Bharat featured in the list of 30 most viewed channels for this audience. BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

¹⁹ This is consistent with another of the BBC's Public Purposes, Public Purpose 3, to show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services.

The BBC risks becoming less relevant to certain audiences

Overall, people feel that TV has become more inclusive

Audiences think that the BBC, and TV in general, is better at representing a wider range of people than it used to be. In particular, people told us that TV is better now at showing people from different minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBT people and disabled people.

“There’s a black guy in a wheelchair that does a travel programme...We weren’t brought up with it [diversity]. Whereas if our kids are brought up with it they’ll accept it more...It’s life, isn’t it? Why not put life on TV?” (female 55+, Wetherby)

But other broadcasters may have a stronger connection to some parts of society than the BBC

Some people perceived that Channel 4 performs better at representing and portraying a wider variety of different groups and considered that it takes more risks than other channels, including the BBC.²⁰ Some saw ITV as more relatable to the wider population, unlike what they saw as the ‘establishment’ BBC.

“And also on the diversity side of things as well. We felt that Channel 4 seemed to be doing more, often, for longer periods...whereas the BBC seemed to be dipping its toes in it” (Male 18-34, Glasgow)

“For me I think Channel 4 do diversity the best. And I think it feels more genuine. That’s what I think. The BBC you can tell they’re trying to tick a box. I think that’s the problem with the BBC” (Male 18-34, Glasgow)

“We commission Mrs Brown’s Boys and Channel 4 commissions Derry Girls. Channel 4 commission Skins and Humans and we commission period dramas and think having Luther is enough. I could go on...” (BBC programme-maker)

Meanwhile, the BBC’s viewing profile is much older than the UK population (63% of the BBC One and BBC Two peak time adult audiences is over 55)²¹ and it is widely perceived largely to serve traditional, white, middle-class and South-East England values. The BBC is also thought to take fewer risks on new or challenging content. Changing those perceptions will require efforts across the BBC and its range of programmes.

²⁰ Channel 4 has a PSB remit, set out in the Communications Act (2003), to make high quality programmes which are distinctive, innovative and reach a diverse audience. The Digital Economy Act (2010) expands on these themes.

²¹ 66% of the BBC One all-day adult audience is aged 55+. 55% of the total TV adult audience is 55+ for peak and for all day. BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018). 37% of the UK adult population is aged 55+ BARB Establishment Survey Q1 2018.

The BBC faces increasing competition for audiences – from international channels and from streaming providers

UK audiences can choose from a wider range of content providers than ever before. Households have access to international content and channels on their broadcast TV platforms, and are increasingly taking up subscriptions to services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and NOW TV.²²

Certain audiences are making more use of these viewing alternatives. For example, just over half of 16 to 34 year olds' viewing (54%) is to non-broadcast content.²³ Viewers from Asian ethnic backgrounds spend 50% of their viewing time on commercial channels that aren't run by UK public service broadcasters.²⁴

It appears that people are using the wider range of options available to them to discover content they connect with. Some we spoke to from minority ethnic backgrounds, for example, were more likely to identify positive examples of representation and portrayal in US than UK programmes. Black African and Black African-Caribbean people picked American shows broadcast on commercial channels or platforms, like *Black-ish* (E4), *Black Lightning* (Netflix) and *The Cleveland Show* (Fox, ITV2). Netflix has even emphasised its catalogue of shows featuring prominent stories by or about people from minority ethnic backgrounds in some of its marketing material.²⁵

“American TV is a lot better in that respect because if you compare British and American TV there is a lot more variety and so you get all kinds [of portrayal] and so you don't tend to complain so much” (Male 18-34 Black African-Caribbean, Bristol)

“I'd rather they don't show Asians or our culture at all rather than showing a stereotypical and out of date character. I won't miss it if they don't show it because I watch Asian TV. But if BBC show it they should get it right” (Female 35-54 South Asian, Glasgow)

Likewise, some of the LGBT people we spoke to cited *RuPaul's Drag Race* and some trans people mentioned *Orange is the New Black* on Netflix as positive examples of representation and portrayal.

“[Orange Is The New Black features a trans person.] It was normalised – they don't make a song and dance about it...” (Male 18-34 Trans, London)

²² 39% of households have a subscription to an on-demand video service (BARB Establishment Survey, Q1 2018). Ofcom, [Communications Report 2018](#)

²³ For all individuals 71% of total audiovisual viewing time is spent on broadcast content. Ofcom/BARB/BARB TV Player/TouchPoints/ComScore as published in Ofcom, [Media Nations 2018](#)

²⁴ i.e. channels that aren't operated by the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 or Channel 5, including their portfolio channels. BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

²⁵ Hollywood Reporter, 2018, [Netflix Airs 'Strong Black Lead' Spot](#) and <https://twitter.com/strongblacklead?lang=en>

The BBC has existing advantages it can use to better connect with more people

The BBC needs to work harder to connect with all its audiences

“...we need our audience to believe that we're making shows about all of them, so having those moments in the schedule, like the Partition season, or the Gay Britannia season, or the Hear Her season, it's 'Your stories are important, too, and your voices will be heard'” (BBC programme-maker)²⁶

While there are examples of BBC content which audiences praised for authentic portrayal of different groups, we also heard from some viewers that the quality of the BBC's efforts is not evenly spread.²⁷

To achieve its goals the BBC will have to work harder at reflecting more parts of UK society than it does currently and at how it portrays certain groups.

Our research provides insights into the elements of representation and portrayal which audiences appreciate and those which they want to see done better. Both offer lessons which the BBC can use.

Authenticity is the product of many factors, both on- and off-screen

On-screen authenticity is the product of many different factors such as where a programme is set, which people are cast, which stories are told, or which questions are asked. A large number of programme makers make those decisions for the BBC across thousands of hours of TV programmes. Their choices are affected by how far they understand or relate to the people or issues featured.

The BBC's large workforce, and production links across the UK, give it a unique advantage. However, we heard from some of its employees that the BBC has tended to draw from a more limited pool of people, especially in terms of ethnicity and class. The share of the BBC's overall workforce from minority ethnic backgrounds (13%) is roughly in line with the UK population (12%),²⁸ but it has a lower share from working class backgrounds.²⁹ Both shares are lower among senior level BBC staff.

A workforce that doesn't reflect the UK's diversity presents a challenge to authentic portrayal of the full range of people across the country. While BBC employees sense that things are improving in some respects, with the benefits being seen on-screen, this is an area in which the BBC can – and should – make more of.

²⁶ The quotes used in this report from programme makers are taken from a mix of interviews and anonymous questionnaire responses from BBC commissioning staff, and anonymous questionnaire responses from representatives of independent production companies. For more details see our Methodology annex (Annex 1) and Craft Strategy, 2018, [Off-screen research: Interviews with BBC staff working in commissioning](#) for Ofcom

²⁷ See sections 4 and 5 below for more detail.

²⁸ Ofcom, [Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Broadcasting 2018](#)

²⁹ BBC, [Equality Information Report 2017/18](#)

“But if you've got people from a community trying to cast people from a community it's more authentic, it's more real, and I think the more diverse the workforce has become the more diverse the shows have become, it's a kind of a side effect, it solves itself, and it doesn't feel like ‘That's for somebody else, it's not for me, it's for all of us.’” (BBC programme-maker)

The BBC has a range of off-screen diversity and inclusion initiatives in place. We will monitor what difference they make on-screen

The BBC's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2016-2020³⁰ sets out several initiatives and targets to achieve greater diversity by 2020. The BBC has pledged to integrate diversity into all that it does, making it something that everyone at the BBC understands and is supported by all involved in programme-making.

The BBC is required by its Operating Licence to report on its on-screen diversity targets.³¹ It has established initiatives to meet this requirement and has also looked to implement additional measures to address off-screen diversity, such as the £2.1 million Diversity Creative Talent Fund.³² Its 2020 on-air and workforce targets have been set to make sure that BBC content reflects its audiences and that its workforce reflects the modern demographics of the UK. The BBC has also established various funding schemes to promote diversity across its programming.

“...if you look at our show reels, now versus four years ago, you can see how in a short space of time how much more culturally diverse our output is. So, I think it [better representation and portrayal] is achievable, I think we've made such great strides in such a short space of time” (BBC programme-maker)

In March 2018 the BBC introduced a diversity commissioning code of practice, as required by its Operating Licence.³³ The code of practice, which was approved by Ofcom³⁴, sets out the steps the BBC will take when commissioning content to ensure that anyone involved in making programmes for the BBC supports its commitments to make programmes that accurately represents and authentically portrays people across the whole of the UK.³⁵ Our off-screen research highlighted how the code of practice has formalised commissioning processes which were already in place and is perceived by some BBC employees as having played an active role in driving the diversity agenda forward.

“That's something that backs up everything we have wanted to talk about in terms of making sure that all of our initiatives and schemes about portrayal and

³⁰ BBC, 2016, [Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2016-20](#)

³¹ Paragraph 2.43; Ofcom, 2017, [Operating Licence for the BBC's UK Public Services](#)

³² The Creative Talent Fund was set up to support emerging writers, talent and producers from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with disabilities to develop ideas across all areas of TV; BBC, [The diversity and inclusion fund](#)

³³ Paragraph 2.46; Ofcom, 2017, [Operating Licence for the BBC's UK Public Services](#)

³⁴ Ofcom, 2018, [Approval letter for BBC Commissioning Code of Practice for Representation, Portrayal and Diversity](#)

³⁵ The diversity commissioning code of practice recommends a series of guidelines and approaches, for example all BBC content suppliers have to have in place a diversity and inclusion policy.

representation, about looking at our work streams - all of those have something there in terms of concrete proposals you can talk to indies about. It doesn't kind of feel you've got to impose them on them: these are values we hold really dear to our programme making. We can say to them, 'We want you to implement that code of practice in terms of your work, in terms of your teams', all of that stuff. I think these are tools to let us make sure that we're getting diversity properly" (BBC programme-maker)

Beyond the formal initiatives set out above, diversity and inclusion has become an increasing focus of the broader conversation and culture at the BBC. BBC employees we spoke to acknowledged the positive introduction of these schemes and also a shift in culture of issues around diversity and inclusion increasingly moving to the forefront, pointing to examples such as the recent debates and BBC initiatives to address gender pay inequalities.

"It's a very inclusive working culture, that is widening all of the time. I've worked at other broadcasters, but I feel that this broadcaster is sincere in wanting to make the work place feel more representative and inclusive." (BBC programme-maker)

"I genuinely believe that BBC is committed to improving diversity and inclusion, and that over the last three years the action/processes have started to catch up with the ambition." (BBC programme-maker)

"We fund a bursary scheme with the Writers Room (the Felix Dexter bursary) which is specifically aimed at giving BAME writing talent an entry into the industry." (BBC programme-maker)

"We have run a drama scheme entitled 'New Perspectives' designed to encourage female and diverse voices as well as writers new to TV to submit and engage with the BBC." (BBC programme-maker)

BBC employees also recognised that the organisation is still on a journey with much work still to be done, particularly in addressing the feeling that the organisation remains predominantly white and middle class in its make-up.

"[The BBC is open] to change, listens to the audience and reflects on internal matters. Tries to affect change, aware of the issues of the traditionally male, middle class make up of staff but it can be a slow process due to the size of the organisation" (BBC programme-maker)

We recognise that it will take time for the BBC's diversity and inclusion measures to take effect. Conducting this review now provides a benchmark for understanding whether the BBC is delivering for all audiences. We will take into account the outcomes of the review as we monitor the BBC's performance and shape future regulation.



Key themes for the whole of the UK

The BBC, and television more broadly, is changing, but progress has not been even

Fifty-nine per cent of audiences across the UK think that the BBC is performing well at delivering its overall obligations to represent and portray the diverse communities of the UK.³⁶ We heard how some BBC channels do well at representing different groups. CBeebies in particular was praised for consistently showing a diverse mix of people across its team of presenters and its content. People also mentioned how BBC Three features a wider mix of people than other BBC channels. Our content analysis supports this view, with a sample of BBC Three programmes recording a higher incidence of women, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and LGB people³⁷ on-screen when compared to a sample of BBC One and BBC Two shows over the same time period.³⁸

“I think ten years ago you could have cast a whole series here and it could have been all white and male. It's unthinkable that that would happen now without someone saying, ‘This doesn't feel very representative.’ That just wouldn't happen anymore.” (BBC programme-maker)

There was a widely held view that television has historically under-represented people from different minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people, older women and LGBT people. People also talked about having seen stereotypical and potentially offensive portrayals of these groups in the past.

“In the olden days Love Thy Neighbour was very offensive: you had a black neighbour and a white neighbour and...the white guy used to be really offensive. Nowadays you are not allowed” (Male 55+ South Asian, Leicester)

Audiences feel that, in broad terms, the situation has improved significantly, with current TV programmes offering a wider and better portrayal of under-represented groups.

³⁶ Ofcom, BBC Performance Tracker, October 2017 – April 2018

³⁷ The CRG content analysis looked at LGB people and trans people separately

³⁸ CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#)

“TV has taken a more diverse approach in recent years. There are many cultures and nationalities presented by very diverse presenters. Skin colour is becoming less important, it's the qualities they bring that counts” (Female 35-44, Glasgow)

For example, across our research groups and interviews we heard that TV overall is doing a better job of showing disabled people on-screen. The Channel 4 programme *The Last Leg* was a particularly prominent example of this trend. Many people also felt that there has been an increase in the visibility of LGBT people on-screen.

However, views are not the same about the representation and portrayal of every background, or across the BBC. While a majority of UK adults agree that the BBC does well at representing and portraying different UK communities, there are some variations in opinion between specific audiences.³⁹

“And I actually think they [the BBC] do do it [representation and portrayal] quite well already, but maybe there are areas for improvement” (Male 18-34, Exeter)

We found that some people were more conscious of poorer representation or portrayal that didn't feel authentic. They included people who felt marginalised. The same audiences tended to place more importance on representation and portrayal.

“We are a triple minority, because we are black, we are Muslim, and we are female. You have all the issues you face as a woman, plus I'm a black woman, which means double the barriers and discrimination. Then on top of that, I wear a hijab and am Muslim” (Female 55+, Birmingham)

“In Casualty [BBC One] you have one black consultant and one nurse. But this doesn't reflect the NHS. You walk into the NHS hospital, it's very diverse, yet on TV it still looks like we are a minority there” (Female 55+ Black African-Caribbean, Nottingham)

³⁹ Ofcom, BBC Performance Tracker October 2017 – April 2018. 59% agree (7-10 out of 10) the BBC shows content that accurately represents and authentically portrays the life and culture of a range of different communities throughout the UK (All adults 16+)/ Groups which rate it lower are those in Scotland (51%), DEs (52%), those with any disability (54%), 65+ (55%). 58% agree (7-10 out of 10) the BBC shows programmes and content that are relevant to me (All adults 16+). Groups which rate it lower are those in Scotland (46%), DE (48%), disabled people aged over 65 (49%), all disabled people (52%), minority ethnic background (53%), men (56%).

Some groups still feel less visible on TV

Working class people feel the BBC does not represent them

We found that people often view the BBC as a middle-class institution which doesn't offer them relevant programmes and content. People not in work or in lower skilled occupations⁴⁰ consistently rated the BBC's performance in representing and portraying them and the places they live significantly lower than the overall population. The gap between people not in work or in lower skilled occupations and people in higher managerial and professional occupations⁴¹ on the same questions was more pronounced (up to 18 percentage points difference on each question).⁴²

"[There is] a perception of BBC being more for the upper class which sort of distances itself from the likes of us" (Male 18-34 C1, Derry/Londonderry)

TV viewing figures appear to back up this perception. The share of viewing to BBC One and BBC Two is lower for working class adults than for middle class adults⁴³ and although working class adults watch more television on average⁴⁴ they tend to be watching ITV and other channels. We also found that, for example, BBC dramas made up four of the 20 most popular programmes watched by working class adults in 2017/18 and nine of the corresponding list for people in middle class adults.⁴⁵

"I think a lot of the dramas on BBC One tend to be more middle class based" (female 45-54 C2D Birmingham)

There are also concerns among working class people about the way in which they can be portrayed. Speaking about television in general, they resented how at times they have felt unfairly treated in some programmes. Some said they felt that extreme caricatures, e.g. in programmes like *Benefits Street* (Channel 4), can affect how society perceives them. The trend of "poverty porn" was typically discussed in reference to other broadcasters beyond the BBC.

"[TV industry] ridicule the poor people who are on the bottom of the ladder" (Male 45-54 C2D, Dungannon)

"Usually they try to portray the lower social classes as the ones who are being the drunks and the druggies" (Female 55+ C2D, Glasgow)

⁴⁰ The DE socio-economic groups defined by NRS, which include semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers; state pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only. See [NRS](#) for full classification.

⁴¹ The AB socio-economic groups defined by NRS, which include higher and Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional occupations

⁴² Ofcom, BBC Performance Tracker October 2017 – April 2018

⁴³ 19% vs 26% for BBC One and 5% vs 7% for BBC Two. BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

⁴⁴ Using viewing data for the C2DE socio-economic group for working class people and ABC1 data for middle class. Working class/C2DE people watch 4hrs 28mins average daily minutes per day to total TV compared to 3hrs 42mins for all adults BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

⁴⁵ BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

Commissioners at the BBC spoke to us about its challenges to include working class people in its workforce

The composition of the BBC's workforce may help explain why working class people perceive differences on-screen. Class diversity behind the camera is a key area in which people inside and outside the BBC believe the organisation still has more work to do. Some of the BBC employees we spoke to also saw the BBC as a very middle class organisation which they felt needs to do more to reflect people from working class backgrounds⁴⁶ and from different parts of the UK (See Section 5).

"I think the major issue for the BBC (and the industry)... is to address regional, and most importantly class diversity - which is a serious issue. The BBC cannot ignore this – and yet it seems for far too long it just has." (Independent programme-maker)

"I think social class is a very difficult area to address - particularly in the BBC's working culture. Unpaid internships & low paid entry level jobs exclude those from poorer back-grounds getting foot in the door - especially in London where accommodation costs are so high." (BBC programme-maker)

"The BBC has always been inherently a repository of British middle-middle class values, and over the last three decades this has changed little. Yet both the country, and audience have. BBC3 has in many ways reflected some of these changes, while one would be hard pushed to argue that the Today programme has." (Independent programme-maker)

Socio-economic diversity in the workforce is not a uniquely BBC problem. The other main broadcasters face similar struggles.⁴⁷

"...what I observe in [a] production company in Scotland is they're much more socio-economically diverse than they are in London, they're much more open places in Scotland whereas in London, my goodness..." (BBC programme-maker)

Older women are felt to be under-represented on TV

There is a widespread belief that older women are under-represented on TV. In particular, there is a feeling that this group is featured less often on TV outside of a small set of programme genres (soaps, chat shows and dramas). Some people we spoke to noticed a difference between the visibility of older women in the daytime schedules, e.g. as presenters of magazine shows, versus

⁴⁶ Detailed information linked to the socio-economic background of BBC employees is available in the BBC's [Equality Information Report 2017/18](#)

⁴⁷ See Ofcom, 2018 [Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Broadcasting: In-focus](#) report on the main five broadcasters

Analysis of the social background of different broadcasters by Dr Sam Friedman shows that Channel 4's workforce with the lowest share of employees from a working class background, reported in The Guardian, 2018, [Channel 4 is Britain's poshest broadcaster, diversity study finds](#)

peak time, where some genres appear to be largely off-limits for older female characters or presenters, e.g. talent competitions. The visibility of older women as news presenters was another topic of discussion, following some high-profile news stories about BBC presenters.

“I know there's been a big issue about women news readers in the last year or two, they get to a certain age and get pensioned off, of course they can still do the job just as well” (Male 55+, Belfast)

“We need to see more women. Older women especially. Occasional news programmes with two female anchors would be great.” (BBC programme-maker)

Our content analysis supported this feeling of under-representation. We found that, overall, men appeared on screen much more frequently than women in the BBC programmes we looked at, in the ratio of 62:38 male to female,⁴⁸ with the biggest differences in the older age groups. Although women aged 55 and over account for 15%⁴⁹ of the UK population and watch 30% of all TV viewing minutes,⁵⁰ they only accounted for 7% of on-screen appearances in our content analysis.⁵¹ Women who appear on screen in peak time BBC programmes are much more likely to be under 55 than the general population.⁵²

“I think you become a wee bit invisible the older you get” (Female 55+, Glasgow)

Some people contrasted the representation of older women with that of older men, who they said are more likely to have prominent, peak time presenting roles. Some felt that there are “double standards” in place for older women versus older men because TV has a general preoccupation with appearance. Others suggested that the opinions of male viewers were considered more important for the peak time schedule, which is why they noticed lower levels of representation of older women in peak time schedules than in daytime.

The peak time difference between older men and women is again supported by our content analysis, which found that the ratio of people on screen who appear to be younger than 45 was broadly equal, but for people aged 45 and over was skewed so that there were two to three times more men than women.⁵³

⁴⁸ The total television population count was logged at 11,467 participant appearances with 7130 male and 4337 female, showing a ratio of 62:38 male to female. Women aged over 50 accounted for 25% of on female screen appearances.

⁴⁹ ONS, 2018

⁵⁰ BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

⁵¹ 18% of women on TV compared to 31% in the UK population. CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#)

⁵² CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#). Women under 55 account for 83% of on-screen women and 69% of the UK female population.

⁵³ CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#)

“You sort of wonder why? I could not think of anybody [female presenter]...It just seems to be a lot of males [presenting]...I think that also if females are hosting they are co-hosting with a male not doing their own programmes” (Female 35-44, Swansea)

Representation of people with mental health issues or learning disabilities⁵⁴ is falling short

There were mixed views about the representation on TV of people with different non-visible conditions. Some people felt that improvements had been made in the number of programmes featuring mental health issues and learning disabilities, e.g. the fact that the lead character in *Sherlock* (BBC One) had Asperger’s syndrome, the inclusion of Stacey Slater’s mental health storyline in *EastEnders* (BBC One) and the sensitive treatment of issues in documentaries like *Professor Green: Suicide and Me* (BBC Three).

Others in our groups and interviews told us that mental health issues and learning disabilities are under represented on TV. Some people in our research felt under-representation happened because it was easier for programme makers to show visible physical disabilities.⁵⁵

“One in four people have mental health problems and that is a lot of people. I think mental health is not covered enough” (Female 35-54 Chronic health condition, Swansea)

We also heard from some viewers that the portrayal of mental illness often focusses on extreme cases rather than presenting a range of experiences. In addition, people with mental health conditions are significantly less likely (38%) than the overall UK population (48%) to think that the BBC offers authentic portrayal of people like them.⁵⁶

“Stacey [Slater, a character in EastEnders] had extreme mental health and Aiden [Connor, a character in Coronation Street] with mental health and suicide...it’s all to an extreme...they don’t show what it’s like to live day to day with a condition so where you’ve got someone like myself where the condition is sometimes good and sometimes bad there is no correlation....There isn’t a character that is in my position” (Female 35-54 With mobility impairment, South England)

“If a news reporter is in a wheel chair that’s a great way to make something more everyday” (Female 35-54 Chronic health condition, Swansea)

⁵⁴ We are using the term “learning disabilities” as a shorthand for cognitive or learning disabilities, learning difficulties and neurodiversity. See <https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/what-learning-disability> for explanations.

⁵⁵ ONS, 2018

⁵⁶ Ofcom, BBC Performance Tracker October 2017 – April 2018. 38% of respondents who self-declared as having a mental health concern rated the BBC highly on this issue. The figure for the overall sample, of all adults, was 48%.

Programme makers raised similar concerns about the representation of people with mental health issues and learning disabilities on screen. They recognised the challenges to bring about change. Others highlighted the importance of supporting people with mental health issues and learning disabilities behind the scenes as well.

“...industry wide, not just BBC wide, there is confusion about what we mean by disability, and I also think there's a danger that the focus becomes about disability that's visibly viewable. And that genuinely troubles me a bit because you don't want to get to the place where you're going, 'That's not the right kind of disability'.” (BBC programme-maker)

“...when we talk about disability in terms of Asperger's or mental health conditions, how does that actually play out off-screen, or things like depression, in what are very high pressure, deadline driven environments...I've worked on lots of programmes where people have physical disabilities and that's been accommodated brilliantly...It's much harder I think in terms of mental health, because I think there's still such stigma around it and I think people are generally afraid of even declaring they have that kind of issue.” (BBC programme-maker)

While there may be difficulties in reflecting conditions and health issues which are not visible, it is important that the BBC – and the wider TV industry – work to improve the representation of people with all disabilities and do not limit their focus to people with physical disabilities alone.

Disabled people feel that TV exaggerates the impact of different conditions

TV can be particularly important for disabled people. Viewing time is much higher among disabled adults, than among adults who do not have disabilities. Disabled adults account for 22% of the total television viewing audience and watch almost twice the amount of TV each day as those who do not have disabilities (6hrs 11 minutes vs 3hrs 20 mins). BBC One is also the most watched channel for disabled adults,⁵⁷ giving the BBC a central role in how society sees disabled people on TV and how they see themselves.

Disabled people emphasised the importance of the role that portrayal on TV plays in influencing wider societal perceptions of disabilities. They expressed views that it can help to raise awareness and understanding, and can help to normalise disability. They talked about its ability, if done well, to dispel myths and ignorance and improve the way that society responds to those with a disability, and to encourage empathy, tolerance and inclusion.

However, in this research we heard that TV in general didn't always fulfil this role and that portrayal could sometimes work counter to these outcomes if handled badly. We heard from some disabled people who felt that they can be portrayed in television drama as "overly damaged". There was a view that disabled people are too often shown as unhappy and depressed. Some commented that

⁵⁷ BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 to March 2018)

the portrayal of disabled people on television can reinforce existing stigmas around disabilities, and talked of a need for more inspiring, positive images of disability, to reflect the fuller range of experiences people have.

“I think it is important because everyone deserves an authentic portrayal; no one wants to walk outside and have people think a certain thing about them because all the media does is portray them in one light” (Female 35-54 Chronic health condition, Swansea)

There is a big difference between the age of people on screen who were observed to have disabilities compared to the number of disabled people in the actual population.⁵⁸ On BBC TV, more people aged under 34 were seen to have a disability than people aged 35-74. However, in the UK population, the share of disabled people in each age group increases with age. More than half of people in the UK older than 75 have a disability, but in our sample of programmes only 9% were observed to have one. People of different ages are more likely to be affected by different types of disability, so the age skew can influence how disability is portrayed overall.

Some people noted that where disabled people are represented, in dramas in particular, their disabilities are often the focus of their storylines, reducing them to disabled people first rather than showing them as people who happen to have disabilities.

Exceptions to this pattern stood out, of people whose disabilities were an incidental aspect of their lives or roles rather than defining them. They included Clarissa Mullery, a character in *Silent Witness* (BBC One) played by Liz Carr, an actress with Arthrogryposis (AMC). Others also spoke positively about the choice of Cerrie Burnell as a CBeebies presenter.

“It is not all or nothing...there are people in the world that function normally but still have a disability” (Female 18-34 Visual impairment, Swansea)

“There are TV programmes now that have people with disabilities...EastEnders [BBC One] is one that has a girl in a wheelchair...The Last Leg [Channel 4]...a comedy show [features disabled people]. It is important to...show that [having a disability] is not a big issue” (Female 35-44 Long reoccurring disability, Belfast)

Portrayals of trans people are felt to be overly negative⁵⁹

Trans participants shared the desire to see a more accurate reflection of their experiences on TV in general. Some felt that their experiences are often portrayed in a limited way which focuses on

⁵⁸ CRG, *On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018*. Note: Content analysis is able to record instances where people have visible disabilities or where non-visible disabilities are explicitly referenced in a programme. It is not able to capture instances where a disability is not visible and is not referenced, so is likely to undercount the overall number of disabled people represented on-screen.

⁵⁹ Trans people are often grouped together with LGB people under the LGBT acronym. Elsewhere in this report we have looked at trans people and LGB people collectively where the grouping is helpful for highlighting common issues. Our research groups, where we heard from lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people,

struggles associated with transition, with a tendency to “medicalise” trans issues. They said this can make trans people feel like outsiders to society.

There was demand, instead, for more positive examples of trans people on screen and to help normalise their portrayal by not using a trans person’s gender identity as a defining characteristic.

“Why does it have to be so gloomy?... We’re the same as everyone else – show the after life, not the hospital... I’m going through that myself – I need to see something positive” (Male 18-34 Trans, London)

“I want to live my life as a normal everyday man, not a transgender man... They’re trying to spotlight it and making me feel different... I don’t want to be different... It’s impossible to be accepted if we’re always going to be ‘the transgender’” (Male 18-34 Trans, London)

The views we heard from trans people made clear how important a role TV can play in shaping how people feel about themselves and their position in society.

Some lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people feel TV can give a skewed impression of them and their experiences

For some LGB people, TV in general plays an important role in building tolerance in society and in validating their place within it.

*“If you see it on the telly it won’t be such a shock when you see it next door”
(Male 18-34 Gay, Liverpool)*

“I feel like it’s more important for me... Most people turn on the TV and they see themselves anyway. When you turn on the TV and don’t see yourself... When you do see yourself it feels nice, you feel like you relate, you are just a lot more emotionally invested and then it means a lot more” (Male 18-34 Gay, London)

However, some LGB participants felt they are too often portrayed using extreme or crude depictions, e.g. gay men as flamboyant and lesbian and bisexual women as butch and masculine.

“A lot of gay characters are like in both ends of the spectrum. So you have the really, really...macho gay guy, or you have the really flamboyant gay guy. There’s nothing wrong with either of them because they are both accurate depictions, but you very rarely just have...a storyline about them and they happen to be gay as well – but it is usually focused on the fact they are gay and like the struggle around that or whatever” (Male 18-34 Gay, London)

highlighted some very different issues felt by trans people compared to LGB people so we have separated them out in this section.

Some LGB people felt programmes often treated people's sexuality as their central, defining feature. They wanted sexuality to be presented as an incidental characteristic instead, to show that there is more to LGB people.

"I'd like to see someone just be cool about their sexuality and like then be a normal character" (Female 18-34 Bisexual, London)

More broadly, LGB and trans audiences felt that LGBT representation and portrayal was skewed towards men, with less representation of women and very limited representation of transgender people. It is challenging for content analysis to record someone's sexuality because it is not a visible characteristic and it may not be referred to in a programme. However, analysis of those instances where the sexuality of a person on-screen is portrayed in some way appears to support the view that there are differences in representation of LGB people: it found there were approximately five times more appearances by gay or bisexual men than lesbian or bisexual women across the sample.⁶⁰

Some LGBT people⁶¹ also felt that certain backgrounds and stories could be overlooked, for example those of older LGBT people and LGBT people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

It is important that programmes reflect more diversity within groups as well as across them.

"For women you're lucky enough to get a female lead in a story, never mind them be bi or gay" (Female 18-34 Bisexual, London)

Other people noticed a disproportionately high number of storylines about sensationalised situations such as gay men engaging in heterosexual "flings" or storylines about women who unrealistically "turned gay" to serve a plotline (e.g. Sonia Fowler in *EastEnders* (BBC One)).

"It would be nice to see a character that is consistent with their sexuality, as people are in real life" (Female 18-34 Bisexual, London)

People from Black African and Black African-Caribbean backgrounds want to be linked to more than just stories of struggle and under-achievement

Young male Black African and Black African-Caribbean participants in our focus groups were especially conscious of being stereotyped. They often felt that they were portrayed in a negative way: as less well-educated, with lower socio-economic status and involved in crime or other negative life situations. Others noticed these stereotypes as well.

"The other day I watched this documentary where they were saying how there was violence, how there were gangs, young black women as well as young black men and the way they were delivering it, it was so negative. And it was just a

⁶⁰ CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#); Sexuality inferred only where it was portrayed in some way in the programme.

⁶¹ The following issues affected trans people as well as LGB people

*minority of these people, but they made it look as though it was across the board”
(Female 55+ Black African-Caribbean, Nottingham)*

“Yeah, it's weird, I've had a few instances where a drama script has come in and [says] ‘barrister, 34; shopkeeper, quite menacing, black, 34’; and I'm like ‘Why do you have to mention ‘menacing’ and ‘black’, and then you've just put ‘barrister’ and left that open?’ It's interesting...” (BBC programme-maker)

This perception was felt across different programme genres, in documentaries and current affairs programmes as well as crime dramas.

Some people recognised that individual programmes may be justified in portraying people in a certain way. However, it is important for programme makers to consider the cumulative impact of how different groups of people are portrayed across different programmes.

There was a desire among Black African and Black African-Caribbean people of different ages to see more positive examples of people from the same background on screen, to counter the negative stereotypes they often see. Programmes which offered positive images of people from black ethnic backgrounds seemed to stand out in people’s minds, helping to explain the durability and fondness of people’s memories of shows like *Desmond’s* (Channel 4) and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (various).

“They always show white women as successful and rich. They have never shown any black women as playing strong and successful characters. They are always shown as midwives or admins” (Female 18-34 Black African, London)

“It was crazy to see that that is how Caribbean people not only lived but they were successful. I mean Desmond had his own shop” (Male 18-34 Black African-Caribbean, Bristol)

“Apart from Ian Wright, I literally cannot think of one high profile black male character or presenter on TV” (Male 35-54 Black African, London)

In addition to these examples of specific programmes, BBC Three was mentioned by some of the people we spoke to from Black African-Caribbean backgrounds as a source of content that felt more representative and more authentic, and they interpreted the move to online-only as being dismissive of diversity. Our content analysis found people from a minority ethnic background made up 21.5% of the total BBC Three population, compared to 12.5% of the total TV population on BBC One and BBC Two.⁶²

“That [BBC Three] used to be OUR channel!” (Male 18-34 Black African-Caribbean, Bristol)

⁶² CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#)

The range of perspectives shown by people from different South Asian backgrounds highlights the differences between people with some shared characteristics

While some people from South Asian ethnic backgrounds highlighted differences between people from Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani ethnic backgrounds, a common observation was that people from each of these minority ethnic backgrounds are often stereotyped on TV generally rather than portrayed in a manner that reflects modern society.

“It’s always the same. If you’ve got a shop, it’s an Asian shopkeeper. If you’ve got a taxi, it’s an Indian. Always the same bullshit stereotypes that are in every single TV show. It’s very rare that you get a breakaway from that stereotype” (Male 18-34 South Asian, Glasgow)

Positive examples mentioned to us by people from South Asian ethnic backgrounds offered more credible visions of people from the same ethnic or religious background as them.

“He [the character Mobeen in Man Like Mobeen (BBC Three)] is exactly the character that we want. He was in the middle, you could see he was going about his daily life as a normal Muslim person rather than being really religious or being the complete opposite spectrum, being gay or something.” (Male 18-34 South Asian, Glasgow)

Our content analysis shows that people from a South Asian ethnic background make up a small share of the BBC One and BBC Two’s on-screen population (3%).⁶³ The fewer programmes there are which represent a particular background, the harder those programmes have to work to offer a portrayal which feels authentic to a range of people from that background.

These challenges were highlighted during our research in discussions about *Citizen Khan*, a BBC One sitcom about a British Muslim family. For some Muslim people, the programme was an inauthentic portrayal because its characters don’t keep in line with their view of their community’s values. However, some younger Muslim people used the comedy as a positive example of normalising Muslim people and showing a “normal” or relatable family. Their views were shared by some non-Muslim participants – including people from other minority ethnic backgrounds.

“It is disrespectful towards Muslims. He has this prayer mat and he’s going around shouting all the time. And then he has got a daughter dressed as...but she is texting, and she goes out at night – Muslims don’t do that. It gives a wrong picture of Muslims” (Female 55+ South Asian, Birmingham)

“I think he wants to break these barriers down and say ‘look, we [Muslims] are people as well, we can enjoy life’. He’s got one of the daughters who wants to

⁶³ CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#). People from a South Asian ethnic background account for 7% of the UK population.

*play one thing at home and one thing outside, just to normalise them actually”
(Male 18-34 Black African-Caribbean, Bristol)*

These difficulties with portrayal may help explain why people from Asian ethnic backgrounds watch half as much BBC TV on average as people from white ethnic backgrounds (36 minutes vs 1 hour 15 minutes respectively), and spend a significantly lower share of their viewing time on BBC channels (23% vs 32%).⁶⁴

Audiences are wary of ‘box-ticking’ and react against it

Some people we spoke to were sensitive to what they called ‘box-ticking’ or ‘tokenism’, where they felt people with particular characteristics had been included primarily to make a programme appear more diverse, rather than to improve quality.

“Question Time is normally a bunch of Caucasian people on there with maybe a token person on there to argue the case. The One Show the same thing; the news – it’s all the same” (Female 18-34 Black African, London)

Some described such ‘box ticking’ as patronising, and others felt it made programmes feel contrived.

“I do think the BBC should embrace diversity to the full but not in a contrived way. We discussed that a more wide range of culture and disability should be represented but not for its own sake, more like including all groups of people in society in a natural way” (Male 55+, Birmingham)

“I think they should write a character to cover something a bit more diverse... Token characters [are included] just for dramatising it, like [for] entertainment, which isn’t very positive in my eyes” (Female 18-34, London)

Some people worry about “over-representation” on screen

Our review has heard a complex and often contrasting mix of views. Some older South Asian men expressed concerns around what they saw as the over-representation of Asian presenters on TV in general. They felt that the visibility on TV of people from Asian backgrounds in areas in which there is a small population of people from minority ethnic backgrounds may result in resentment towards immigrant groups from white British people.

“I work in Corby where there are very few Asians. I worked there 22 years and I’ve seen it change over the years. There’s a lot of resentment building up with foreign workers coming in... and the white people see things like [increased

⁶⁴ Adults from an Asian ethnic background watch TV channels for an average of 2 hours 35 minutes each day; adults from a white ethnic background an average of 3 hours 49 minutes (i.e. 74 minutes less per day). For BBC TV channels only, adults from an Asian ethnic background watch an average of 36 minutes each day; adults from a white ethnic background an average of 1 hour 15 minutes (i.e. 39 minutes less per day). BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

diverse representation and portrayal on TV] and they say ‘they have bloody taken over our country’. You know, you hear comments like that” (Male 55+ South Asian, Leicester)

Similarly, some transgender respondents had mixed views about the visibility of transgender people across TV. While they wanted to raise awareness about transgender issues, they were also wary of the impact that repeatedly narrow or stereotypical portrayals of trans people on TV might have on how they were perceived by the viewing audience and more widely in society.

These two examples highlight the contrasting views often expressed within minority groups: some may feel that greater visibility is a way to gain mainstream acceptance, while others feel that staying out of view and causing less “fuss” is a better option. In some cases, their views appear to be influenced by other elements of their identity, such as their age or socio-economic group.

It is important for programme makers to demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the people who appear in their programmes

The impact of diversity amongst programme makers is not lost on viewers. Some suspected a connection between what they felt was inauthentic portrayal and the people making the programmes.

“I feel like when you look at like really high-quality shows... nine out of ten times when it is a diverse writing room the content is way, way better. It is funnier. It is way more considerate, because you just get all these different perspectives like. So I feel that creates a better product” (Male 18-34 Gay, London)

Some of the BBC employees we spoke to also told us they see a connection between the authenticity of portrayal in TV programmes and the people who make them. BBC commissioners, at different levels, had seen examples where a direct understanding of particular characteristics being featured had made a programme better.

Some BBC employees said that the BBC had more to do in this area. The BBC’s workforce employs fewer female employees (45%) than male (55%). Its share of employees at senior management levels who are female (42%), who self-define as disabled (9%) or who come from a minority ethnic background (8%) is lower than its overall workforce, and lower than the UK population.⁶⁵

In the opinions of some BBC employees, these figures result in part from wider difficulties in recruiting people from certain backgrounds into the TV industry.

⁶⁵ Ofcom, [Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Broadcasting 2018](#)

“There is a virtual barrier in that some communities by their nature are more private or do not hold the media industry in high regard. We find it harder to reflect these ethnic groups.” (BBC programme-maker)

However, some BBC employees were clear that any challenges for recruitment the BBC faces were outweighed by the positive impact they could have. The BBC’s policy initiatives will play an important role in helping to change its workforce. This review provides a baseline against which we will monitor the impact that has on the BBC’s performance.

“There is a lot more talent out there than [X], I’d like to flood our shows with more representation in all areas. I want to defeat the idea that we box tick, and I’d like to get past the stereotypes of diversity that are frequently depicted on our screens.” (BBC programme-maker)

“I think we all know when a programme has generated a conversation. I think there’s a virtuous circle, when you start to tell more stories from a diversity of voices and from a diversity of writers, then more voices come. I have seen that, and I think our responsibility in commissioning is to keep opening the doors and to keep people coming in and to prove to the creative community in the commissions that we make that those doors are truly open” (BBC programme-maker)



Key themes in the UK's nations and regions

People enjoy programmes set in, or reflecting, where they live

Our identities are shaped by different characteristics, but also by where we live. People like to watch programmes that reflect their local identity.

“Relate to being there and knowing that place... it is nice to watch programmes that you know, have familiarity about them” (Female 35-44, Belfast)

TV viewing data also shows how programmes that reflect different parts of the UK can attract large audiences, many of whom are from that particular nation. For example, some of the most watched programmes in each nation are those with high production values and that have a local flavour to them. *Still Game* (BBC) (Scotland) and *Derry Girls* (Channel 4) (Northern Ireland) were the first or second-most watched programmes in these respective nations and were considerably more popular in the nations in which they were set than at UK level.⁶⁶

Some people also mentioned that they liked it when programmes weren't attached to single locations and therefore had the freedom to cover smaller, more rural areas that aren't usually reflected on screen.

“And it's also helpful on screen if we're looking for stories that tell a particular point of view, you know, diversity is not just about BAME, social economic and geographical diversity is really important, and so things like when you move the One Show around the country you see spikes in audience outside of the South East, it's not a surprise, you know.” (BBC programme-maker)

“Countryfile is an example of that because they do represent all the country. They go literally around the country, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, England, they go everywhere. And you can see bits of everything.” (Male 55+, Colwyn Bay)

⁶⁶ BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 to March 2018)

Satisfaction with the BBC varies between the nations and in some areas there is a clear appetite for more

The BBC produces more nation and region-specific content than any other national broadcaster, in line with the quotas and requirements included in its Operating Licence.⁶⁷ Eight per cent of its spend and programming hours in Scotland must be on locally-made programming, 5% in Wales and 3% in Northern Ireland. People we heard from in each nation were broadly happy with how well this locally-focused BBC content represented and portrayed their respective locations, but expressed an appetite for greater representation of their areas to be shown UK-wide by the BBC.

People in the nations generally considered that the BBC is performing well and cited several examples of positive representation and portrayal, such as *Peaky Blinders* (Birmingham, England) *Line of Duty* (Northern Ireland), *Keeping Faith* (Wales) and *Shetland* (Scotland). Between nations though, there were differences.

Viewers in Wales value how well the BBC represents and portrays the nation

Our TV viewing analysis shows that viewers in Wales watch 15% more BBC TV each day than the UK average (21 minutes more per day), and more than viewers in any other nation.⁶⁸

There was a widely held view in Wales that the BBC is performing better than other broadcasters in terms of reflecting their nation, especially the production of dramas depicting life in Wales, giving the nation greater visibility. For example, the BBC One drama *Keeping Faith*, set in a fictional town in Carmarthenshire, was viewed positively by participants in our north and central Wales research groups for its quality, the way in which it showcased the region, and the fact that it was a BBC Wales production and broadcast originally in Welsh.

“I think it [Keeping Faith] just puts us on the map really. It shows us there is another part to us” (Female 55+, Swansea)

“Hinterland was brilliant for TV here it was filmed in and around Aberystwyth” (Male 35-44, Aberystwyth)

“When it comes to programmes based in Wales the BBC is miles ahead of the other broadcasters, definitely” (Male 18-34, Swansea)

People in Wales also appreciated having a dedicated Welsh variant of BBC One and felt that programmes made in BBC Wales production studios, such as *Doctor Who* and *Casualty*, give the nation a sense of Wales’ broadcasting presence.

⁶⁷ Ofcom, 2017, [Operating Licence for the BBC’s UK Public Services](#)

⁶⁸ Adults in Wales watch TV channels for an average of 4 hours 3 minutes each day; UK adults an average of 3 hours 42 minutes (i.e. 21 minutes more per day). For BBC TV channels only, adults in Wales watch an average of 1 hour 22 minutes each day; UK adults an average of 1 hour 11 minutes (i.e. 11 minutes more per day). BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

In Northern Ireland people want to see more of the BBC's good examples of its representation and portrayal reach a UK-wide audience

Viewers in Northern Ireland watch less BBC TV on average than any other UK nation (11% lower than the UK average)⁶⁹ and BBC channels form a smaller share of average daily viewing (29%). Despite watching less BBC, people in Northern Ireland rated the BBC's performance in representing and portraying people and places broadly in line with the UK average.⁷⁰

High-profile dramas such as *The Fall* (BBC Two) were cited by some participants as positive examples of BBC Northern Ireland productions which were authentic in their representation and portrayal of the nation.

Talking more broadly about portrayal of Northern Ireland on TV in general, some participants in our Northern Ireland research groups were very positive about the sitcom *Derry Girls* (Channel 4) for offering an authentic, humorous take on stories from that area.

There was also a desire from some for the BBC to broadcast more network content from Northern Ireland and to continue to make improvements in terms of positive representation and portrayal of the nation.

While people in Scotland watch lots of BBC programmes, there is still demand for greater representation

Viewers in Scotland watch 12% more broadcast TV each day than the UK average, and 13% more BBC TV.⁷¹ However, some were particularly dissatisfied with the BBC's performance in representation and portrayal, and this was echoed in the results of our quantitative survey, which were significantly lower in Scotland than in England and the UK overall. Fifty-two percent of people in Scotland had a favourable⁷² overall impression of the BBC, compared to 64% of all UK adults. Only 39% of people in Scotland thought that the BBC broadcasts a good range of programmes and content that represents where they live,⁷³ against 50% of all UK adults.

Some participants in our Scotland focus groups expressed a desire for content depicting life in the nation to be shown outside of BBC Scotland programming.

⁶⁹ Adults in Northern Ireland watch TV channels for an average of 3 hours 39 minutes each day; UK adults an average of 3 hours 42 minutes (i.e. 3 minutes less per day). For BBC TV channels only, adults in Northern Ireland watch an average of 1 hour 3 minutes each day; UK adults an average of 1 hour 11 minutes (i.e. 8 minutes less per day). BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

⁷⁰ Ofcom, BBC Performance Tracker 2018 October 2017 – April 2018

⁷¹ Adults in Scotland watch TV channels for an average of 4 hours 8 minutes each day; UK adults an average of 3 hours 42 minutes (i.e. 26 minutes more per day). For BBC TV channels only, adults in Scotland watch an average of 1 hour 20 minutes each day; UK adults an average of 1 hour 11 minutes (i.e. 9 minutes more per day). BARB – All adults (16+), (April 2017 – March 2018)

⁷² A rating of 7-10 out of 10, where 1 is extremely favourable and 10 is extremely favourable

⁷³ Gave a rating of 7-10 out of 10 for the BBC's provision of 'a good range of programmes and content that represents where I live'

In Scotland and Northern Ireland some people felt that the BBC's regional programmes were better at covering local news than other broadcasters'. *Spotlight* (BBC) in Northern Ireland and *Reporting Scotland* (BBC) in Scotland were cited as programmes that cover local issues and interests well.

"Spotlight and all those programmes are about Northern Ireland. I think BBC do better on home affairs and politics." (Female 55+, Dungannon)

"You've got local news there, so you've got Reporting Scotland that comes on, so you're getting your local news which is better than ITV Border, because you don't always get mentioned in this area" (Female 45-54, Dumfries)

Despite this, there were concerns around network news focusing on the same areas. For example, in our Scotland focus groups, which took place in locations across the country,⁷⁴ some people felt that the news focuses primarily on the hubs of Glasgow and Edinburgh and called for wider geographic representation.

"The news that we get in Scotland is very central focused and if there could be much better representation of more rural voices, smaller towns up and down the country, more regional focus" (Male 55+, Dumfries)

People want to see wider representation of the UK outside of its major cities – especially London

Our content analysis highlighted that the BBC does not represent a wide range of areas. Of the BBC One and Two UK-produced programmes that were considered, 77% did not have an identifiable location.⁷⁵ Where a programme's location could be identified, half were in London and the South East (48%).⁷⁶

Viewers appear to notice this trend; in line with previous research findings, there was a widely held view from our qualitative research that the BBC focusses on representing London and South East England over other areas in the UK.

"You think of the BBC as originating in London. To me it's southern" (Female 55+, Wetherby)

By making its programme locations more obvious to viewers, the BBC could represent a wider range of UK locations beyond South East England.

Some people felt that broadcasters including the BBC ignored many of the English regions, and particularly under-represented some large areas like the Midlands, in favour of a media focus on

⁷⁴ Scottish research sessions took place in Dumfries, Glasgow and Inverness

⁷⁵ The main region/location where a programme is set

⁷⁶ CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#)

London. Some perceived that Manchester was shown more often than other areas following the BBC's partial relocation to Salford.

"I don't think the BBC knows where Birmingham is...They will just go to London or they will go to Manchester" (Male 35-44, Birmingham)

People across the nations also felt that representation was restricted to the major cities in each respective nation, and that the BBC could do more to represent areas beyond these cities. In Wales there was a view that representation is restricted to Cardiff and Swansea at the expense of North Wales, while in Northern Ireland, some people felt that areas beyond Belfast were under-represented on screen.

"I think the BBC could show more than just Cardiff. You could go a bit further West, not particularly Swansea, but there is St David's and Haverford West. And North Wales as well" (female 55+ ABC1 Swansea)

"BBC and UTV seem to think that Northern Ireland finishes somewhere near Lisburn" (Female 45-54, Belfast)

"They put their resources into the BBC in Belfast" (Male 45-54, Dungannon)

Similarly, in Scotland, some participants commented that representation is limited to the central belt (i.e. the area between and including Edinburgh and Glasgow). As such, the BBC One drama, *Shetland* was praised by some participants in Scotland for featuring parts of the nation that are not usually shown on TV.

There were also concerns about the under-representation of certain rural areas. Some people in our Wales research groups commented on TV content prioritising the representation of urban areas in Wales over rural areas in the nation, while some people in Scotland raised similar concerns around the under-representation of remote locations in the nation. Some however cited certain BBC programmes, including *Countryfile* and *Hinterland*, as performing well in terms of the representation of rural areas.

People like to see areas they are from represented on screen, as a means of seeing their ways of life reflected back to them. They also feel TV plays an important role in exposing others to their way of life. As a result, some felt that a focus on a narrow set of areas could mean people are less aware than they should be about other areas in the country.

"Mid and North are forgotten. You say Wales and it's Cardiff. I think people out of Wales are totally uneducated on Wales, about Wales" (Male 35-44, Aberystwyth)

"Our slate seeks to inform and educate the wider NI population about a very diverse Ulster-Scots culture and heritage, as such inclusivity is very important" (BBC programme-maker)

People made observations about the range of regional accents heard on TV generally

Representation and portrayal of different parts of the UK is not just about the locations or settings used in TV programmes, but also about the people and the accents that we hear. Yet some people told us that they feel that national and regional accents are under-represented and/or poorly executed on national television.

“You very rarely get a Scottish newsreader on the BBC main programme...It is always maybe English or Welsh” (Male 44-55, Glasgow)

“[About Christine Bleakley] Nice whenever someone is on and you go ‘Oh they are from here and they come across well’” (Female 18-34, Belfast)

“...on the whole accents is something that the BBC maybe don’t do as well” (Female 45-54, Birmingham)

“Regional accents we felt were a bit hit and miss. We’ve got the odd one. We could think of an example there which we discussed. But on the whole accents is something that the BBC maybe don’t do as well.” (Female 45-54, Birmingham)

Some people expressed the view that, accents could be inauthentic or exaggerated where an actor is portraying a character from outside their home region. Some also felt that people from outside South East England can water down their accents when appearing on national TV programmes. There were also concerns that people with certain accents might be restricted from certain roles on UK-wide TV.

“They are told to change their accent” (Male 55+, Belfast)

“[On TV] you get a person who’s not from that culture putting on a really bad accent. Somebody not from Wales might not pick it up but if you are from Wales, you notice that it’s somebody doing a very bad Welsh accent” (Male 55+, Colwyn Bay)

Portrayal of people from the nations and regions can be felt to rely on stereotypes

Ways of life in different areas can be felt to be depicted in negative ways

Some audiences felt their local areas and the people in them were often portrayed negatively. For example, some people in Birmingham said they felt that the city is often shown in relation to poverty (e.g. *Benefits Street*, Channel 4), while wealth is often associated with London (e.g. *Made in Chelsea*, E4). In Northern Ireland some people highlighted what they felt was often a backward-looking focus

on the Troubles.⁷⁷ Similar concerns on narrow portrayal were raised in our Wales focus groups, where there were complaints about the association of drugs with Wales in some documentaries.

“Every time I’ve seen the Midlands portrayed on TV it is like quite negative, very run down, like everyone is on benefits” (Female 18-34, Birmingham)

“[Northern Ireland] was seen as a war zone and always talked about in derogatory terms rather than the way it is” (Male 35-44, Belfast)

People are sensitive to national stereotypes

Audiences also made comments about the overuse of national stereotypes on programmes on TV channels beyond the BBC. The higher frequency of stereotypical portrayal in some programmes meant that they were more likely to be remembered. Examples given included depicting Scottish men as aggressive or drunks and people from Wales as “stupid” or restricted to comedic roles.

“The Scottish person is always a drunk and an abusive drunk at that. Next they will have them wearing a kilt, you know, I think” (Male 35-44, Inverness)

“Gavin and Stacey – it’s all [about] portraying Wales as thick” (Female 18-24, Aberystwyth)

“I get frustrated if northerners are on the telly and they’re only cast as bawdy and common and all the rest of it, it’s like everybody’s got a stereotype” (BBC programme-maker)

In contrast, audiences spoke positively about programmes they felt showed people from their area in a different light to usual, even if that was not a straightforward “positive” portrayal. For instance, viewers, including those from Birmingham, spoke highly about the BBC drama *Peaky Blinders*. Despite the programme’s focus on a criminal family in a poor area of the city, people liked that it offered complex characters instead of stereotypes, with the additional layer of an authentically presented historical setting.

Local backgrounds can aid authentic portrayal

Some people thought that content felt authentic to an area when the programme-makers demonstrated a knowledge of the area being featured. Some also felt that they were able to judge whether programme-makers had a background in that place.

“If it’s produced by Scottish people, Scottish actors, then it feels more authentic, and it feels more acceptable. That is done by a London scriptwriter, and done by a London production company, that’s different” (Male 18-34, Glasgow).

⁷⁷ i.e. the historic violent conflict in Northern Ireland

“I think we relate to Leeds with Kay Mellor, a lot of dramas...she is from Leeds so she knows what she is writing” (Female 55+, Wetherby)

In our Scotland research groups, people also considered programme-makers from the nation to have greater licence to experiment with portrayal of these areas. Some people in Northern Ireland cited *The Blame Game* (BBC) as an example of a locally produced programme that ridiculed local matters in a way that people outside of the area could not. Similarly, *Still Game* (BBC One), *Rab C. Nesbitt* (BBC Scotland) and *River City* (BBC Scotland) were mentioned as shows in which the programme-makers, in being from Scotland themselves, had the licence to play around with Scottish stereotypes.

“It is okay to poke fun at ourselves but not have anyone else do it” (Male 44-55, Glasgow)

Some BBC producers also recognised this connection between authentic portrayal of the area or community being portrayed on screen and the people off screen involved in making the programme.

“[On additional changes that the BBC could make to improve diversity and inclusion on-screen] Recognise the regional/local differences that exist in the UK in our targets. Place more value in regional actors and locations, in universal stories, for network television, in all genres” (BBC programme-maker)

Some BBC programme-makers talked about the relationship between programme locations and representation and portrayal. For example, one observed that the practice of filming content in the nations and regions alone does not necessarily guarantee authentic portrayal, and that more attention must be paid to ensuring a true reflection of the way of life in local areas. Another alluded to programmes which qualify as made in the nations and regions when the majority of the content is filmed in London.

“There seem to be a volume of projects that are made in the nations but could have easily have been made in Bristol or Leeds; i.e. they're failing to reflect the region they were shot in” (BBC programme-maker)

Our engagement with programme-makers highlighted that the BBC could be more geographically inclusive in its commissioning process, compared to other broadcasters.

“[When asked for recommendations to make to the BBC:] Be genuinely inclusive of the regions – can't remember the last time a BBC drama commissioner ventured out of London – again in comparison to Sky who offer regular meetings with the Controller of Drama in Manchester, BBC Drama England commissioners don't even respond to emails” (Independent programme-maker)

Some independent programme-makers also talked about the benefits in their view of BBC commissioning teams being located outside of London and South East England and how this allows for more meaningful engagement with commissioners also based outside of these areas.

“CBBC and CBeebies are great commissioning teams. BBC Drama, England team in comparison to other networks is impossible to forge a meaningful commissioning dialogue with if you work outside of the M25.” (Independent programme-maker)

The BBC has announced a nations and regions strategy which will include its commissioning teams spending more time in the UK nations and regions in future, and to see them as an “opportunity for innovation”.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Broadcast, 2018, [Charlotte Moore reboots nations & regions strategy](#)



What's next for the BBC?

We have identified areas where the BBC could do more to better connect with some audiences

Given its unique role and position within the UK broadcast industry, it is important that the BBC leads by example, and produces distinctive content that accurately represents and authentically portrays the whole of the UK.

While the BBC has a number of initiatives in place to drive improvements in diversity and inclusion, their impact will not be observable until 2019 and beyond. Following our review, we will continue to monitor the steps the BBC takes to address the areas we have identified it could do more. Our Annual and Performance reports⁷⁹ also consider the BBC's performance against Public Purpose 4 and will continue to do so in the coming years.

A key part of the BBC's continued progress will depend on its ability to consider the complexity of representing and portraying different specific groups, and its ongoing recognition that who is behind the scenes has an impact on on-screen authenticity. It is important that the BBC has an in-depth understanding of different people across the UK, including where they expect to find its programmes. Our findings suggest that the BBC may need to consider the impact changes to BBC Three in particular have had on audience perceptions of representation and portrayal.

The need to represent the UK's nations more broadly, and not just their major cities will be key to the BBC's future success as a distinctive broadcaster which reflects people across the UK. We encourage the BBC to build on its existing good practice where the commissioning process extends beyond London.

⁷⁹ Ofcom, 2018, [Annual Report on the BBC](#)

This review sits within our wider work with the broadcast industry on diversity and inclusion

We continue to engage with the wider industry on making further progress in these areas, working with broadcasters on specific issues such as language and terminology, and more broadly on how TV can truly reflect UK society. In September, we published our second report on off screen diversity and inclusion. We are also determined to do all we can to promote diversity and equality inside our organisation and published our Diversity and Inclusion Programme 2018-2022 earlier this year.

The insights of our review, and the extensive research which underpin it provide a valuable resource, not just for the BBC, but for the wider UK broadcast industry. While change is already taking place, there is still further to go to achieve a TV landscape that reflects the richness of UK society, both on screen and behind the scenes.



A1. Methodology Annex

Introduction

In designing our review, we have been keen to ensure a wide range of perspectives were considered. This meant hearing not just from audiences across the UK, but also from those working off screen in the TV commissioning and production processes. Furthermore, as people find it hard to recall their exact viewing experiences, it meant complementing claimed, perception-based insights with quantitative data gathered from industry TV viewing metrics and bespoke programme content analyses that recorded details of who appeared on-screen in a sample of BBC programmes.

In all, the review drew upon six distinct sources, listed below.

1. UK-wide qualitative study

The study⁸⁰ was conducted by Kantar Media, an independent market research agency. The overall objectives for this study were to understand the importance of on-screen representation and portrayal to different audiences, and to explore how well BBC TV is perceived to be performing in this respect.

The fieldwork was conducted across the UK in May and June 2018. Particular care was taken to ensure that a range of audiences participated across several locations within each UK nation, with sessions taking place in both urban and rural areas. We sought the views of people from different age groups, including younger and older viewers, and people from different socio-economic backgrounds. We spoke to people from white ethnic backgrounds and also to people from different minority ethnic backgrounds, and we spoke to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. We also sought the views of people with a range of disabilities, all in order to explore different people's feelings on representation and portrayal.

The research agency drew from a pool of experienced research moderators who were themselves from diverse backgrounds, in order to match as far as possible the moderator's gender, ethnicity and other relevant characteristics, to that of the participants.

⁸⁰ Kantar, 2018, [*BBC representation and portrayal qualitative research for Ofcom*](#)

In total, 312 individuals took part in the research; this number, whilst large for a single qualitative study, is not to be read as significant in itself but is rather a reflection of the breadth and granularity of different viewer types interviewed within each UK nation.

2. Content analysis of BBC One, BBC Two and BBC Three

Our content analysis⁸¹ considered how frequently people with various characteristics appear on screen, and in what proportion.

The primary on-screen characteristics measured included gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality/sexual orientation. Other variables recorded for analysis included channel, production type, and the level of each participant's appearance. Programme location was also logged for each programme where there were any identifiable locations.

The sample comprised four weeks' peak-time (18:00 – 00:00) programming output from BBC One and BBC Two, taken as composite weeks (Monday in week one, Tuesday in week two and so forth). It also included c.94 hours of programming content from BBC Three which was selected in a ratio that was proportionate to viewing by genre. The recording period ran from January to March 2018.

In total the analysis covered a total of 536 programmes with a combined duration of more than 311 hours.

3. Ofcom BBC Performance Tracker

The tracker provides Ofcom with an evidence base to assess audience opinions on the BBC's performance against its delivery of its four public purposes. Public Purpose 4 relates to representation and portrayal on the BBC.

The survey is conducted using 50% online and 50% face-to-face ("F2F") data collection. Quotas were set on nation and region, gender, age, ethnicity and religion, internet usage and working status (F2F only) using a combination of 2011 Census data, data from the GfK Random Location (F2F) Omnibus and Financial Research Survey (FRS).

To ensure accurate representation, ethnicity, religion and nation were boosted in the sample, and then data weighted. The survey is conducted annually, on a rolling basis, among 4000 respondents. Fieldwork for the first year of the BBC Performance Tracker was undertaken on 9 October 2017 to 13 April 2018. The data are weighted to be nationally representative of the UK population.

4. Bespoke BARB viewing analysis

We also conducted a series of bespoke analyses of BARB (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board) viewing data⁸² relating to UK adults' TV viewing cut by gender, age, SEG, ethnicity, disability and by

⁸¹ CRG, [On-Screen Diversity Monitoring 2018](#)

⁸² Ofcom, 2018, [Representation and portrayal on BBC TV: BARB analysis](#)

nation, with a particular focus on the BBC channel family. The data was based on TV viewing from April 2017 to March 2018. BARB data is based on viewing to broadcast TV on TV sets, including to catch-up and recorded programmes up to seven days after first broadcast.

5. In-depth interviews with BBC Commissioning staff

In order to hear from people who are involved in the commissioning process on a day to day basis, Ofcom undertook a series of interviews⁸³ with BBC commissioning editors and executives.

Ten one-to-one depth interviews were undertaken by Craft Strategy, an independent research agency, between 16 and 24 July 2018. Interviews were discursive in nature and lasted approximately one hour each. Each interview was audio recorded to ensure accuracy of analysis. A wide range of issues were discussed around the topic of representation and portrayal on-screen within the BBC.

6. Surveys of BBC commissioning staff and independent production company staff

We used short online surveys to capture broader views from people working in commissioning at the BBC and, separately, people working in independent production companies.

The independent production company survey was distributed to a random sample of organisations through the trade association for UK independent television production companies, Pact.

a. BBC Commissioning staff survey

The BBC survey consisted of ten questions, the majority of which were open text. The questions were designed to explore people's experiences of working in commissioning at the BBC, their views on how diversity and inclusion is taken into account when undertaking commissioning activities, and their views on the working culture at the BBC in relation to diversity and inclusion.

Respondents were also asked to outline which, if any, further improvements could be made, and their view of how likely it was that these interventions would take place.

Thirty-nine responses were received. No demographic data was collected. The survey responses were anonymised using specialised survey software.

b. Independent production company survey

The survey of independent production companies consisted of eleven questions, the majority of which were open text. The questions were designed to explore the experiences of people working to get programmes commissioned by the BBC, their views and experiences of the BBC's approach to diversity and inclusion, and their views and experiences of the working culture at the BBC in relation to diversity and inclusion.

⁸³ Craft Strategy, 2018, [*Off-screen research: Interviews with BBC staff working in commissioning*](#) for Ofcom

Respondents were also asked to outline any improvements they felt could be made to the BBC's commissioning process in this context, and their view of how likely it was that these interventions would take place.

Seven responses were received. No demographic data was collected or processed. Again, all survey responses were anonymised using specialised survey software.



A2. Qualitative study recruitment details

General population: Focus groups (6-8 participants each)					
Age	Gender	SEG	BBC approval rating		Location
18-34	Male	C2D	Mixed		London
55+	Female	BC1	Mixed		London
18-34	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med		Birmingham (workshop)
35-44	Male	C2D	Med-high		
45-54	Female	C2D	Low-med		
55+	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high		
18-34	Male	DE	Med-high		SW (Exeter)
35-44	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med		London
45-54	Male	C1C2	Med-high		NW (Liverpool)
55+	Female	C2D	Low-med		NE (Wetherby Yorkshire)
18-34	Male	C2D	Med-high		SCOTLAND Glasgow (workshop)
35-44	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med		
45-54	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high		
55+	Female	C2D	Low-med		
18-34	Female	DE	Low-med		Inverness
35-44	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high		Dumfries
45-54	Female	C1C2	Low-med		
55+	Male	C2D	Med-high		
18-34	Female	C2D	Low-med	Protestant	
35-44	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	Catholic	
45-54	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med	Protestant	
55+	Male	C2D	Med-high	Catholic	
18-34	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	Catholic	Derry / Londonderry
35-44	Female	DE	Low-med	Protestant	
45-54	Male	C2D	Med-high	Catholic	Dungannon
55+	Female	C1C2	Low-med	Protestant	

18-34	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	WALES Swansea (workshop)
35-44	Female	C2D	Low-med	
45-54	Male	C2D	Med-high	
55+	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med	
18-34	Female	C1C2	Low-med	Aberystwyth
35-44	Male	DE	Med-high	
45-54	Female	C2D	Low-med	Conwy (50% fluent bilingual English / Welsh speakers)
55+	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	

People from minority ethnic backgrounds: Focus groups (6-8 participants each)			
Ethnicity/religion	Gender	Age/generation	Location
South Asian Bangladeshi/ Pakistani Muslim	Male	18-34, less traditional (assumed to be 2 nd /3 rd gen)	Glasgow
South Asian Bangladeshi/ Pakistani Muslim	Female	55+, more traditional (assumed to be 1 st gen)	Birmingham or Leicester
South Asian Indian Hindu/Sikh	Female	35-54, less traditional (assumed to be 2 nd gen)	Glasgow
South Asian Indian Hindu/Sikh	Male	55+, more traditional (assumed to be 1 st gen)	Birmingham or Leicester
Black E & W African (Somalian, Kenyan Sudanese, Eritrea East) + (Nigerian - West), Muslim	Female	18-34 less traditional (assumed to be 2 nd /3 rd gen)	London
Black Sub-Saharan African (S African, Nigeria and Ethiopia), Christian	Male	35-54, more traditional (assumed to be 1 st / 2 nd gen)	London
Black Afro Caribbean Christian	Female	55+ less traditional (assumed to be 1 st gen)	Nottingham
Black Afro Caribbean Christian	Male	18-34 less traditional (assumed to be 2 nd /3 rd gen)	Bristol

LGBT people: Triads (2-3 participants each)		
Sexuality/Gender	Status	Location
Gay men	Out and established	London/South
Lesbian	Out and established (55+)	Glasgow
Bisexual (female)	Recently out (18-34)	London/South
Gay men	Recently out (18-34)	London/South
Lesbian	Not yet fully out/ partially out	London/South
Bisexual (male)	Not yet fully out/ partially out	Glasgow
Transgender		London

Disabled people: Individual interviews (some with carer)		
Disability/condition	Description	Age, SEG and BBC approval rating
2 x Sensory impairment: visual		Younger and older Lower and higher SEG & BBC Approval rating
3 x Sensory impairment: hearing		Younger and older Lower and higher SEG & BBC Approval rating
4 x Physical impairment: mobility issues	Any condition or problem which makes it difficult for a person to carry out everyday activities without some degree of assistance or adaptation. It may be congenital, such as cerebral palsy, or caused by a chronic illness such as multiple sclerosis, arthritis, or diabetes. It may be the result of an infection such as meningitis or polio.	Younger and older Lower and higher SEG & BBC Approval rating
3 x A learning disability (neuro diversity / cognitive)	This affects the way a person understands information and how they communicate. Some conditions are associated with a learning disability, such as Down's syndrome, autism and epilepsy. This can be mild, moderate or severe. We advise against including severe given the requirements of the research and the burden on potential participants of these characteristics. Not to be confused with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia or A.D.D.	Younger and older Lower and higher SEG & BBC Approval rating
3 x A long-standing illness / health condition	This may be concurrent to physical impairment / mobility issues (above). Includes self-reported physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last a year or more.	Younger and older Lower and higher SEG & BBC Approval rating