



Ipsos MORI  
Social Research Institute

June 2017

# BBC Distinctiveness

**Report prepared for Ofcom**

Ipsos MORI



# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Overall perceptions of the BBC</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Opinions on the BBC’s role in society and the new public purposes</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Distinctiveness and the BBC</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1 Background and objectives</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>1.1 Research background</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>1.2 Aims and objectives</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>1.3 Methodology</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Figure 1: Overview of research methodology .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2 Overall perceptions of the BBC</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1 The BBC’s perceived strengths and weaknesses</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>2.2 Views on the BBC as an institution</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>2.3 Participants have unique and complex relationships with the BBC</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Figure 2: Range of views about the BBC .....	<b>13</b>
<b>2.4 The BBC’s perceived strengths and weaknesses</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>2.5 Perceptions of different BBC platforms</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>3 Opinions on the BBC’s role in society and the new public purposes</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>3.1 Spontaneous views of the BBC’s role in society</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>3.2 Views of the BBC’s public purposes</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>4 Distinctiveness and the BBC</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Figure 3: The BBC’s distinctiveness in terms and what it <i>is</i> and what it <i>does</i> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>4.1 How did participants describe BBC distinctiveness?</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>4.2 Views of the distinctiveness of BBC TV</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>4.3 Views of the distinctiveness of BBC Radio</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>4.4 Views of the distinctiveness of BBC Online</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>4.5 Views of Schedule 2 of the BBC Framework Agreement</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>5 Appendix</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>5.1 Methodology</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>5.2 Sampling</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>5.3 Workshop discussion guide</b> .....	<b>42</b>

# Executive summary

## Introduction

As part of Ofcom's duties regulating the BBC, it is important that Ofcom takes account of changing public tastes, attitudes and habits. To do this, Ofcom carries out regular qualitative and quantitative research with audiences to ensure that they remain in touch with people's priorities, concerns and what they want from the BBC. Each year Ofcom conducts research with over 3500 adults from across the UK to ask them about their views on public service broadcasting. This research, together with research from Ofcom's third PSB Review, highlights how the BBC remains the cornerstone of public service broadcasting (PSB) and that it continues to deliver high quality services that are valued by people across the UK.<sup>1 2</sup>

However, the context in which the BBC operates is changing rapidly. Viewers now have more choice than ever before and are consuming ever more content on-demand and online. Younger people, in particular, are embracing online and on-demand services and watching increasing volumes of content off-schedule across a range of devices. As a result of these changes we are beginning to see a shift in audience perceptions regarding the BBC, and indeed the other PSBs. It was therefore considered timely for Ofcom to re-engage with audiences and update their understanding of how they feel about the BBC and its public purposes before taking on its new duties. Ofcom commissioned qualitative market research to speak to people from across the UK's Nations, regions and diverse communities about what they expect from the BBC and their views on the BBC's five public purposes. In particular, the third public purpose, showing the most creative, highest quality and distinctive outputs, was a new and complex priority within the BBC's purposes, which Ofcom wanted to explore to understand audiences' expectations of this purpose.

## Overall perceptions of the BBC

Overall the BBC was thought to offer consistently high quality output across its many different services, providing content that participants personally valued. People associated the BBC positively with being safe and reliable. It was also valued as a British institution, integral to British society, largely because of its long history and nostalgia for the influential role it has played in the lives of individuals, and the nation as a whole.

Within this were a wide range of views, with perceptions of the BBC varying across different demographic groups. Views ranged from the very positive, where the BBC was seen as a trusted institution offering reliable, high quality services which were highly valued. Other views were more negative. Some felt that the BBC was too traditional, did not take enough risks, or offer enough content for them personally.

Older and middle class participants were generally more positive about BBC services, feeling they could depend on them to meet high standards in terms of quality and professionalism. However, some younger and working class participants were more likely to view the BBC less favourably, describing it as old-fashioned or as offering very little of relevance for them. Related to this, there were mixed views on whether BBC content served all groups in society. Some felt that the BBC

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2015/psb-review-statement>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/information-for-industry/public-servicebroadcasting/public-service-broadcasting-annual-report-2016>

focused more on middle aged and middle class audiences, with fewer services for younger audiences, working class people, and people from minority groups.

The BBC's perceived strengths included:

- High quality TV dramas
- Documentaries on TV and radio
- Children's TV
- Radio, in terms of both the range and quality of services

The BBC's perceived weaknesses included:

- Comedy and light entertainment, particularly on TV
- Sports coverage, in terms of the range, rather than the quality of individual programmes
- A lack of risk-taking leading to too much reliance on familiar formats and programmes

Perceptions regarding BBC News were somewhat polarised, especially on television. Some considered it to be a reliable and unbiased source of news that they trusted, while others were concerned about impartiality and the BBC being the voice of the Establishment.

Participants had different views of BBC TV, radio and online services.

Perceptions of **BBC radio services** were extremely positive among those who listened to, or were familiar with, them. Listeners valued the variety of services for different audiences, and the quality of the programmes on different stations. Participants felt that BBC radio stations had some of the best shows and presenters available on radio. They also said it was easier to find the type of content they wanted because individual stations and programmes had very clear target audiences with quite specific offerings.

There were varying views towards **BBC television services**. Some people were extremely positive and felt that the BBC continued to provide familiar, high quality content. They felt this consistent approach made BBC TV different from other broadcasters. For others, BBC TV was too risk averse. Some younger participants were more critical and argued that BBC Three no longer being broadcast on TV suggested that producing more creative and innovative content for young people was not a priority for the BBC. Some were even unaware that BBC Three could still be accessed online.

**BBC Online services** were also valued by those who used them. For example, the BBC News, BBC Weather and BBC Sport websites were considered clear and easy to navigate, with the equivalent apps also well used and highly regarded. The BBC iPlayer was also described as easy to navigate, and as offering a good way to access high quality content from across the BBC. Those who used other on-demand services (such as Netflix and Amazon Prime) felt that the iPlayer needed to continue to improve to match these.

## Opinions on the BBC's role in society and the new public purposes

As part of the research participants were shown the BBC's new public purposes and asked to consider which they considered important, both to themselves and to society as a whole. Overall, people felt the purposes were a good summary of what the BBC should aspire to be and do, often reflecting their own views of the role of the BBC. Generally, all the purposes were considered to be important and to have value. Again, there were a wide range of views reflecting people's different priorities. Broadly ranked in order of importance to society:

- **To provide impartial news and information** – this was considered perhaps the most important for society across the discussions, but was also a personal priority for many participants.
- **To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of the UK** – this was seen as important for society, with many participants also citing it as a personal priority. However, some recognised the challenges in fulfilling this purpose – particularly the tensions between offering mainstream vs. niche programming and the scheduling of such programmes on high reach vs. low reach channels.
- **To support learning for people of all ages** – this was described as important for society, but was not always a personal priority for participants.
- **To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services** – this was viewed as generally important personally, but deemed relatively less so for society.
- **To reflect the UK, its culture and values to the world** – there was some uncertainty about what this would mean in practice, and mixed views about how important it is for the BBC to focus on this given its other priorities.

## Distinctiveness and the BBC

The BBC was felt to be distinctive in terms of both its character and content. In terms of character, it was seen as a distinctive British institution with all the history that goes alongside its unique funding and its remit. But the BBC was also seen as distinctive for the quality of its output, its reliability, and its professional tone. Some people highlighted this by saying that they would know a programme was produced by the BBC without having to be told. However, the BBC was not generally considered distinctive in terms of being fresh, new and innovative and a creative risk taker.

Perceptions of distinctiveness also varied by platform.

**BBC television content** was seen as distinctive because of its high-quality production and the talent and professionalism of its presenters. Additionally, it was considered distinctive because of its unique coverage of important national events such as the Olympics or royal weddings. This was considered a core role for the BBC and most participants went to it for this type of content. They felt the coverage would be of higher quality and in greater depth than they would be able to get elsewhere.

BBC television was seen to be a leader in some areas. Programmes such as *Planet Earth II* and the BBC's *The Great British Bake Off* were viewed as exceptional and unique compared to anything seen on other channels. However, it was also noted that BBC continues to produce popular programmes for a long time, limiting their ability to innovate. Audiences

wanted the BBC to take more risks with their TV content, but to continue to produce these popular shows that they liked. They recognised that this was a significant challenge for the BBC.

The talent and professionalism of BBC presenters – for example, on news, current affairs, and documentaries – was thought to be unique to the BBC. However, this was not always seen as positive by younger audiences who felt that there could be more presenters who appealed to them.

In order to become more distinctive, audiences wanted to see a greater diversity in terms of writers, producers and talent on BBC TV. It was felt that the BBC could do more to represent all of society; by being more ethnically diverse, more geographically diverse, and more representative of younger generations.

**BBC Radio services** were viewed as being highly distinctive in terms of both their range and the quality of their programmes. They were seen as serving a broad range of audiences of different ages and with different interests and tastes. Participants did not think other providers covered the same range of music, sport, talk shows and drama content. In particular, stations such as Radio 1, Radio 1Xtra, Radio 4 and Radio 6 Music were all seen as providing something different to commercial stations. Radio 1 and 1Xtra were distinctive for airing new British talent, and for being more relevant and engaging for younger listeners than commercial stations. Radio 4 was different in terms of the range of its programmes and their quality.

Most were very positive towards BBC Radio, suggesting no significant changes to improve distinctiveness. However, a few participants suggested that BBC Radio could be more distinctive by showcasing even more non-mainstream music, or by more coverage of local issues and music.

**BBC Online content was thought to be consistent and clear.** The BBC News website was felt to have a distinctive brand and layout, with its clear format and the reliability of its content making it different to other providers. However, BBC iPlayer was not seen to be as distinctive when compared to alternatives such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. It was considered easy to use by older groups, but as less intuitive and increasingly behind the curve by younger generations. Users felt that the BBC iPlayer needed to adapt by offering recommendations and by increasing access to back catalogues of TV content.

As part of the research process, participants were introduced to Schedule 2 as detailed in the BBC Framework Agreement. Schedule 2 provides Ofcom with detailed guidance on how it should interpret the requirements on the BBC to provide outputs and services that are substantially different to other comparable providers both in peak time and overall, and on television, radio and online, in terms of:

- The mix of genres and output
- The quality of output
- The amount of original output produced in the UK
- The level of risk-taking, innovation, challenge and creative ambition
- The range of audiences it serves

While participants found it difficult to know exactly what Schedule 2 might mean in practice without greater detail, they felt that it did cover important aspects of distinctiveness. This list reflected participants' priorities for distinctive content; in

particular, the quality of output, the amount of original output produced in the UK and the range of audiences it serves were important to participants.

**Quality of output was seen as important for distinctiveness across people of all ages and backgrounds.** It was seen to be a priority for viewers personally and something that the BBC already did, and should continue to do, to be distinctive.

**It was important for the BBC to have original, UK produced output on TV and radio in order to support UK writers, actors, musicians and presenters.** This was viewed as an important part of the BBC's role in society, and something it does to some extent already. For example, the BBC was perceived to do this particularly well for music on stations such as Radio 1, Radio 1Xtra and Radio 6 Music.

**Participants felt that given the BBC's public funding, it was essential that produced content to serve a range of audiences.** The BBC was thought to do this to some extent already, but participants were also clear that it could do more to reflect and serve different audiences across the UK, for example in terms of age, Nation, ethnic background, and social class.

The level of risk-taking, innovation, challenge and creative ambition was the most contested aspect of distinctiveness. Some felt that the BBC should focus on what it does best, arguing that the BBC does not need to compete with every other provider. In particular, they felt that the BBC cannot rival high-budget American shows, and should instead prioritise content that other channels do not make. However, there was also the view, among younger audiences especially, that the BBC needs to adapt and to produce more innovative and creative content to continue to attract audiences and remain relevant.

Both younger and older participants wanted BBC content to be distinctive. Older participants viewed distinctiveness in terms of the BBC's unique position in providing the type of content it already (and traditionally) provides, while younger groups saw distinctiveness as meaning new and innovative content. Overall, a balance between some more innovative content, alongside a continuation of popular content, was the preference.

# 1 Background and objectives

## 1.1 Research background

The BBC's constitutional basis is guaranteed by its Royal Charter, which is renewed every 10 years. The most recent Charter came into effect on 1 January 2017. Among other things, the new Charter sets out the BBC's mission and public purposes and describes how the BBC will be governed. Alongside the Royal Charter sits the Framework Agreement between the BBC and the Secretary of State, which provides further detail on how the BBC will meet its aims. Previously, the BBC Trust had responsibility for regulating the BBC. However, as of April 2017, Ofcom, the UK communications regulator took over responsibility for regulating the BBC.

Ofcom is now responsible for holding the BBC to account for the delivery of its mission and public purposes. The BBC's mission is to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain. Its five public purposes are:

- To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them
- To support learning for people of all ages through helping people learn about new subjects in a way that they will find accessible, engaging, inspiring and challenging
- To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive outputs and services
- To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the UK's nations and regions
- To reflect UK values to the world through high quality, accurate and impartial news to international audiences

Leading up to this change in regulation, Ofcom wanted to understand the public's attitudes towards the BBC and the public's priorities. Previous research conducted by Ofcom makes it clear that the BBC is a highly valued across the UK.<sup>3</sup>

However, the context in which the BBC operates is changing rapidly. Viewers now have more choice than ever before and are consuming ever more content on-demand and online. Younger people, in particular, are embracing online and on-demand services and watching increasing volumes of content off-schedule across a range of devices. As a result of these changes there has been a shift in audience perceptions regarding the BBC, and the other public service broadcasting providers (PSBs). Research was therefore necessary to understand the public's priorities given this changing environment.

Ipsos MORI was commissioned to undertake qualitative research to explore the public's views of the BBC, and their views on the BBC's public purposes. In particular views about the third public purpose, showing the most creative, highest quality and distinctive outputs were explored. A further quantitative survey which will measure audience views on these areas is in progress, with the results to be published in Summer 2017.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2015/psb-review-statement>  
<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/information-for-industry/public-servicebroadcasting/public-service-broadcasting-annual-report-2016>

## 1.2 Aims and objectives

This research had three key aims:

1. To explore people's relationship with the BBC overall across TV, radio and online platforms
2. To understand how the BBC compares to other media providers across these platforms
3. To explore what distinctiveness means to the public and whether and in what ways they feel the BBC is distinctive

In order to further explore the concept of distinctiveness, participants also considered aspects of Schedule 2 of the BBC Framework Agreement. Schedule 2 provides Ofcom with detailed guidance on how to interpret the requirements on the BBC to provide distinctive output and services, and on television, radio and online, in terms of:

- the mix of different genres and output;
- the quality of output;
- the amount of original output produced in the UK;
- the level of risk-taking, innovation, challenge and creative ambition; and
- the range of audiences that the BBC serves.

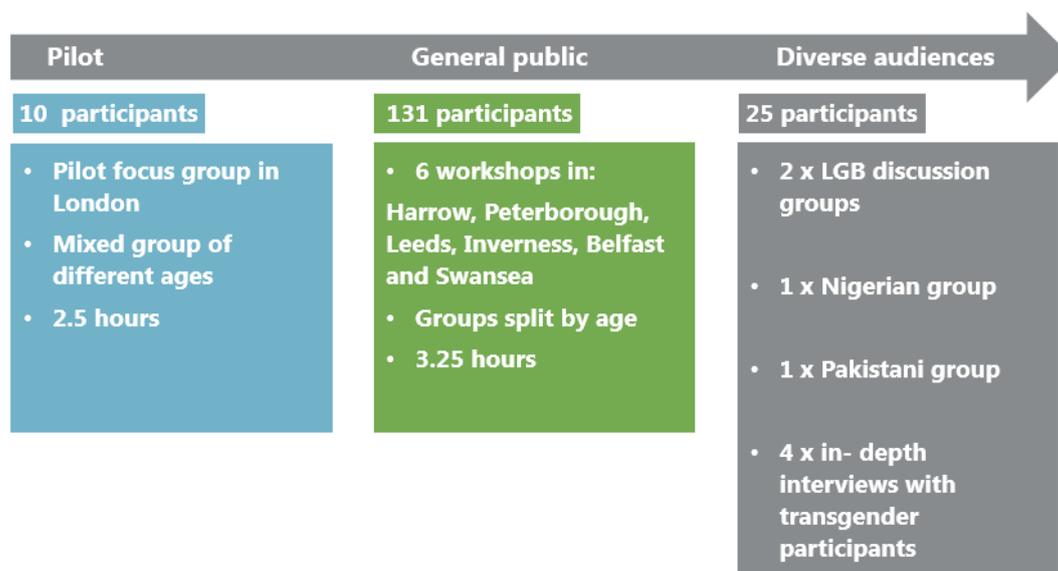
## 1.3 Methodology

This qualitative study used a number of different approaches, including online discussion pre-tasks, deliberative workshops, and in-depth interviews, to explore audience experiences and priorities.

Ipsos MORI conducted **deliberative workshops across the UK**. Deliberative workshops are a type of facilitated group discussion that provide participants with the opportunity to consider an issue in depth, be introduced to new information, challenge each other's opinions and develop their views to reach an informed position. This approach was used as it allows time to introduce and consider more complex topics – in this case, the BBC's public purposes and aspects of Schedule 2.

After an initial pilot workshop with 10 participants in London, Ipsos MORI carried out six workshops in Harrow, Peterborough, Leeds, Inverness, Belfast and Swansea. A total of 131 participants took part in the six workshops. Each workshop was recruited based on the demographic characteristics of the area, in order to reflect the UK population overall across locations. Most of the discussions took place in smaller groups based on age, in order to explore generational differences. Each group differed slightly but the broad age ranges in the younger groups were 18-29 year olds, in the middle groups they were 30-49 year olds and then 50+ in the older groups. The workshops allowed participants time to reflect on their own relationship with the BBC and hear the experiences and views of others. This allowed them to consider the relevant issues about the BBC from their own consumer perspective (as people who use BBC services), and from a broader citizen perspective (thinking about the role of the BBC in society as a whole). The research approach is summarised below.

Figure 1: Overview of research methodology



Prior to taking part in the workshops, participants completed an online media diary. During the week leading up to the workshop participants recorded what media they had consumed (watched/ listened to/ read online) during the day from different media providers. This approach meant that participants had started to think about their media consumption ahead of the workshop as well as prompting discussion on what they consumed and why they did it via that service/ programme.

During the workshops, the topics discussed included:

- **Participants' media use:** what they consume on TV/radio/online, exploring why they used particular platforms and providers for different types of content
- **Overall impressions of the BBC:** what participants value about the BBC, including the types of programmes and content they felt they could and could not access from other providers
- **Role of the BBC in society:** spontaneous views on the BBC's role, followed by an in-depth discussion about the five public purposes, covering what they think the purposes should mean in practice and how important they are
- **Exploring the meaning of distinctiveness:** how they defined distinctiveness in a media context, and how distinctive the BBC's content is across different platforms<sup>4</sup>

Following the pilot and main workshops, additional **discussions were carried out amongst diverse audiences**, covering similar topics as the deliberative workshops. These consisted of two mini-workshops with BME groups (Black African and Pakistani), two workshops with lesbian, gay and bi-sexual people (LGB) and four in-depth interviews with transgender people. The additional workshops and interviews were carried out to explore and illustrate the views of potentially under-represented groups.

<sup>4</sup> For full details, please see the discussion guide and other research materials included in Annex X

## 2 Overall perceptions of the BBC

This chapter outlines participants' spontaneous views of the BBC. Overall the BBC was thought to offer consistently high quality output across its many different services, providing content that participants personally valued. People associated the BBC positively with being safe and reliable. It was also valued as a British institution, integral to British society, largely because of its long history and nostalgia for the influential role it has played in the lives of individuals, and the nation as a whole.

Within this were a wide range of views, with perceptions of the BBC varying across different demographic groups. Views ranged from the very positive, where the BBC was seen as a trusted institution offering reliable, high quality services which were highly valued. Other views were more negative. Some felt that the BBC was too traditional, did not take enough risks, or offer enough content for them personally.

Older and middle class participants were generally more positive about BBC services, feeling they could depend on them to meet high standards in terms of quality and professionalism. However, some younger and working class participants were more likely to view the BBC less favourably, describing it as old-fashioned or as offering very little of relevance for them. Related to this, there were mixed views on whether BBC content served all groups in society. Some felt that the BBC focused more on middle aged and middle class audiences, with fewer services for younger audiences, working class people, and people from minority groups.

The BBC's perceived strengths included:

- High quality TV dramas
- Documentaries on TV and radio
- Children's TV
- Radio, in terms of both the range and quality of services

The BBC's perceived weaknesses included:

- Comedy and light entertainment, particularly on TV
- Sports coverage, in terms of the range, rather than the quality of individual programmes
- A lack of risk-taking leading to too much reliance on familiar formats and programmes

Perceptions regarding BBC News were somewhat polarised, especially on television. Some considered it to be a reliable and unbiased source of news that they trusted, while others were concerned about impartiality and the BBC being the voice of the Establishment.

Participants had different views of BBC TV, radio and online services.

Perceptions of **BBC radio services** were extremely positive among those who listened to, or were familiar with, them. Listeners valued the variety of services for different audiences, and the quality of the programmes on different stations. Participants felt that BBC radio stations had some of the best shows and presenters available on radio. They also said it

was easier to find the type of content they wanted because individual stations and programmes had very clear target audiences with quite specific offerings.

There were varying views towards **BBC television services**. Some people were extremely positive and felt that the BBC continued to provide familiar, high quality content. They felt this consistent approach made BBC TV different from other broadcasters. For others, BBC TV was too risk averse. Some younger participants were more critical and argued that BBC Three no longer being broadcast on TV suggested that producing more creative and innovative content for young people was not a priority for the BBC. Some were even unaware that BBC Three could still be accessed online.

**BBC Online services** were also valued by those who used them. For example, the BBC News, BBC Weather and BBC Sport websites were considered clear and easy to navigate, with the equivalent apps also well used and highly regarded. The BBC iPlayer was also described as easy to navigate, and as offering a good way to access high quality content from across the BBC. Those who used other on-demand services (such as Netflix and Amazon Prime) felt that the iPlayer needed to continue to improve to match these.

## 2.1 The BBC's perceived strengths and weaknesses

### ***The BBC was seen as good quality, but safe***

Participants personally valued the BBC for providing reliably high quality content. Many were positive about the overall style and standards of the BBC's programmes and services. Participants felt that the BBC could be relied on to provide good quality, consistent content. Although they found it difficult to articulate exactly what it was about BBC content overall that made it high quality, participants discussed many specific examples of what they meant. These included the level of research and detail in documentaries and dramas, the tone and subject matter of different types of programmes, and good production values. There was a sense of professionalism and consistency in the quality of the BBC's services and programmes, and the BBC was described as familiar, safe and reliable.

*"I put that it's comfortable, you can always go back to them for a bit of depth or classiness."*

Older group (50+), Harrow

### ***This safeness was seen as a strength of the BBC by many older and middle aged participants***

They described the BBC's consistency over many years and said they continued to value its role in providing reliable content of a good standard. As such, these participants felt they knew what to expect from the BBC's programmes, in terms of both style and quality, and this contributed to a sense of trust in its services.

*"Safe needn't be a pejorative term; you know what you're going to get."*

Middle group (30-49), Peterborough

*"Radio, TV. A trusted source of production. Considered because they don't have a lot of rubbish. Every show or radio is quite a considered approach."*

Younger group (18-29), Harrow

### ***Some younger and working class participants were more likely to view the BBC less favourably***

This perception of the BBC as being 'safe' was also be viewed negatively, particularly by younger and some middle aged participants. These participants tended to focus on the quality of current programmes, and compared these to similar content from other providers. They described a lack of risk-taking and too much focus on familiar or even traditional or old-fashioned types of content, which meant the BBC was not engaging for them. Younger groups in particular suggested there was too much reliance on conventional formats, with content that was similar to existing outputs. This was seen as more of an issue on BBC TV.

*"In general, there is never anything that really grabs my attention that I want to take the time out of my day to watch it."*

Younger group (18-29), Inverness

*"I think they are quite stuck in their ways. They see the formula works and don't try anything new."*

Younger group (18-29), Peterborough

### ***The BBC was seen as having a unique and recognisable tone across its services***

This BBC's tone was usually described as being more formal or traditional than other providers. Taken together with the BBC's perceived reluctance to take risks with its content, this contributed to a sense of the BBC being a more serious broadcaster. This was often contrasted with the lighter, or more entertaining tone associated with other providers. While safeness and seriousness were not always seen as negative, they did shape participants' views in terms of seeing the BBC as somewhere they would go for factual or serious programmes rather than for more entertaining or cutting edge content.

*"I trust them for the boring, factual things in my life. If they ran a doctor's surgery I would probably go."*

LGB women, Brighton

## **2.2 Views on the BBC as an institution**

### ***Participants felt the BBC plays an important role as a valued British institution***

As well as discussing what the BBC *does*, in terms of providing a range of content and services, participants also spoke about the BBC in terms of what it *is*, as an institution. Being a British institution was seen as a core part of the BBC's identity, with participants of all ages and backgrounds described the BBC as being integral to British society. Older and middle-aged groups particularly valued its long history and associated it with what they felt were characteristically British values. For them, the BBC had helped form a shared cultural identity and it was something that they felt proud of.

*"It's very British, it's what we've all grown up with. It's quintessentially British and I'd miss it if it wasn't there. It's always been there, it's part of my youth."*

Middle group (30-49), Harrow

*"It's the British Broadcasting Corporation, that's why. It has a long standing tradition of honesty, forthrightness."*

Older group (50+), Leeds

However, the BBC being a British institution was also seen as a weakness by some participants, as they felt the BBC represented and served a predominantly white, middle class audience. These participants thought the BBC was set in its ways, and perhaps presented a more establishment view of Britain and Britishness. Some valued this role for the BBC, but others wanted to see much greater diversity on the BBC, with a move away from a perceived white, middle class, and often London-focused perspective.

*"I think there's probably a lot more control over what we see with it being a government channel."*

Middle group (30-49), Leeds

Perceptions of the BBC as a national institution were also related to its status as a publicly-funded broadcaster. Views on the licence fee varied, and participants' satisfaction with the BBC influenced their views on paying the licence fee and their expectations of the BBC. Those who felt that the BBC was doing well and giving them content that they enjoyed (most older participants) saw the licence fee as reasonable. Those who did not feel the BBC provided them as much content that they wanted (younger and some middle aged participants) were more likely to raise the licence fee as an issue which negatively influenced their views of the BBC overall. Some participants compared the BBC to alternative providers such as Netflix or Sky, arguing that they offered more of the content that they wanted, and that it was a choice whether they paid for them or not. Some of these participants also mistakenly assumed that the BBC was a government owned institution and this meant that they had high expectations of the BBC and were unhappy if it did not give them the kind of content that they wanted.

*"As the BBC is a government-owned thing, it is owned by us. I think it costs too much."*

Younger group (18-29), Inverness

### ***There were some concerns that the BBC is not serving all audiences***

Concerns about whether the BBC did enough to serve all members of society were central to discussions about the BBC's position as a publicly-funded national institution. There was general agreement that because the public were paying for the BBC's services through the licence fee it should serve everyone in society. Some felt the BBC already caters for a wide range of audiences reasonably well, but not everyone agreed. Those who felt the BBC did not do this thought that the BBC's focus was on older or middle aged and middle class audiences.

*"It is turning into an older persons' channel; it is more for an older audience."*

Younger group (18-29), Inverness

They argued that there was less content for younger people, working class audiences, and people from minority groups. Across different groups participants suggested the BBC could do more to diversify their content and the range of audiences it served.

*"A bit more representation, in terms of lesbian, gay, transsexual groups. Differently abled people. Not just white hetero middle-aged people."*

Younger group (18-29), Peterborough

### 2.3 Participants have unique and complex relationships with the BBC

Many participants described the BBC in ways that emphasised how integral it is to their lives. While each individual's experience was unique, participants broadly fell into three groups in terms of their attitudes towards and use of the BBC. These groups are described below.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive typology of public attitudes to the BBC, but rather to highlight the broad range of perceptions and current experiences. The examples outlined in more detail are designed to illustrate these groups, but the examples are not reflective of all those in each broad category. For example, some of those who highly value the BBC do not use BBC Radio, while some older people are more negative about the BBC and have little nostalgia for past programmes.

Figure 2: Range of views about the BBC



#### 1. BBC advocates

Participants who were most positive about the BBC felt that it excelled in its range of programmes and high quality content. They were frequently using BBC programmes and services, often including radio and online, alongside TV. The BBC played an important role in their daily lives, and they felt it offered them content they could not get to the same standard elsewhere.

### Example relationship with the BBC: Committed radio listeners

The radio listener particularly values the BBC for the broad range of different radio services it provides. They may use commercial stations as well, for example when they're driving and want to listen to more mainstream music, but they feel the BBC offers unique content that is not available elsewhere. They might particularly like the news, documentaries and comedy programmes on Radio 4, the sports coverage on 5 Live, or the variety of different music across BBC Radio 1 and 6 Music.

*"I like a lot of music, comedy, different interesting things ... I listen to Radio 4 in the mornings, I listen to the Today programme when I'm making breakfast, it's in the kitchen so when I'm making dinner as well. 5 Live for the sports."*

Middle group (30-49), Harrow

They usually have the radio on in the background while they'd doing other things, and they also tune in at set times for their favourite shows. They often listen to radio online too, and like being able to catch up when it suits them.

*"They have shows on demand, so I listen to some Radio 1 they're on at two in the morning so I listen on iPlayer."*

Middle group (30-49), Harrow

Most of all they value the BBC for offering the more niche music and programmes which they can't get from other providers.

*"There's stuff on there that you wouldn't get anywhere else cos they do stuff that wouldn't be commercially successful. My girlfriend listens to Gardener's Question Time, there's niche things like that I like."*

Middle group (30-49), Harrow

## 2. Nostalgic about the BBC

Another group of participants saw the BBC very positively, even if they were getting most of their media content from other providers. Some of these participants were not using the BBC much at all, while others went to the BBC for specific things: for example, they might only use the BBC to get the news on TV/ online, or they might watch soaps on the BBC but nothing else. However, they were still very positive about the BBC. For them, this was about much more than how much value they placed on what they currently use: they were considering the important role the BBC has played throughout their lives.

In particular, their nostalgia was often due to the influential role the BBC had played in their early lives, with many participants recalling watching or listening to BBC programmes when they were young. Themes of trust and familiarity were common across groups, with several suggesting the BBC was like a grandparent to them.

*"It's familiar. You feel it's trusted because you grew up with it. Does that make sense? I've grown up with the BBC since I can remember."*

Younger group (18-29), Harrow

*"It's almost like having your great-great-great Grandad in your house – that's our benchmark. There may be other grandads around but then when someone asks do you want them out of the way, gone from the house? You say 'No!' "*

Middle group (30-49), Peterborough

#### Example relationship with the BBC: the nostalgic viewers

Nostalgic viewers value the BBC for the sense of familiarity and comfort it offers them. They have warm memories of watching and listening to its programmes as a child and associate it with family and safety. They like the BBC's consistency and appreciate the way many of their favourite programmes have continued, or continued to be available, over the years.

*"It's something we were raised with, it's always been there since I was a child ... Match of the Day, I've watched it with my dad since I was eight. It's the comfort, plus it's quality."*

Older group (50+), Belfast

Their views on the BBC are largely based on recollections of programmes from years ago, which they felt were iconic and ground-breaking at the time. Their fond memories and the positive associations they have with the BBC mean they see its current content in a good light and trust it as a provider of high-quality media. They continue to value older programmes, returning to them again and again, but do not rely only on the BBC for their media content as they did in the past.

*"I value the BBC's reputation ... Comedy on the BBC, Only Fools and Horses, Fawlty Towers ... Dinner ladies... keep coming back up, it's so funny now."*

Older group (50+), Leeds

### 3. Disengaged from the BBC

A final group of participants did not think that the BBC offered them much they currently valued, and had much less nostalgia for the BBC's role in their lives. This included many younger and middle aged participants. Some preferred alternative providers such as Netflix and Amazon Prime for drama series and documentaries, or Sky for sports, and did not see the type of content that they wanted on the BBC. There were also those who were older who did not think that the BBC offered them as much as it used to.

This group saw the BBC's current services in an unfavourable light compared to its past output. Middle aged participants in particular remembered programmes which they had enjoyed in the past. But rather than making them feel fond of the BBC, it highlighted to them that the quality of the BBC's content had declined in their lifetimes.

*You're saying about shows from when we were younger but there's not as much now. I don't think the comedies and dramas are as good as they were.*

Older group (50+), Peterborough

#### Example relationship with the BBC: Disengaged younger viewers

Many younger participants said they were getting their TV content through on-demand streaming services like Netflix. They preferred big-budget American TV shows like *Game of Thrones* and *Narcos*, or more niche shows related to their interests, and did not value the content offered by the BBC. They did not mind paying for subscription services, but it did not feel they should pay for the BBC when they did not use it much.

*"I watch a lot of series, Narcos, Billions, Power, Bloodline, everything. Netflix, we don't get to watch TV during the day so we just kind of chill out [and watch it in the evenings] ... it's just easier to stream it."*

Younger group (18-29), Belfast

They used to watch BBC Three when it was broadcast on TV. They liked the new comedies that were on this channel and thought it was a good way to try find more innovative material, but they hadn't used it as much since it had moved online. They felt they hadn't seen any new content like this from the BBC for a while.

*"It was a massive fail was getting rid of BBC Three ... loads of things like Gavin and Stacey started off on BBC Three but they're not prepared to give it a long enough run."*

Younger group (18-29), Belfast

## 2.4 The BBC's perceived strengths and weaknesses

### **Perceived BBC strengths include the range and quality of radio, the best TV dramas and documentaries, and children's TV**

Across participants from different generations and backgrounds there was broad agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of the BBC's content overall, with more nuanced views by platform type. The BBC's perceived strengths included its radio output, its high quality TV dramas and documentaries, and children's TV. The BBC was seen as less strong in making more innovative content, light entertainment, and in covering a wide range of sports.

Overall, across the UK BBC Radio was seen as excellent in terms of both the range and quality of its services among its listeners. Participants valued the variety of content produced, as they felt the mix of radio stations served a wide range of audiences, and regarded its programmes and presenters as high quality. The reasons for these views are discussed in more detail in Section 3.5. The main exception to this was in Inverness, where difficulties with accessing BBC Radio limited the value it had to participants.

The high quality of the best BBC's TV dramas was a common theme across different groups. As well as enjoying the stories themselves, participants commented on the high levels of authenticity and attention to detail evident in period dramas. Dramas such as *Sherlock* were thought to be a particular strength for the BBC, in part because they were seen as characteristically British in terms of setting, plot and overall feel.

BBC documentaries were also praised for their attention to detail and the depth of insight they provided, as well as the broad range of topics they covered. The standard of presenters came out as a key strength, as participants felt BBC documentaries were given added credibility because of they were presented by reliable experts.

*"No one does period dramas like the BBC."*

Older group (50+), Belfast

*"Planet Earth II was the best documentary ever."*

Middle group (30-49), Harrow

Participants across different generations agreed the quality of BBC children's TV was high, particularly in comparison to other providers. They valued its educational content and as an alternative to American shows, both for children today and for its role in their own childhoods.

*"The children's television on BBC. With six grandkids I watch CBeebies a lot and that's quite good, they have good things up on that, it's knowledgeable."*

Older group (50+), Leeds

### **Perceived BBC weaknesses included comedy and light entertainment, and sports coverage**

Many felt the BBC was not good at making comedy and light entertainment. This was partly a result of associations with the BBC as being more safe and serious than other providers. Participants discussed the lack of new entertainment shows and the use of repeated formats for comedy as reinforcing their view of the BBC as too traditional and risk averse. They felt that the BBC stuck with what was familiar in terms of format and the comedians featured (often citing panel shows and conventional sitcoms).

*"Comedy should be about pushing boundaries, not playing it safe. It feeds back into the stagnation. They are quick to get rid of people who don't fit in with their idea."*

Younger group (18-29), Peterborough

The BBC was also seen as not as strong as it was in its sports coverage by some participants. Those who valued sport often felt the BBC was still producing high quality programmes around key sporting events like Wimbledon and the Olympics. There were more mixed feelings about the content of its more regular programmes, with many enjoying the familiar formats that they had come to expect, such as Match of the Day.

*"I don't enjoy the football. It's not detailed enough... It's just very dated. Very old school. They don't have big enough budgets to compete with Sky... Bit of nostalgia but apart from that, very poor."*

Younger group (18-29), Harrow

Others felt that the BBC was not spending enough money on its sports coverage and that it was visibly falling behind commercial providers like *Sky Sports*. Some were also disappointed that the range of sports covered had reduced, although others argued that the BBC should not seek to compete with subscription services. Among those who valued sports coverage, there was a perception that minority sports not covered elsewhere could be given more priority on the BBC.

*"Scotland doesn't get much coverage. It is all English games...but the Olympics was amazing!"*

Middle group (30-49), Inverness

### ***BBC's role in providing the news was seen as crucial, but views of it were more polarised***

There was general agreement that the BBC's role in providing news was crucial. However, there was a debate around whether the BBC provides the right level of depth and detail in the news, and whether it is impartial. Firstly, there were different views about the depth of BBC news, with some arguing that it is very in-depth, and others saying that BBC news (particularly online) was not providing sufficiently detailed news coverage.

*"BBC news is really good compared to the other side. Good Morning Britain is just about entertainment."*

Older group (50+), Peterborough

Another concern among participants was perceived bias in the BBC's news reporting, with some describing coverage as having a clear view on key political events and therefore portraying a particular perspective. They often associated the BBC with a more establishment take on news. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

*"I watch Channel 4 news as I think BBC is biased; they have an opinion already and they broadcast this opinion."*

Younger group (18-29), Leeds

## **2.5 Perceptions of different BBC platforms**

### ***Views of BBC Radio and BBC Online were more positive than BBC TV***

The quality of flagship dramas and documentaries on BBC TV was seen as a clear strength by many participants. However, BBC TV overall was perceived as fairly predictable, offering a similar set of outputs within a recognisable formula. For some this was appealing, because they thought it was important for the BBC to continue to offer familiar, high quality content. They felt this consistent approach made BBC TV different from other broadcasters. For others, BBC TV was too risk averse.

Younger participants in particular felt that more varied, innovative content had been available on BBC Three. The decision to switch BBC Three to online-only suggested to some that making this type of content, and appealing to younger audiences, was no longer a priority for the BBC. Some were unaware that BBC Three could still be accessed online.

*"I don't think they're as innovative on TV as they are on radio."*

Middle group (30-49), Harrow

*"I think that BBC isn't doing comedy very well. There was room for it, with BBC Three, like the Mighty Boosh."*

Younger group (18-29), Peterborough

There was general agreement that BBC Radio provided high quality content for a broad variety of different audiences. Participants felt BBC Radio had some of the best shows and presenters available on radio. They said it was also easier to find the type of content they wanted, because individual stations and programmes had a clear identity, aimed at specific types of people.

*"They've got a broad range of radio stations...they're all completely different which is good."*

Transgender participant, London

*"I would be lost without radio. Radio 1 is always on in the kitchen. Radio 5 live is always on in the car because I love football. Radio 1 on Saturday night is awesome."*

Middle group (30-49), Belfast

### **BBC Online services were seen as clear and easy to use**

Although not all participants used BBC Online services regularly, the BBC News, BBC Weather and BBC Sport websites and apps were valued by many for the content they provide and the simplicity of their layout. There was agreement across different generations that the websites were clear and easy to navigate, with useful information in an accessible format. Views were more varied on the BBC iPlayer: older participants described it as easy to navigate and a good way to access high quality content from across the BBC, while younger participants who used other on-demand services (such as Netflix and Amazon Prime) felt that the iPlayer could do more to innovate to keep up with other providers.

*"iPlayer is amazing and I think it's world class."*

LGB men, Brighton

*"I get my news from the BBC website and always do, I know where everything is, I know that format, and they're up to date."*

Older group (50+), Leeds

## 3 Opinions on the BBC's role in society and the new public purposes

This chapter outlines participants' views about the role of the BBC in society, highlighting the importance of the BBC in providing impartial news and accurate information. As part of the research process, participants were also introduced to the BBC's five public purposes; to provide impartial news; to serve the diverse communities of the UK; to support learning for all ages; to show the highest quality, most creative and most distinctive outputs; and to reflect the UK and its values to the world.

Overall, people felt the purposes were a good summary of what the BBC should aspire to be and do, often reflecting their own views of the role of the BBC. Generally, all the purposes were considered to be important and to have value. Again, there were a wide range of views reflecting people's different priorities. However, there was consensus across the groups that providing impartial news and reflecting and representing the diverse communities of the UK should be key priorities.

### 3.1 Spontaneous views of the BBC's role in society

#### ***The BBC is valued for its role in providing impartial news, educating and representing the UK***

During initial unprompted discussions, most participants found it difficult to describe the role of the BBC in society, with some unsure that it even has a specific role. They found it difficult to conceptualise life without the BBC, and also struggled with what it means for the BBC to be a publicly funded media provider with a detailed remit.

For those who were able to spontaneously describe the BBC's role in society, the main themes that emerged were that the BBC's role involves providing impartial news and information, representing the different parts of society, and offering something for everyone.

Providing impartial news was seen as essential, as this was not something participants felt they could rely on from other news sources. Discussing this reliance on BBC news coverage meant participants reflected that the BBC has a powerful, and potentially authoritative role in shaping public debate. Participants also felt that the BBC also played a role as an educator and tries to inform more widely, through informative programmes, as well as through its news and current affairs offering.

*Being controlling – decision makers. Any big news I'd go straight to the BBC. It's such a well-known channel so its controlling in that way.*

Younger group (18-29), Leeds

*The granny, the teller of all, the wise old, trying to be the person that educates.*

Older group (50+), Belfast

Participants felt that the BBC should also have a role in ensuring that it represents the UK as a whole. Related to this, there was a strong sense that because everyone pays the licence fee, the BBC should ensure it provides at least something for everyone. For some participants, this meant the BBC focusing on the majority, while others thought the BBC should offer

services for as wide range of different types of people as possible. Overall, participants thought the BBC should offer content that people find entertaining and enjoyable, and not just informative – but views differed on what the right balance should be.

*"It gives a whole, I think it, from babies to the older generation, it's got something for everyone."*

LGB women, Brighton

*"I think because we pay for it, we kind of have to pay for it you do feel like it's really got to reflect you in a way. Which it hasn't been doing very well. I don't think it does really reflect the society we live in, it doesn't move with the times, it keeps its hardy perennials going but it doesn't really reflect the changing nature of society in its hardy perennials."*

Middle group (30-49), Harrow

### 3.2 Views of the BBC's public purposes

As part of the research, participants were shown the BBC's five new public purposes and asked to consider which they considered most important, both to themselves and to society as a whole. The purposes are set out below, ranked broadly by participants in order of importance to society. Overall, participants thought the purposes were a good summary of what the BBC should aim to be and do, although they were viewed as aspirational, with many arguing the BBC had a way to go to achieve some or all of them.

1. To provide impartial news and information
2. To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of the UK
3. To support learning for people of all ages
4. To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services
5. To reflect the UK, its culture and values to the world

1. To provide impartial news and information

#### ***The BBC providing impartial news was seen as important for society, and by participants personally***

Providing impartial news and information was seen as one of the most important purposes overall, both for society and for participants personally. It was also a point of principle that the BBC as a publicly funded institution does provide impartial, serious news, particularly as it does not need to generate revenue.

*"I feel with the BBC, especially with the news, they have a duty to report honestly and factually and to be balanced, and I have a feeling that's why I listen to the BBC because they give an accurate view... their standards are a tier higher than that of other channels."*

Older group (50+), Swansea

Beyond this, it was important for participants that they had somewhere to go where they could get information that they trusted. This was seen as especially important because of the amount of poor quality and biased news that was available from other providers. The BBC was compared favourably to some commercial news organisations and online news providers, who were seen as much less reliable. Participants valued the BBC for its role in providing impartial news to them in the UK, and for its ability to provide this across the world.

*"I would watch BBC news other than other ones. I'd trust the BBC more; they are more independent, if you compare them to other channels"*

Older group (50+), Belfast

### **High quality, impartial news was considered a historic strength of the BBC**

The BBC was seen as being excellent at providing in-depth coverage of important national, political and sporting events. However, this also meant that there was a perception that the BBC also provided the 'voice of the establishment' and as such may be biased in terms of both *how* it covers news and the editorial decisions about what stories are selected on the BBC.

For example, the BBC was considered by some participants to have covered events such as the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 and the EU referendum in 2016 in a biased way. Participants acknowledged that it was a difficult balance for the BBC to get right. They did not always agree on which direction the BBC had been biased, suggesting that this perception of bias was to some extent based on an individual's views about the issues. In general, this perception of bias tended to be in relation to the BBC's TV news, rather than BBC News Online. The latter was seen as more neutral, in part because participants felt that online news had less depth than TV news.

*"They were very biased during the referendum as they were firmly on the EU's side..."*

Older group (50+), Peterborough

*"I'm aware of the conspiracy that the BBC is full of left-wing fools but it's very establishment."*

Older group (50+), Peterborough

2. To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of the UK

### **Serving different communities seen as something that all media providers, including the BBC, could be better at**

Reflecting, representing and serving the diverse communities of the UK was seen as a crucial purpose for society and a personal priority for many participants. This was seen as something that all media providers, not just the BBC, could be

better at. However, participants appeared to have higher expectations of the BBC because of its public funding and remit, and as such expected that the BBC should be leading the way in terms of diversity in the media.

This purpose was seen as important because participants felt that the BBC is for everyone. It appealed to a sense of fairness: because everyone pays for the BBC it should do its best to serve all communities in UK society. It also appealed at a personal level to those who felt that their region, generation or community was underserved, and who wanted the BBC to provide more content that was relevant to them. For example, younger generations felt that there should be more BBC programmes and services for their age group.

*“One of their principles is all about UK values and stuff but you kind of have to think whose values are they, are they the younger people or are they the older people?...”*

*You feel like they’re missing a trick by not appealing to the younger people, [young people don’t want programmes] like Sunday morning politics, or BBC parliament...I actually put it on by accident a few weeks ago and I was like what is this?”*

Younger group (18-29), Belfast

There were mixed views on the extent to which the BBC provided content relevant to specific regions in the UK. Participants thought that BBC Radio delivered regional content through its range of local stations, but that this was not always the case on BBC TV. For example, in Inverness, there was a perception that BBC TV covered Scotland but not issues specific to their region, and that providers such as STV were better at this.

*“More local stuff. The main news. STV have much more regional news that’s more pertinent to where we are. The BBC is just Scotland. BBC Alba has good news too and it’s very local. Even local dramas. They aren’t as good, a bit twee, but some are quite good.”*

Older group (50+), Inverness

### **Many participants wanted the BBC to take genuine steps to increase diversity on- and off-screen**

For most participants, reflecting diversity was about more than the extent to which the BBC serves different geographical communities. They also highlighted diversity in terms of portraying different ages, different socio-economic groups and people from different backgrounds and ethnicities. Participants felt it was important to go beyond tokenistic diversity that simply includes people from different backgrounds in a way that can often feel forced. Instead, they wanted the BBC to increase diversity in terms of its on-screen talent (e.g. presenters and actors) and off-screen talent (e.g. writers and producers). They felt that this would help the BBC create content that would appeal to a wider, more diverse audience, and that it was important for society as a whole. For those passionate about improving diversity, their aim was about giving people from different communities an authentic voice that really reflects their experience. While this was a priority for many participants from minority groups, white working class participants also felt the BBC should be doing more to improve how it portrays their communities.

There were some examples of positive moves by the BBC to improve its diversity. Participants cited examples such as having a BBC Children's TV presenter with disabilities, and programmes covering transgender issues. Despite this, it was felt that more could be done by the BBC to ensure that people from ethnic minorities and other minority groups are represented by the BBC. Whilst programmes on transgender issues were viewed positively, participants wanted the BBC to go beyond a few issue specific programmes and instead include transgender people into regular programming in a way that helped to encourage social norms of acceptance and did not mark transgender people as different.

*"There's a lot more acceptance of gay people in mainstream media than trans people ... trans people aren't featured as much ... being transgender has still got quite a way to go. I wouldn't want the BBC to focus on it, but I'd like it to just be included into things that are totally unrelated to being transgender ... it's just another character; when trans characters are included in television shows that is a plot in itself."*

Transgender participant, London

In the BME groups, there were strong concerns about the lack of positive portrayals of Muslims and black Africans in the UK in the media as a whole. In the Pakistani group participants felt that local and international stories had a negative bias in the reporting of stories which involved Muslims, and they saw the BBC as reinforcing this. For black African participants, there were similar issues around a lack of positive portrayals: of Africa, Africans, and black Africans living in the UK. As such, they thought the BBC could do much more to reflect and serve the black African community in the UK.

*"Muslims are only portrayed in one way in the media... we expect more from the BBC."*

BME group, Pakistani, Birmingham

*"I love the BBC – but where are the positive programmes about the experience of my community?"*

BME group, Black African, Birmingham

Ideally participants wanted more positive portrayals in mainstream content and services, including at peak times and on popular programmes. However, they also recognised that it was a challenge for any media provider, including the BBC, to do this. They expected that some content that seeks to improve portrayals of specific groups may be through more niche programming.

### 3. To support learning for people of all ages

#### ***Providing educational content was felt to be important for society, particularly to help children and young people***

Participants felt it was important for society that the BBC supports learning and provides educational content. This was seen as an important role for the BBC because they felt that few other providers did this. The BBC's provision of learning resources for children and young people – for example through educational Children's TV programming and Bitesize resources – were seen as great assets by those familiar with them.

Participants agreed that it was beneficial for society for the BBC to provide content to help learning for children. Views were more mixed about whether it was personally important that the BBC also provide content to encourage learning at *all* ages. For those who had interests in specific subjects such as history, literature, music or science, the BBC's provision of interesting and engaging factual content on these subjects was very important to them. However, for those who valued lighter, entertainment content, this was seen as less important.

*"It does beautiful science programmes, beautiful programmes on philosophy, it's seamless to me the radio and TV... sometimes I'll start watching something or listening to something and I'll think I'm not interested in this but they go into such depth and from a different viewpoint that I think I am interested in this and then I've learnt something."*

Older group (50+), Swansea

4. To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services

***Showing the most creative, highest quality and distinctive outputs was regarded as more important for participants personally, and less important for society***

Participants emphasised different aspects of this purpose in their discussions. Some focused on creativity, while others debated the obvious importance to them of quality more generally. Overall, this purpose was seen as more of a priority for participants personally – they value and enjoy high quality programmes – but it was less important for the BBC's role in society than the others discussed previously in this section.

*"It's what we want from our TV programmes. It's probably not as important but, right now, it is for me in my armchair."*

Older group (50+), Harrow

The idea of the BBC producing distinctive outputs and services was a difficult one for participants, and examined in different ways across discussions. This is described in greater detail in Chapter 4. However, it is worth emphasising that, while important, for many participants the BBC producing the very best and most distinctive content was not as much of a societal or personal priority relative to the other purposes. They recognised the financial and other constraints on the BBC, and had experienced other providers producing many types of content that were as good as or better than the equivalent content on the BBC.

*"We pay for the programmes so it should be good. We need programmes that cater to a wide range of people. I don't watch BBC Two and none of my friends do. They have a lack of creativity and humour really."*

LGB men, Brighton

Even though the societal value of this purpose was debated, most participants wanted the BBC to continue to make creative and high quality outputs and services. This was seen as a way in which the BBC can demonstrate its value to

different groups in society and therefore ensure ongoing public support. Younger people who did not think that the BBC was producing content for them thought that it needed to improve to ensure that it stays relevant.

*"I think as people get older it's going to die, the BBC's going to die out. It's like a dinosaur."*

LGB women, Brighton

However, participants described the language used in this purpose as strong, and they questioned whether the BBC should be aiming to show the *most* creative, *highest* quality outputs and services. There was uncertainty about whether the BBC has the resources to deliver on this purpose, and whether it should be trying to compete with other providers across all the different types of content it produces. Some argued that showing creative and high quality outputs was an appropriate aim for the BBC, but to have the *most* creative and *highest* quality was a very high bar and a focus which should come after the other priorities.

*"It's quite a bold statement to say the most creative and the highest quality programmes. There's too many people out there with amazing programmes... they can't be the 'most' of everything. It's unrealistic."*

Middle group (30-49), Harrow

5. To reflect the UK, its culture and values to the world

### ***The BBC's roles in raising awareness of global issues and the quality of its international journalism were valued***

Overall, the BBC was seen as having an important role to play internationally. The BBC was respected for its role in raising awareness of issues internationally, and its work for global causes such as Comic Relief. It was also valued for the quality and depth of its journalism globally. The BBC's role in providing impartial news to international audiences in places where access to this might be limited, through services such as the BBC World Service, was seen as valuable by many participants. This was viewed as particularly important by participants who had experienced living in countries where it was difficult to access accurate and unbiased news coverage.

*"When I was in India, I used to listen to BBC World Service, we didn't know what was happening but we got the news through the BBC and it was reporting what was going on...especially about tension between India and Pakistan, we used to listen to the BBC and get the news through there. A lot of people in India still only listen to BBC World Service."*

Older group, (50+), Harrow

### ***Participants were hesitant to endorse UK values, as this was seen as a contested idea***

Despite the value of the international role of the BBC, this purpose generally considered less important than the other public purposes. Partly, this seemed to be because participants were unsure what it meant in practice, but it was also because it was not an area that would have as direct an impact on them. In addition, participants were hesitant about the idea of reflecting UK values to the world, as they were unsure what values these would be. Participants felt that trying to

define 'UK values' would be a highly contested debate, and that even if it was possible to agree on what UK values were they were unsure whether it would be good to reflect these to the world. Participants were concerned about the imperialist connotations of this idea.

There was also a feeling that this purpose did not need to be a specific goal, as it could be achieved through fulfilling the other public purposes. Some participants argued that reflecting UK culture and values to the world could be done through ensuring that there is good quality, factual programming that represents the diverse communities of the UK.

*"I call it a passive aim: if it's doing the others well, it will do this one well. Americans look at Doctor Who or Sherlock...a cult drama, and people look up to the BBC news...if everything else is done well then that comes with it... I assume it is saying that someone will sit down and work out what UK values are?!"*

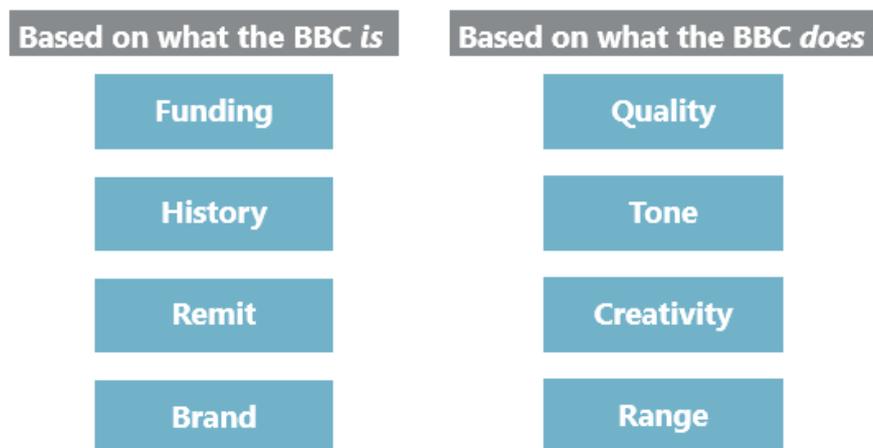
Middle group (30-49), Peterborough

## 4 Distinctiveness and the BBC

This chapter describes how participants defined and prioritised the distinctiveness of the BBC. Overall, participants found it difficult to explain the characteristics of distinctive media content. For them, it meant content that was unique or different, but they felt that this could come in many forms. During their deliberations, distinctiveness was described in two overlapping ways by participants: programmes or services that are *different* and *stands out* for any reason, or content that feels *new* or *innovative*. The first of these categories covered many types of content, including programmes or services which were simply the best examples of a particular genre or format, or unique because of their long history. The second category focused on developing more innovative concepts and creative programme types.

Despite the challenges around defining distinctiveness, participants generally agreed that there is something distinctive about the BBC. The BBC was felt to be distinctive in terms of both *what it is* as an organisation (its character) and *what it does* (its content). In terms of character, it was seen as a distinctive British institution with all the history that goes alongside its unique funding and its remit. But the BBC was also seen as distinctive for the quality of its output, its reliability, and its professional tone. Participants often described this by saying that they would know a programme was produced by the BBC without having to be told. However, the BBC was not generally considered distinctive in terms of it being creative and innovative, particularly when compared to other providers.

Figure 3: The BBC's distinctiveness in terms of what it *is* and what it *does*



Perceptions of the distinctiveness of the BBC also varied between different platforms. BBC Radio was seen as distinctive because the range of content it offers and the high quality of that content. By contrast, BBC TV overall was not seen as being particularly distinctive. Participants felt there were elements of BBC TV that were distinctive, including its consistent quality and the professionalism of producers and presenters. But they felt that the tone of BBC TV was more formal than other broadcasters, and that it did not produce much new or innovative content. BBC Online was seen as distinctive because of the clear branding and layout of the different websites and apps. Views of the iPlayer were more mixed, with some participants describing it as distinctive in terms of its design and navigation, while others thought the service needed to be improved to keep up with the best alternative on-demand services.

## 4.1 How did participants describe BBC distinctiveness?

Participants approached discussing BBC distinctiveness in different ways. In some groups, participants thought about the features of distinctive media content, using examples of programmes and services that had seemed different to them. They then weighed up whether they felt the BBC currently produces this type content, and indeed whether they thought it should. In other groups, participants considered instead what they thought made the BBC distinctive, before discussing whether or not these were characteristics that they valued.

The BBC was seen as distinctive in for two main reasons.

1. **The BBC is distinctive because of what it *is* as an organisation.** The BBC's value as a British institution, its remit, and way that it is funded all make the organisation distinctive. Participants valued the unique role that it has played both in the recent history of the UK, but also throughout their lives as individuals.
2. **The BBC is distinctive because of what it *does* as an organisation.** The BBC differed from other providers in terms of the quality of its output, its reliability and its professional tone. Participants felt that they could spot a BBC production without being told it was made by the BBC, and cited the range of radio services as unique compared to other providers.

*"It's like having an essence. It's something you can relate to. People feel it. You feel that essence in whatever you see."*

Younger group (18-29), Peterborough

*"Distinctive means different and not doing what everyone else is doing."*

Transgender participant, Norwich

### ***The BBC's unique brand and history made it difficult for participants to compare it to other providers***

The interaction between the BBC being distinctive for what it *is* on the one hand and what it *does* on the other was complex. The strength of the BBC's brand, its long history, and the unique range of services it offers made it difficult for participants to disentangle their expectations and experiences of the BBC, and to compare this to numerous other providers producing similar content across platforms and genres. While participants were clear that the BBC was in some sense distinctive, there was less agreement about the specifics.

In particular, the extent to which the BBC provides new and innovative content was contested. Participants described examples of when the BBC made innovative programmes such as *Doctor Who* and *The Great British Bake Off*, and also described these as fitting with the BBC's tone. But the length of time that these programmes had run for limited the extent to which the BBC could continue to be seen as distinctive as a result.

*"Everything repeats itself. Doctor Who and Sherlock follow the same formula. There is no risk-taking."*

Younger group (18-29), Peterborough

Younger participants in particular thought that the BBC needed to do more to produce this creative and innovative content more often to remain distinctive. They felt that that more cutting edge content was available through competitors such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and Channel 4.

*"I think when you are scrolling through the TV, live and on demand (iPlayer) you are always scrolling through to find something that catches your eye. I feel that they have lost their way there is nothing that really grabs my eye to say "watch me". We pay for the BBC I think there should be more content on there."*  
Younger group (18-29), Inverness

## 4.2 Views of the distinctiveness of BBC TV

### 4.2.1 To what extent is BBC TV distinctive?

***BBC TV content was seen as distinctive because of its unique coverage of important events, its consistent quality, and the talent and professionalism of its presenters***

BBC TV was seen as a leader in some areas:

- The BBC was thought to have a unique role in **covering national events** such as The Olympics or Royal Weddings, and BBC TV was the place that most participants went for this type of content. They felt that the coverage would be higher quality and in greater depth than they would be able to get elsewhere.

*"I scroll between news channels, one of which is CNN, it's hysterical and there are always panels of about 24 people. BBC is always calm and has gravitas."*  
Older group, (50+), Harrow

- BBC TV was also praised for the **best of its documentaries**. Participants were very positive about the BBC's well-researched factual programmes on a wide range of challenging and interesting topics. Examples such as *Planet Earth II* were seen as exceptional and unique compared to anything participants had seen on other channels.
- BBC TV was also regarded as distinctive in its production of **high quality British dramas** such as *Taboo*, *War and Peace* and *Poldark*. These were valued for how entertaining they were, and seen as important for being distinctly British. However, there was a sense that the BBC had fallen behind in producing the best and most creative dramas. Some younger participants felt that the BBC prioritised high quality period dramas at the expense of more innovative content. Other participants thought the BBC had lost ground to expensively-produced American dramas available on other on-demand services.

*"They still invest in good quality dramas; I think they do innovative stuff that more commercial ones don't-like the Toby Jones drama – so sweet – typical of what they do they don't have chase the highest figures."*  
Mixed group, London

*"It needs to be more individual and creative. It feels like the BBC is just playing catch up...BBC was a bit more risky on BBC 2 with things like Louis Theroux documentaries, but it doesn't seem to be doing that anymore...they need to link the BBC to something else, it needs to link more to the younger generation, less spending on huge dramas."*  
Younger group (18-29), Leeds

- More generally, the quality and professionalism of the **talent on BBC TV** – in terms of both presenters and actors – was seen as another distinctive feature. For example, presenters on news and current affairs shows were seen as more professional and less focused on entertainment than other news providers. The highly professional tone of BBC presenters was seen as unique, but for some who preferred a more informal tone this was less appealing. Similarly, the BBC was thought to attract many of the best British actors to star in its high quality dramas.

*"It is more factual, ITV in the morning tends to be a bit more gossipy. BBC is more official and strict."*  
Middle group (30-49), Inverness

Participants felt that BBC TV was less distinctive in other areas. They described the BBC as having been a place to go for unique and innovative comedy in the past. Participants discussed examples including *Monty Python* and *The Office*. However, they felt that the BBC was no longer an innovator when it comes to comedy, and had been superseded by providers such as Channel 4 in the UK, and by comedies from other countries, particularly America.

*"I think of Tony Hancock when I was a kid, Steptoe and Son, Monty Python, they were ground breaking comedy shows...you're saying about shows from when we were younger but there's not as much now. I don't think the comedies and dramas are as good as they were."*  
Older group (50+), Peterborough

*"I like Live at the Apollo and Mock the Week, but I find they are conservative. They don't take risks. They are scared of offending people and they want to make it fair for all ... for risks I would go to Channel 4."*  
Younger group (18-29), Peterborough

### The distinctiveness of Channel 4

Throughout the discussions, Channel 4 was often described by participants as being more distinctive than the BBC when it comes to creative and innovative content. This was seen through Channel 4's comedy and drama output, their documentaries, and their presenters.

For instance, Channel 4 was thought of as producing riskier comedies, with participants discussing examples such as *Catastrophe* and *London Irish*. Many participants also argued that Channel 4 dramas were generally more innovative too, including series like *Humans* and *Black Mirror*.

*"For me, I think of Channel 4 and how they do a lot of content from emerging and new writers whereas with BBC it's the same old names in their 50s and 60s."*

Younger group (18-29), Harrow

*"Channel 4 do a lot more hard-hitting dramas ... I think the BBC are scared to touch anything that has sex, drugs and rock and roll."*

Younger group (18-29), Inverness

Channel 4 was also seen as a channel that showed greater diversity in its talent and presenters, including people from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people.

*"Although I don't think the BBC have as much diversity as people in Channel 4 and 5. I think the BBC are behind the times here."*

LGB men, Brighton

Participants did not necessarily want the BBC to use the same approach to taking creative risks as Channel 4. Instead, for many participants, having Channel 4's output as a comparison simply highlighted that BBC TV was not the most distinctive when it comes to new and innovative content.

#### 4.2.2 How could BBC TV be more distinctive?

##### **Audiences wanted to see more innovation and creativity, and a greater diversity in terms of writers, producers and talent on BBC TV**

Participants felt that BBC TV could be more distinctive by ensuring that it continues to be a leader where it is already strong, while also producing some more innovative and creative content. Many valued long-running, popular shows on the BBC and wanted to see them continue. But they also felt that these reinforced the impression of the BBC as more traditional than other broadcasters. Those who wanted to see this change felt that the BBC needed to take risks on different formats and content to be more distinctive. As described above, some areas which the BBC had been considered exceptional in the past, such as comedy, were seen as areas of particular weakness.

There was also a feeling that the BBC's programmes and services lacked genuine diversity, with not enough people from different backgrounds on screen and responsible for writing and producing content, and for making decisions about what

programmes are made and shown. Many participants felt the BBC could do more to represent all of society; by being more ethnically diverse, more geographically diverse, more diverse in terms of class, having presenters from other minority backgrounds, and doing more to reflect the experience of different generations. Younger participants in particular felt that the BBC needed to have more presenters and programmes relevant to them in their interests and experiences.

Participants' suggestions for BBC TV to be more distinctive:

- More creative programme formats and content
- More innovative, and risky comedy
- More content for younger audiences
- More diverse presenters and content to serve people from a wide range of backgrounds

### 4.3 Views of the distinctiveness of BBC Radio

#### 4.3.1 To what extent is BBC Radio distinctive?

***BBC Radio was seen as being highly distinctive in terms of both the range of services offered and the quality of its programmes and services***

Participants described BBC Radio as serving a broad range of audiences of different ages and with different interests and tastes. They did not think other providers were covering anything like the same range of music, current affairs and magazine shows, drama, and sports content. It was also clear to participants that BBC Radio catered to a wide range of musical tastes including pop, rock, classical, jazz and world music. In particular, Radio 1, Radio 1Xtra, and Radio 6 Music were all seen as providing something different to any commercial stations. Radio 1 and 1Xtra were seen as distinctive for airing new British talent, and for being more relevant for younger listeners than stations provided by commercial providers.

*"I really like the Annie Mac show and then also Live Lounge, yeah that's what makes BBC distinctive the Live Lounge, I can't think any other channel that does that."*

Younger group (18-29), Swansea

Participants were also positive about other types of non-music radio produced by the BBC. Radio 4 was seen as exceptional in its production of high quality, engaging news, current affairs, dramas and other types of speech content.

*"Radio 4 if there's a specific show on they get interesting people on, who are authoritative. Other radios you've got talking heads they wheel anyone on...they're not after sound bites. They give it time, time to let it breathe, no hyperbolic."*

Middle group (30-49), Peterborough

Many participants valued the sports and news coverage provided by Radio 5 live, even if it was thought to face greater competition from other similar services than Radio 4. Some younger participants praised Radio 1 for its news and current affairs and for tackling important and difficult issues relevant for their lives.

*"I think the fact that it's not afraid to talk about things On BBC Radio 1 yesterday they had a story on a 22-year-old talking about the process she'd gone through to get an abortion ... they're talking about relevant stuff."*

Younger group (18-29), Belfast

#### 4.3.2 How could BBC Radio be more distinctive?

***Most were positive about BBC Radio, but with a few suggesting it could be more distinctive by showcasing even more non-mainstream music, or by more coverage of local issues***

The range of content provided by the BBC was seen as unique and excellent, and there were few ways in which participants thought that BBC Radio needed to be more distinctive in this regard. However, there were some specific suggestions for how the content itself could be made more distinctive. For example, a few participants thought the BBC could be more distinctive by showcasing even more non-mainstream music, or to giving local issues and local music more coverage. Participants who valued sport felt the coverage on BBC 5 live was good, but that there could perhaps be greater coverage of non-UK or more niche sports events.

*"Radio 1 is sometimes disappointing with choice of music. Commercial rubbish basically."*

Middle group (30-49), Inverness

*"I find BBC 5 Live Extra frustrating. If you've got Sky, people can watch cricket whenever they want to but, with BBC 5 Live Extra, you can only listen to a match the if UK are involved. Sometimes they'll have finals. For example, there's the Indian IPL, there's a lot of interest in the world, if it was on 5 Live, I'm sure people would be interested but they're not covering it."*

Older group (50+), Harrow

Participants' suggestions for BBC Radio to be more distinctive:

- Showcasing more non-mainstream music on Radio 1.
- More local/ regional music
- More coverage of local issues
- Greater range of sports coverage, such as sports that involve non-UK teams

## 4.4 Views of the distinctiveness of BBC Online

### 4.4.1 To what extent is BBC Online distinctive?

#### ***BBC online services thought to have a distinctive brand and clear layout, but iPlayer needs to continue to adapt***

BBC Online content was seen as being distinctive in terms of the clear layout and ease of navigation. Participants also mentioned the absence of adverts on the BBC website as helping to remove some of the clutter experienced on other similar news and information websites.

BBC iPlayer was seen as intuitive to use by participants, including those from older groups. However, some of those who used alternatives such as Netflix and Amazon Prime felt that these offered an even more intuitive and accessible platform, and that the BBC would need to adapt to compete with these providers. In particular, they mentioned the recommendations offered by these services as ways they found new content they might like – something they wanted the BBC to offer too. They also wanted greater access to the BBC's archive of high quality content.

*"It's not that distinctive online [in terms of iPlayer]. It's not that it's not good, but other people do that as well."*

Older group (50+), Leeds

*"But the only problem with BBC iPlayer is it freezes and you get the circle and you're waiting and waiting...And then you're through it and then it stops...And then you've got to wait and then it's...It's not constant It's a bit temperamental, isn't it?"*

LGB women, Brighton

The BBC Online news site, and the news and weather apps, were seen as distinctive for their clear brand and layout and for being easy to use. These were used across age groups, and seen as market leaders, in contrast to the iPlayer. Online BBC news content was seen as distinctive for being accurate and reliable, and for many it was a highly trusted site.

*"The good thing about BBC is BBC news. It's the best that's out there. I use the BBC app first thing in the morning. It's clear, concise, crisp. You don't need anything else."*

Younger group (18-29), Peterborough

*"I think the BBC weather app is amazing, I use it by hour. In other countries too, it's my favourite weather app."*

Mixed group, London

#### 4.4.2 How could BBC Online be more distinctive?

##### **BBC Online could offer more in-depth journalism**

BBC News Online was not thought to offer content that was as in-depth as other online news providers, or indeed the BBC on other platforms. There was a perception that the BBC's drive to remain impartial limited their ability to provide more challenging in-depth journalism in an online context. For this type of content participants said they would use alternative sites.

*"It would be nice if they did more opinion pieces like The Guardian, which I would read mainly for their opinion pieces and you can see other people's responses and have a discussion."*

Younger group (18-29), Belfast

*"From Our Own Correspondent; brilliant, 15-minute incisive, political comment pieces ... I'd love to see that in long form [online]... More efficient to repurpose for multiple audiences."*

Transgender participant, Norwich

Participants' suggestions for BBC Online to be more distinctive:

- Improve usability of iPlayer
- Offering recommendations and increasing access to back catalogues of TV content
- More in-depth online news journalism

## 4.5 Views of Schedule 2 of the BBC Framework Agreement

*Schedule 2 is a section of the BBC Framework Agreement that sets out how Ofcom should interpret the requirements of the BBC to provide outputs and services that are substantially different to other comparable providers. Schedule 2 includes a list of ways that the BBC must be different from other providers to secure distinctive outputs and services. As part of the research process, this list was tested with participants to see if it resonated with their expectations of distinctiveness. The list includes:*

- *Mix of genres and output*
- *Quality of output*
- *Amount of original output produced in the UK*
- *Level of risk-taking, innovation, challenge and creative ambition, and;*
- *The range of audiences it serves*

***The most important aspects of Schedule 2 are the quality of output, original UK output and serving diverse audiences***

Participants generally thought the Schedule 2 list captured the main aspects they thought were important for BBC distinctiveness. No key concepts were felt to be missing. Despite this, participants found it difficult to assess whether these would ensure that content was distinctive without knowing more about how these elements would be put into practice.

Quality of output was important to participants across different generations and backgrounds; this was felt to be a necessary element of everything that the BBC did, and for some this was the most important priority. However, it was not always associated with making sure the BBC was distinctive, and was rather something they considered important in its own right.

*"I'd rather preserve the quality of the output as opposed to trying to do everything for everybody."*

Middle group (30-49), Swansea

The amount of original output produced in the UK was seen as a priority because participants wanted the BBC to be supporting UK writers, actors, musicians and presenters. It was also felt that supporting UK talent would help represent and reflect all of the UK, which was important to many participants.

*"The BBC is a British channel, so it should show British programmes...the support for new film makers and new TV makers is massively important."*

Middle group (30-49), Peterborough

Serving a range of audiences across the population was another important element, which also linked with the Public purpose of representing and serving the diverse communities of the UK. This was especially significant for those who felt that minority groups and certain regions were currently underrepresented by the BBC. Participants felt that having a mix of genres and output was implied by serving a range of audiences.

*"In Inverness there is a Polish community so maybe they would be putting things out that would be of interest to them. The presenters just seem to be white and middle class so maybe they need to branch that out."*

Younger group (18-29), Inverness

*"I think there's room for improvement for the range of audience to be served, like for those with English as a second language. That would benefit and attract those minority communities."*

Older group (50+), Harrow

Serving a range of audiences also could be interpreted as more programming for niche and special interests as well as appealing to a wider demographic. Participants thought that it was important to produce content to appeal to different interests but they did not expect this to be prioritised, and accepted this might need to be online only or shown at off-peak times.

*"It's a catch 22- if go for the popular stuff like 'Strictly' it's just mainstream, but if don't get that, why are we all paying if doing all this niche programming? It's a balance, I like distinctive things but I don't expect to see them on Saturday at 5pm – I'll watch them at 1am on the graveyard shift."*

Mixed group, London

The level of risk-taking, innovation, challenge and creative ambition was the most contested aspect of Schedule 2. Participants debated whether the BBC should continue to focus on what it does best (e.g. high quality dramas and documentaries on TV) or whether it should create more innovative content, even if this has less broad appeal. Most participants wanted the BBC to make programmes that appeal to large audiences because everyone pays for the BBC. But they also wanted the BBC to produce innovative content to serve more niche communities and interests because they saw this as part of the BBC's role as a publicly-funded broadcaster, and something commercial providers would not do. Overall, participants wanted the BBC to produce some more innovative content, without losing too much of the popular content that so many of them enjoyed. They also suggested that this riskier, more innovative content could be trialled online first before being shown on live TV.

This reflected the earlier discussions about whether the BBC should prioritise the kinds of programmes and services participants thought would appeal to most people, or whether the BBC should represent and serve different kinds of people by producing content more specifically aimed at them. In the end, participants generally concluded that these were both roles they expected the BBC to fulfil.

*"The BBC should keep up what they're doing, shouldn't change it – if they did, it wouldn't be the BBC anymore."*

Younger group (18-29), Leeds

*"They need to keep it modern... push the boundaries and be more up-to-date."*

Middle group (30-49), Inverness

# 5 Appendix

## 5.1 Methodology

The research approach was qualitative in nature in order to conduct a detailed exploration of how people felt about the BBC and the BBC's public purposes. The research comprised of large deliberative workshops, smaller workshops and in-depth interviews. Before each workshop participants took part in a pre-task exercise to record their media usage (TV, radio and online). Most participants did this online, with those who did not feel comfortable doing this online completing the diary in a paper format instead. Participants were asked to do this so that they could start to identify the main sources of media they were using for different genres/ types of content, and to use this to inform their discussion at the workshops.

After an initial pilot workshop with 10 participants in London, Ipsos MORI carried out six mainstage workshops in Harrow, Peterborough, Leeds, Inverness, Belfast and Swansea. A deliberative approach was chosen as it is an ideal methodology for exploring complex issues with participants and giving them time to engage with new materials and information, debate the issues and have time to reflect and come to an informed view. A total of 131 participants took part in the six workshops. Each workshop was recruited based on the demographic characteristics of the area, in order to reflect the UK population overall across locations. The workshops took place between January and February 2017 and each lasted 3 hours 15 minutes.

Within each workshop, most of the discussions took place in smaller groups based on age, in order to explore generational differences. Each group differed slightly but the broad age ranges in the younger groups were 18-29 year olds, in the middle groups they were 30-49 year olds and then 50+ in the older groups. The workshops allowed participants time to reflect on their own relationship with the BBC and hear the experiences and views of others. This allowed them to consider the relevant issues about the BBC from their own consumer perspective (as people who use BBC services), and from a broader citizen perspective (thinking about the role of the BBC in society as a whole).

Following the pilot and mainstage workshops, additional discussions were carried out amongst diverse audiences, covering similar topics as the deliberative workshops. Two mini-workshops with BME groups (Black African and Pakistani) were conducted in Birmingham in February 2017, and two workshops with lesbian, gay and bi-sexual people (LGB) were conducted in Brighton in February/March 2017. Ipsos MORI also conducted four telephone in-depth interviews with transgender people, conducted in February/March 2017. The additional workshops and interviews were carried out to explore and illustrate the views of potentially under-represented groups.

## 5.2 Sampling

The participants were recruited on a number of factors to ensure that a wide range of people took part in the research. Factors included age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic group and household status/life-stage. Characteristics such as age and life-stage were found to be relevant in previous research on PSB's (2014 PSB Review, Ipsos MORI). A detailed breakdown of the quotas achieved in each workshop can be found in the tables below.

*Workshop socio-demographic information*

	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Social Grade	Household Status
<b>Pilot –London</b> (10 participants)	2 x 18-24 2 x 25-44 4 x 45-64 2 x 65+	5 x female 5 x male	1 x Asian 2 x Black British 6 x White British 1 x White Other	3 x AB 4 x C1/C2 3 x DE	2 x Children under 18 at home 2 x Children over 18 at home 1 x Grown up children living away from home 5 x No children
<b>Harrow</b> (23 participants)	4 x 18-24 9 x 25-44 6 x 45-64 4 x 65+	12 x female 11 x male	4 x Asian/ Indian 5 x Black British 1 x Black Other 1 x Mixed 10 x White British 2 x White Other	5 x AB 12 x C1/C2 6 x DE	6 x Children under 18 at home 1 x Children over 18 at home 3 x Grown up children living away from home 13 x No children
<b>Peterborough</b> (20 participants)	1 x 18-24 10 x 25-44 8 x 45-64 1 x 65+	8 x female 12 x male	2 x Asian 1 x Mixed 16 x White British 1 x White Other	5 x AB 12 x C1/C2 3 x DE	5 x Children under 18 at home 4 x Children over 18 at home 1 x Grown up children living away from home 10 x No children
<b>Leeds</b> (25 participants)	7 x 18-24 6 x 25-44 7 x 45-64 5 x 65+	12 x female 13 x male	4 x Asian 3 x Mixed 15 x White British 3 x White Other	9 x AB 10 x C1/C2 6 x DE	6 x Children under 18 at home 3 x Children over 18 at home 7 x Grown up children living away from home 9 x No children
<b>Inverness</b> (22 participants)	3 x 18-24 9 x 25-44 6 x 45-64 4 x 65+	10 x female 12 x male	22 x White Scottish	8 x AB 9 x C1/C2 5 x DE	8 x Children under 18 at home 1 x Children over 18 at home 5 x Grown up children living away from home 8 x No children
<b>Belfast</b> (23 participants)	6 x 18-24 10 x 25-44 4 x 45-64 3 x 65+	13 x female 10 x male	2 x Asian 1 x Mixed 18 x White	6 x AB 10 x C1/C2 5 x DE	7 x Children under 18 at home 3 x Grown up children living away from home 13 x No children

			2 x Prefer not to say	2 x Prefer not to say	
Swansea (18 participants)	4 x 18-24 5 x 25-44 5 x 45-64 4 x 65+	9 x female 9 x male	1 x Black British 2 x Mixed 15 x White British	6 x AB 8 x C1/C2 4 x DE	5 x Children under 18 at home 3 x Children over 18 at home 5 x Grown up children living away from home 5 x No children

*Workshops socio-demographic information – diverse audiences mini-workshops*

	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Social Grade	Household Status
1. Birmingham (6 participants)	1 x 18-24 3 x 25-44 2 x 45-64	2 x female 4 x male	6 x Pakistani	4 x C1/C2 2 x DE	3 x Children under 18 at home 1 x Children over 18 at home 2 x No children
2. Birmingham (5 participants)	1 x 18-24 1 x 25-44 2 x 45-64 1 x 65+	2 x female 3 x male	5 x Black African	3 x C1/C2 2 x DE	2 x Children under 18 at home 1 x Children over 18 at home 1 x Grown up children living away from home 1 x No children
3. Brighton (5 participants)	1 x 18-24 2 x 25-44 2 x 45-64	5 x female	5 x White British	4 x C1/C2 1 x DE	2 x Children under 18 at home 1 x Children over 18 at home 2 x No children
4. Brighton (5 participants)	1 x 18-24 2 x 25-44 2 x 45-64	5 x male	5 x White British	5 x C1/C2	5 x No children

### 5.3 Workshop discussion guide

Timings	Content
25 mins	<p><b><u>1. Introduction and discussion of media consumption</u></b></p> <p><b>PLENARY (5 mins)</b></p> <p><i>INTRODUCE WORKSHOP AND TEAM, INCLUDING ANY OBSERVERS FROM OFCOM</i></p> <p>Today we're keen to understand your views about the future of TV, radio and online services and content in the UK. We are going to talk for about 3 hours, and hopefully you'll find it an interesting and enjoyable experience.</p> <p>This research is on behalf of the communications regulator, Ofcom. Ofcom want to understand what people think about TV, radio and online services and content to help inform how these are regulated in future. This will all become clearer as we go through the evening.</p> <p>LEAD MODERATOR INTRO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About Ipsos MORI – independent research company; MRS</li> <li>• Informal discussion</li> <li>• No right or wrong answers</li> <li>• Want to hear your views and to hear from everyone, we'll make sure everyone has a chance to speak</li> <li>• It is fine to hold a different view from other people in the group – make sure you have your say, but also remember to be respectful of other viewpoints</li> <li>• Explain that it is confidential, will not say who took part but will feedback to Ofcom on what people have said as a group</li> <li>• Clients observing and audio recording</li> <li>• IF APPLICABLE: Explain videoing the groups, and just used internally at Ofcom.</li> <li>• Clarify timings – when we will have a break and when finish.</li> <li>• Other housekeeping- fire alarms, facilities, mobile phones, etc</li> </ul> <p><b>BREAK-OUT GROUPS BASED ON AGE (15 mins)</b></p> <p>MODERATOR TO INTRODUCE THEMSELVES TO GROUP AND REITERATE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank you for coming</li> <li>• Want you to listen to each other and not talk over each other</li> <li>• Lot to get through – may need to move you on at times</li> </ul> <p>Ask participants to introduce themselves briefly (name and who they live with)</p> <p><b>REVIEW MEDIA DIARY</b></p>

Now I want to spend a few minutes discussing the diary we asked you to keep over the last week or so.

**Overall, how did you find completing the diary?**

DISCUSS EACH PLATFORM IN TURN, ALTERNATING ORDER ACROSS GROUPS, WITH MODERATOR TO FLIPCHART RESPONSES BY PLATFORM

- What sorts of things are you watching on TV?
- And what about listening to on the radio?
- And where do you go for online content/news?

**And then thinking about different genres/ types of content, where do you go for:**

1. GENRE LIST STIMULUS  
USE TO PROMPT BROAD DISCUSSION

- news content?
- sports content?
- entertainment (soaps/dramas/comedy/other)?
- documentaries/ factual?

**Why do you use that particular channel/station/website/app for that type of content?**

- Where else do you think you could have got this kind of content?
  - And would it be the same standard?
  - How might it be different?

**Thinking about things you've seen/heard/read recently, is there anything that has surprised you? Or that seemed different/ unusual?**

PROBE FOR TV, RADIO AND ONLINE EXAMPLES

- Why did it surprise you?
- Why was it different?
- Who do you think it was aimed at?
- What were the specific features of it that made it different?
  - PROBE: content/subject/tone/relevance/production style/etc

50mins

**2. Overall impressions of the BBC**

We're now going to talk about what you think of the BBC and the programmes, services and content that it provides. Whilst we're doing this, keep in mind the kinds of similar content other providers make too and how the BBC compares.

Before we discuss this in more detail, spend a couple of minutes writing down the three words/short phrases that sum up what you think of the BBC overall. Think about your overall impressions across the TV, radio and online content the BBC produces.

PROVIDE POST-IT NOTES FOR PARTICIPANTS TO WRITE DOWN OVERALL IMPRESSIONS (ONE PER POST-IT), AND ASK THEM TO STICK UP ON FLIPCHART

**What are your overall impressions of the BBC?**

MODERATOR TO GROUP RESPONSES BY THEME AND DISCUSS:

- Why did you say this?
- Who agrees/disagrees? Why?
- PROBE: Positive and negative impressions
- PROBE: BBC TV/ Radio/ Online

THINKING OVERALL ABOUT THE BBC:

(MODERATOR NOTE: REMEMBER TO PROBE THROUGHOUT AROUND RADIO AND ONLINE, NOT JUST TV, AND FOR NATIONS CONTENT)

**How important, if at all, would you say the BBC is to you?**

- Why is it important/not important?
- Has the BBC's importance to you changed over recent years? In what ways?

**What, if anything, would you miss if the BBC no longer provided it?**

- PROBE USING GENRE LIST: Where would you go for this type of content?
- Have you looked elsewhere for this type of content? What did you find?
- ALLOW SPONTANEOUS, THEN PROBE USING MEDIA DIARY EXAMPLES

**What, if anything, does the BBC give you that you can't find elsewhere?**

- What would you do if the BBC no longer provided this?
- Have you looked elsewhere for this type of content? What did you find?
- ALLOW SPONTANEOUS, THEN PROBE USING MEDIA DIARY EXAMPLES

**What, if anything, do you think the BBC does well? And what do they not do so well?**

- FOR WELL: What specific features of how the BBC does this make it stand out?
- FOR NOT WELL: Who does it better? What specific features make it better?
- PROBE USING GENRE LIST
- PROBE: new/innovative vs. long-running programmes

**How well does the BBC serve different types of people in society?**

- PROBE: Does it serve you and your friends/family well? What about other types of people?

**What should the BBC do less of or stop doing?**

- Who might miss this if the BBC no longer provided it?
- What do you think these people would do?
- And what should the BBC do more of?

MODERATOR TO EXPLORE VIEWS OF BBC SERVICES FOR EACH PLATFORM, FOCUSING ON AREAS NOT ALREADY DISCUSSED ABOVE.  
ENSURE PROBE ON NATIONS CONTENT (e.g. BBC Radio Scotland).

## 2A. SHOW BBC TV CONTENT STIMULUS

### Thinking about TV content in more detail...

- What do you think about BBC TV content?  
PROBE AROUND:
  - News
  - TV entertainment/ soaps/ dramas
  - Films
  - Factual/ documentaries
  - Sports
- How does it differ to content by other providers? And in what ways is it similar?
- How does it differ by channel? E.g. BBC1/ BBC2

## 2B. SHOW BBC RADIO SERVICES STIMULUS

(CAN ALSO SHOW 2D. WELSH/SCOTTISH/IRISH CHANNELS IF APPLICABLE)

### Thinking about radio content in more detail...

- What do you think about BBC radio content?  
PROBE AROUND:
  - News
  - Music
  - Sports
  - Entertainment (dramas/ quiz shows)
  - Factual
- How does it differ to content by other providers? And in what ways is it similar?
- How does it differ by station? Radio 1/2/ 4/ local radio stations/ Asian network

## 2C. SHOW BBC ONLINE SERVICES STIMULUS

### Thinking about online content in more detail...

- What do you think about BBC online content?  
PROBE AROUND:
  - **BBC iPlayer**
  - **BBC website**
    - News
    - Sports
    - Entertainment
    - Factual /Learning resources
- How does it differ to content by other providers? And in what ways is it similar?

30 mins

**3. Role of the BBC****How would you describe the BBC's role in society?**

MODERATOR RECORD SPONTANEOUS VIEWS ON FLIPCHART

**What role *should* the BBC play in society?**

- Is the BBC meeting this role?
- Has this changed in recent years?

**How should this role differ between TV, Radio and Online?**

CONSIDER EACH IN TURN

**3. HAND OUT PLENARY PRESENTATION AND LIST PURPOSES**

Short presentation of information BBC mission and purposes, Ofcom's broad role, and Ofcom's responsibility for BBC distinctiveness, and check understanding.

1. To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them
2. To support learning for people of all ages through helping people learn about new subjects in a way that they will find accessible, engaging, inspiring and challenging (NOTE: FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING)
3. To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive outputs and services
4. To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the UK's nations and regions
5. To reflect UK values to the world through high quality, accurate and impartial news to international audiences

**BREAK-OUT GROUPS****What do you think of what you've just heard?**

- Is there anything that doesn't make sense?
- How could it be made clearer?

REVIEW PUBLIC PURPOSES, WORKING THROUGH EACH

**How well does the BBC meet these five public purposes?**

- Can you think of any examples where you have seen these recently?
- PROBE SPECIFICALLY FOR UNDERSTANDING AND ASSESSMENT OF PURPOSE 3 (DISTINCTIVENESS) – INCLUDING EXAMPLES

**Overall, how do they compare with the role for the BBC that you described earlier?**

- Is there anything missing?

GIVE PARTICIPANTS STICKERS IN 2 COLOURS, TWO STICKERS FOR WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO THEM PERSONALLY, AND TWO MOST IMPORTANT TO SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

MARK THESE WITH STICKERS ON THEIR WORKSHEET.

	<p>MODERATOR TO TALLY RESPONSES ON FLIPCHART AND FOLLOW UP ON REASONS FOR RESPONSES GIVEN.</p> <p><b>Why are these the most important for you as individuals, do you think? And why are these the most important for society?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PROBE: similarities/differences between consumer and citizen perspectives</li> <li>• PROBE: which are less important, and why</li> </ul> <p>PLENARY – SUM UP BBC ROLE AND THOUGHTS ON PURPOSES</p>
20mins	Break
50 mins	<p><b><u>4. The meaning and value of distinctiveness</u></b></p> <p><b>BACK TO TABLES</b></p> <p>Now I want you to think a bit more about ways in which the BBC is different from other media providers, and ways in which it is similar. Please think across all the services, programmes and content we've been discussing so far. One of the purposes we looked at earlier was 'to show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive outputs and services.'</p> <p><b>In this context, how would you explain 'distinctiveness' to someone else?</b> MODERATOR TO RECORD ON FLIPCHART</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What other words or phrases might you use?</li> <li>• How is it similar or different to 'creativity' or 'quality'?</li> </ul> <p><b>What do you think being 'distinctive' means for the BBC?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PROBE: TV / Radio / Online</li> </ul> <p><b>Do you think it's important for the BBC to be 'distinctive'?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why/why not?</li> <li>• PROBE: history, public funding, other reasons</li> <li>• PROBE: TV / Radio / Online</li> </ul> <p><b>What might that look like in practice?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PROBE: TV / Radio / Online</li> </ul> <p>DIVIDE EACH GROUP INTO THREE MINI-GROUPS – ONE GROUP WILL COVER TV, ONE RADIO AND ONE ONLINE</p> <p>4. WORKSHEET ON HOW BBC IS SIMILAR AND DIFFERENT TO OTHER PROVIDERS FOR EACH MINI-GROUP TO COMPLETE</p> <p><b>TV: Is the BBC distinctive when compared to other providers (Sky, Channel 4, ITV, others)?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the BBC similar? And how is it different?</li> <li>• How should BBC TV be distinctive?</li> </ul>

AFTER DISCUSSION WITH THE WHOLE GROUP, PROBE FOR THE ROLE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- a) UK and US programmes
- b) Repeats and. new programmes
- c) Entertainment shows
- d) Celebrity news vs. in-depth current affairs
- e) Programming from the nations and regions of the UK
- f) Arts & music programming

**Is the BBC distinctive in these areas when compared to other providers?**

**Is it important for the BBC to be distinctive in these areas? Why/why not?**

- IF YES: How should BBC TV be distinctive in these areas?
- What should the BBC do differently?

**Radio: Is the BBC distinctive when compared to other providers (commercial stations)?**

- How is the BBC similar? And how is it different?
- How should BBC Radio be distinctive?

AFTER DISCUSSION WITH THE WHOLE GROUP, PROBE FOR THE ROLE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- a) UK and US music
- b) Presenters
- c) New music
- d) Football and more niche sports

**Is the BBC distinctive in these areas when compared to other providers?**

**Is it important for the BBC to be distinctive in these areas? Why/why not?**

- IF YES: How should BBC TV be distinctive in these areas?
- What should the BBC do differently?

**Online: Is the BBC distinctive when compared to other providers (other news/info sites)?**

- How is the BBC similar? And how is it different?
- How should BBC online services be distinctive?

AFTER DISCUSSION WITH THE WHOLE GROUP, PROBE FOR THE ROLE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- a) Celebrity news vs. in-depth current affairs

**Overall, what are the key things you think the BBC should do to be distinctive?**

ASK THEM TO SHOUT OUT FEATURES THAT SHOULD MAKE THE BBC DISTINCTIVE  
FLIPCHART RESPONSES

- Which of these do you think BBC should make sure they keep doing to be distinctive?
- Is there anything they're not doing but they should do to be more distinctive?

## 5. HAND OUT SCHEDULE II

Explain this is a suggestion of what distinctiveness might look like.

Ask participants to read through and check if it makes sense/ what do they think the aspects are describing.

- *Mix of genres and output*
- *Quality of output*
- *Amount of original output produced in the UK*
- *Level of risk-taking, innovation, challenge and creative ambition*
- *The range of audiences it serves*

(Then either working in pairs/ as a group)

FOR EACH ASPECT OF SCHEDULE II:

- What do you think this is describing?
- Does it apply to the BBC?
- Can you think of a time when you have seen a good example of this from the BBC?
- How important is it to you? What about to other people? And to society overall?
- What does this aspect look like on TV/ Radio/ Online?

Compare participants' list with Schedule II and explore how their list overall compares to Schedule II

If you had to choose between some of these aspects, which would be the important to you?

Which are the least?

- Would you prefer it if the BBC focused more on new content, or on producing long running programmes?
- Should they be making more programmes that have broad appeal or covering a range of specific interests?
- How important is it to produce UK content compared to the other aspects?

Would your view on these change depending on whether these things were at peak viewing time vs off-peak viewing time?

How does this differ by media and service?

- For BBC TV: probe on music, arts, religion and other specialist factual content; comedy; and children's programming
- For BBC Radio: probe on UK talent, music output, news and sport.
- For BBC Online: probe on news and current affairs, and children's output/education

TAKEN AS A WHOLE:

Overall, how well do these define how you think the BBC should be distinctive?

- How well do they compare to the priorities you developed earlier?
- How well is BBC meeting these currently?

15 mins

## 5. Summarising views of distinctiveness and the BBC

Considering everything we have talked about, what are the most important things that the BBC needs to do to be distinctive?

- PROBE: TV / Radio / Online
- PROBE: different genres

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PROBE: Schedule II aspects</li> </ul> <p>Earlier we discussed your overall impressions of the BBC. Have your views changed at all during the course of the evening?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PROBE: Same/more positive/negative?</li> <li>• In what ways? What changed your view?</li> </ul> <p>GO ROUND TABLE:</p> <p>Finally, to sum up, please can you tell us the one thing that you most value about the BBC?</p>
5 mins	<p><u>6. Wrap up</u></p> <p><b>PLENARY</b></p> <p>Sum up of most important priorities for BBC when it comes to being distinctive</p> <p>Thank for participation and explain next steps</p>

**Daniel Cameron**

Research Director  
Daniel.cameron@ipsos.com

**Ellie Thompson**

Research Manager  
Eleanor.thompson@ipsos.com

**Jennifer Durrant**

Research Executive  
Jennifer.durrant@ipsos.com

## For more information

3 Thomas More Square  
London  
E1W 1YW

t: +44 (0)20 3059 5000

**[www.ipsos-mori.com](http://www.ipsos-mori.com)**  
**<http://twitter.com/IpsosMORI>**

### **About Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute**

The Social Research Institute works closely with national governments, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its c.200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues. Each has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of specific sectors and policy challenges. This, combined with our methods and communications expertise, helps ensure that our research makes a difference for decision makers and communities.