Ofcom’s Public Service Broadcasting Tracker

Notification of proposed change for 2020
1. Overview

This document proposes suspending the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) Tracker Survey for the year 2020. This is mainly as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. We expect to restart the survey in 2021 in a revised form, and instead propose to carry out further research to support Small Screen: Big Debate, our ongoing review of PSB.

The PSB channels (the BBC’s channels, ITV, STV, Channel 4, Channel 5, and S4C) are together expected to fulfil the PSB purposes and characteristics as set out in the 2003 Communications Act, although each PSB channel also has a specific remit.

The PSB Tracker is a mixed method quantitative survey with a core aim of measuring public opinion on how well specific PSB channels meet each of the relevant PSB purposes and characteristics. The survey also asks respondents to rate the performance of the PSB channels collectively, both in terms of the importance and the delivery of the PSB requirements.

In addition, the survey also covers a range of other PSB-related topics, including viewing habits, overall satisfaction, and use of PSB website and catch-up services.

What we are proposing – in brief

We are proposing to suspend the PSB tracking survey in 2020. In its place, we intend to commission a range of quantitative and qualitative ad-hoc research that explores peoples’ relationship with PSB, as part of our PSB review, Small Screen: Big Debate. Following Ofcom’s PSB Review on the future of public service broadcasting in the UK, we will then re-design and recommission a new tracking survey in 2021.

Further information on our proposals can be found below. If you would like any further details or if suspending the PSB Tracker for 2020 will cause any problems for your organisation, please email market.research@ofcom.org.uk by 25 June 2020.
2. Proposed changes to the PSB Tracker 2020

Temporary suspension of the PSB Tracker Survey

2.1 The fieldwork for the PSB Tracker 2020 has already been paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

   a) There are normally two waves for the PSB tracker each year. The first wave takes place between May and June, and the second between October and November. Our methodology uses a 50/50 split of face-to-face and online fieldwork.

   b) We have not commenced the first wave of fieldwork due to Covid-19 and the suspension of all face-to-face fieldwork on all surveys nationwide. It is unlikely that we will be able to conduct face-to-face research in the near future, and it may indeed be difficult to achieve for the rest of this year.

   c) We do not wish to continue with an online-only approach as this would not be representative of the UK population overall, because it misses out key groups, such as older people and those without access to the internet. These groups also tend to be more reliant on PSB, so it is critical their opinions are canvassed. The alternative would be to replace the face-to-face with a telephone approach, however this would result in comparability issues with previous years.

   d) Additionally, due to the impact of Covid-19 on viewing habits, any data gathered this year is likely to be an anomaly in the long-term trend, and so less useful when taking a longitudinal view.

2.2 A full review of PSB is currently being undertaken. As a consequence of this, we are reviewing and re-designing the tracking survey to launch afresh next year.

2.3 During the temporary suspension of the main survey, we intend to carry out several other pieces of research, and have already conducted some

   a) As a part of the PSB review, Small Screen: Big Debate, we have already conducted a wide range of research exploring peoples’ relationships with PSB. The full results of each piece and a summary of what we have learned will be made available on the Small Screen: Big Debate website. This includes the following:

      i) Qualitative studies – one amongst UK adults age 16-24, and one amongst UK adults aged 25+, both aimed at understanding what younger audiences’ relationship with PSB is, what it delivers for them currently, which aspects matter most to them and what they think its purpose should be.

      ii) Quantitative research – an omnibus survey to determine which areas of PSB UK adults find most valuable.

      iii) Qualitative research – two waves of research amongst 16-24 year olds, one before Covid-19 and one during the lockdown, looking at their relationships with the PSBs’ services.
b) We plan to commission further research later this year to explore whether, and if so how, people's attitudes towards PSB have changed following the Covid-19 lockdown.