Northern Ireland: setting the scene

Key facts about Northern Ireland

Figure	Nation	UK
Population	1,779m *(mid-2009 estimate)*; population is estimated to have risen by 5.6%, or 94,000 people, since 2001 census	61,792m *(mid-2009 estimate)* Northern Ireland accounts for approximately 3% of UK population
Population density	132 people per sq km	246 people per sq km
Urban versus rural	Approximately 580,000 people live in the Belfast metropolitan area – around a third of population. 35% of population live in a rural area	n/a
Language	Approximately 170,000, or 10.4%, have some knowledge of Irish Approximately 30,000, or 2%, claimed to be able to speak Ulster Scots.[1]	Ulster Scots is the first language for 0.1% of the UK population Gaelic is the first language for <0.1% of the UK population
Unemployment	7.3% of working population	7.7% of working population
Income and Expenditure	Weekly household income: £627 Weekly household expenditure: £485.80	Weekly household income: £683 Weekly household expenditure: £455

Source: Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency, Office for National Statistics, 2001 Census, www.statistics.gov.uk, Family Spending 2010 edition

A note on our survey research

We conducted a face-to-face survey of 3,474 respondents aged 16+ in the UK, with 511 interviews conducted in Northern Ireland. Quotas were set and weighting applied to ensure that the sample was representative of the population of Northern Ireland in terms of age, gender, socio-economic group and geographic location. Fieldwork took place in January and February 2011.

Respondents were defined as urban if they lived in a settlement with a population of 2000 or more and rural if they lived in areas with smaller populations.

The survey sample in Northern Ireland has error margins of approximately +/- 3-4% at the 95% confidence level. In urban and rural areas, survey error margins are approximately +/-4-6%.

In addition to the survey data, this report refers to information from a range of other sources, including data provided to Ofcom by stakeholders.

Tables summarising the data collected in our survey are published on Ofcom's website.

[1] 1999 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey. Research undertaken by the Ulster Scots Agency, however, puts the figure as high as 100,000.

1 The nations' communications markets

1.1 Introduction and key findings for Northern Ireland

Introduction

This section sets out a selection of the key facts and figures relating to communications markets across the UK's nations in 2011, comparing and contrasting nations and highlighting changes that have taken place in the past year.

Key findings for Northern Ireland

TV and audio-visual content

- A year ahead of digital switchover in Northern Ireland, 90% of homes now have a digital TV service. While this is behind the UK average of 96%, it is the only UK nation where the switchover process has not begun.

- The proportion of homes with a pay-TV service has risen by eleven percentage points to 66% of TV homes in Northern Ireland, compared to the UK average of 57%.

- 32% of homes in Northern Ireland claim to have access to HDTV channels – on a par with the UK average (32%).

- Over a five-year period, PSB investment in first-run originated English-language programmes for viewers in Northern Ireland was down 43%, the largest decrease in spending across the nations.

Radio and audio content

- Weekly radio reach stood at 92% of adults in Northern Ireland in Q1 2011 – higher than the UK average of 90.9%. Similar to last year, BBC local/national stations were particularly popular in Northern Ireland, with a 22% share (compared to a 9% share across the UK).

- Radio is relied on for local news by 22% of adults in Northern Ireland, a significantly higher proportion than the UK average (10%).

Internet and web-based content

- Three-quarters (75%) of adults now have broadband at home; this is up by five percentage points since 2010, and is in line with the UK average (74%).

- The past year has seen a significant rise in the use of social networking sites, with almost half of all adults in Northern Ireland visiting these sites (47%).

Telecoms and networks

- Northern Ireland leads in the roll-out of fibre broadband, with 81% of households passed by a fibre-to-the-cabinet connection in June 2011, compared to 23% across the UK as a whole.

- Take-up of both fixed (+3 to 84%) and mobile (+4 to 92%) telephony has increased over the past year in Northern Ireland, with both on a par with the UK average.

- Almost a quarter (23%) of mobile phone users in Northern Ireland now own a smartphone, although this lags behind the UK average of 30%.

- Satisfaction with mobile phone reception has increased by eight percentage points over the past year to stand at 89%.

1.2 UK communications market: fast facts

Figure 1.1 illustrates how take-up and use of a variety of communications services across the UK has changed over the past year.

Figure 1.1 UK communication markets: fast facts

	UK	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	NI urban	NI rural	UK urban	UK Rural
Digital TV take-up among TV homes	96 ↑+4	96 ↑+4	97 ↑+6	99	90	92	85	96 ↑+4	95 ↑+3
Broadband take-up	74 ↑+3	76	61	71 ↑+7	75	75	74	74 ↑+4	80 ↑+5
Mobile broadband	17 ↑+2	18 ↑+3	9	16	13	15	10	17	14
Mobile phone take-up	91 ↑+2	92 ↑+2	86	87	92	91	92	91 ↑+2	92
Use mobile to access internet	32 ↑+9	34 ↑+9	21 ↑+6	25	29 ↑+8	33 ↑+12	22	34 ↑+8	23
Smartphone take-up amongst mobile phone owners	30 ↑+	31 ↑+	21 ↑+	29 ↑+	23 ↑+	27 ↑+	17 ↑+	30 ↑+	30 ↑+
Fixed landline take-up	85	85	80	80	84	83	87	84	90
Households taking bundles	53	54	49	47	46	52	36	54 ↑+3	47
DAB ownership amongst radio listeners	37	39	31	27	28	30	24	37	40

X *Figure is significantly higher than UK average*

X *Figure is significantly lower than UK average*

↑+xx *Figures has risen significantly by xx percentage points since 2010*

Ofcom research Q1 2011
Base: All adults aged 16+ (n = 3474 UK, 1983 England, 487 Scotland, 493 Wales, 511 Northern Ireland, 2458 UK urban, 1016 UK rural, 1719 England urban, 264 England rural, 239 Scotland urban, 248 Scotland rural, 241 Wales urban, 252 Wales rural, 259 Northern Ireland urban, 252 Northern Ireland rural)
Note: This is the first year in which we have collected survey data on smartphone use, so we cannot report a precise year-on-year increase. We are, however, confident that ownership has increased significantly in the past year.

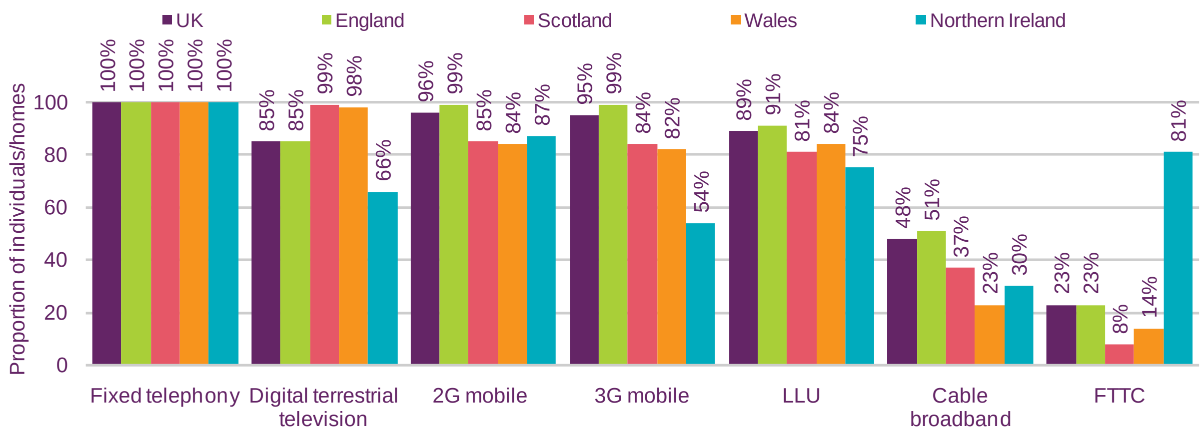
1.3 Availability of communications platforms and services

Availability of communications services varies across the UK's nations

Figure 1.2 shows the availability of communications services across the UK by percentage of population covered. The coverage of most services shown in the chart has not changed in the past year. Digital terrestrial television is an exception to this, having risen as a result of the continuing digital switchover programme across the UK (to be completed in 2012).

- Fixed-line voice telephony and dial-up internet access are available to 100% of homes in the UK, as a result of the universal service obligation.
- Eighty-one percent of homes in Northern Ireland are connected to a Fibre-to-the-cabinet enabled exchange – significantly above the UK average of 23%. 1700 cabinets have been upgraded with fibre-to-the-cabinet and that number is due to grow to almost 2500 by next year, giving 88% of the population access to super-fast broadband.
- At the end of 2010 89% of UK homes were in exchange areas that had been unbundled (up from 40% five years previously), with this proportion ranging from 75% in Northern Ireland to 91% in England.
- Among the UK nations the proportion of homes passed by Virgin Media's cable broadband network was lowest in Wales at 23%, and highest in England at 51%. In Northern Ireland 30% of homes were passed by the cable broadband network, the second lowest proportion among the UK nations.
- 2G mobile coverage is lower in Northern Ireland than in the UK as a whole – 87% of people in Northern Ireland lived in postcode district with at least 90% 2G area-coverage, compared to 96% across the UK as a whole. Lower network coverage is a reflection of large areas of low population density and areas where hilly or mountainous terrain limits the range of mobile masts.
- Across the UK 3G coverage is generally lower than 2G coverage. This is particularly true in Northern Ireland, where 54% of people live in a postcode area with good 3G coverage from at least one operator – the lowest of all the UK nations.
- Digital terrestrial television, offering the full channel line-up, was available to 66% of Northern Ireland's population in 2011. This figure is the lowest among the UK nations, and coverage is now near-universal in Wales, where the switchover process is complete. Switchover in Northern Ireland, scheduled for 2012, will result in rising levels of coverage as the DTT signal power is increased.

Figure 1.2 Communications infrastructure availability across the UK's nations



Sources: Ofcom and:
1. DTT: Availability of 17 services. Ofcom estimates.
2. Proportion of population living in postal districts where at least one operator reports at least 90% 2G area coverage. Sourced from GSM Association / Europa Technologies (Q2 2011). Note that coverage data have been restated; this means that year-on-year comparisons are not possible.
3. Proportion of population living in postal districts where at least one operator reports at least 90% 3G area coverage. Sourced from GSM Association / Europa Technologies (Q2 2011). Note that coverage data have been restated; this means that year-on-year comparisons are not possible.
5. Proportion of households connected to an LLU-enabled exchange
6. Proportion of households passed by Virgin Media's broadband-enabled network
7. Proportion of households connected to an FTTC-enabled exchange

1.4 Take-up of communications platforms and services across the UK

Modest increases in take-up of established communications services across the UK nations

Take-up of the most established communications services remained stable or increased modestly in the past year. Digital television and mobile telephony services are approaching universal ownership, so year-on-year increases in take-up have slowed.

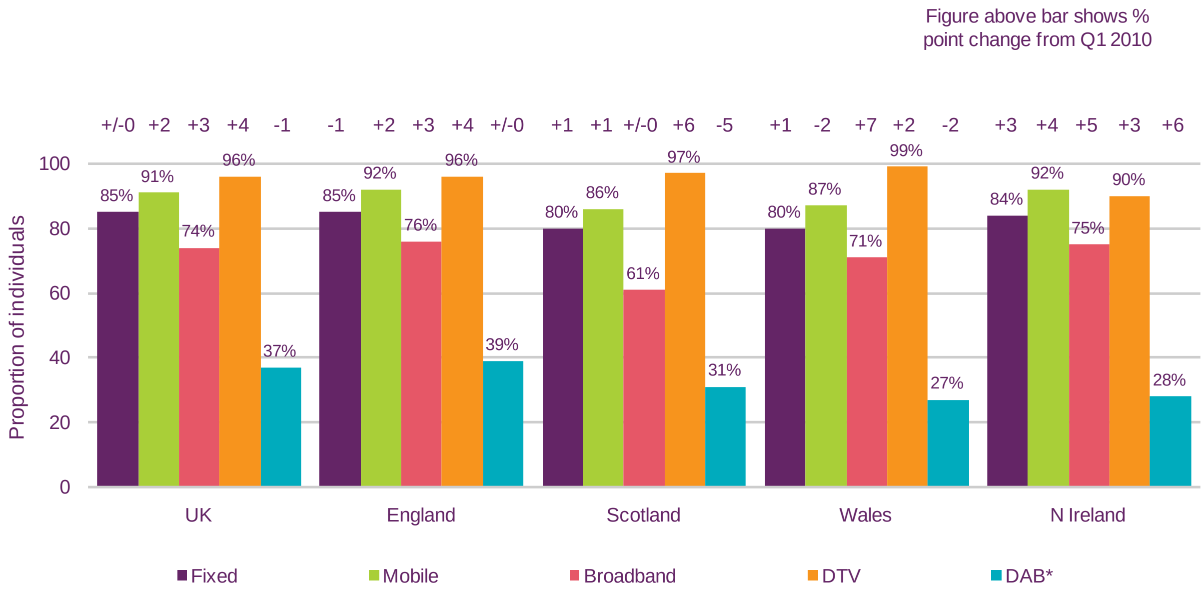
- The small fall in ownership of fixed-line telephones across the UK that we reported on last year has been sustained, with take-up remaining at 85%. Take up of fixed-line telephones is lowest in Scotland and Wales (both at 80%), with Northern Ireland more in line with the UK average, at 84%.

- Broadband take-up (whether fixed or mobile) has continued to increase, with a three percentage point rise in the past year. The largest percentage point increases were seen in Wales (+7) and Northern Ireland (+5). In Scotland, broadband ownership remained at 61% and is now 13% points behind the UK average of 74%.

- Over nine in ten UK adults now own a mobile phone, following a two percentage point increase in take-up during the past year. There is modest variation in take-up between nations, with highest take-up (92%) being found in Northern Ireland and England and the lowest take-up in Scotland (86%). The apparent fall in mobile ownership in Wales is within the survey's error margins and so should be treated with caution.

- Digital television ownership has increased to 96% of the UK's adult population. Wales (the first UK nation to switch over to digital) has the highest uptake at 99%. Digital switchover in Northern Ireland is scheduled for 2012, when all of the remaining regions of the UK will also switch to digital.

Figure 1.3 Communications service adoption across the nations of the UK: 2011

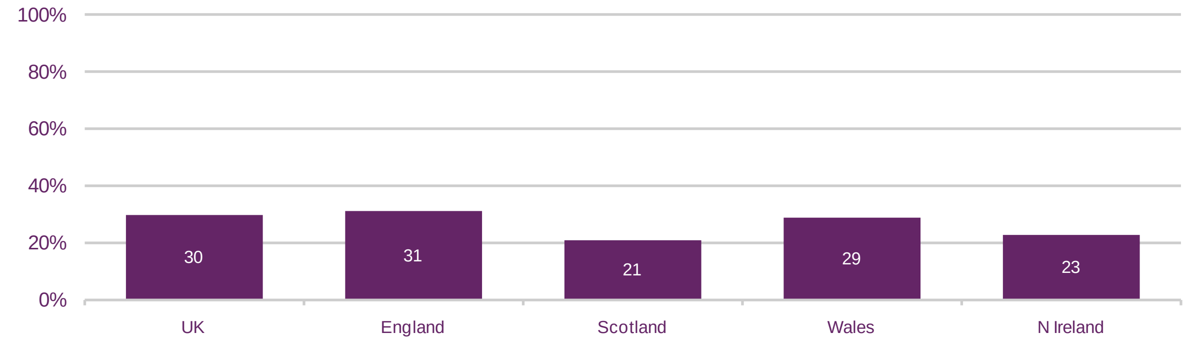


Source: Ofcom research, Q1 2011
Fixed line, broadband and mobile bases: All adults aged 16+ (n = 3474 UK, 1983 England, 487 Scotland, 493 Wales, 511 Northern Ireland)
DTV base: Adults aged 16+ with a TV in the household (n= 3412 UK, 1941 England, 479 Scotland, 483 Wales, 509 Northern Ireland)
*DAB base: Adults aged 16+ with any active radio sets in the household who listen to radio. *NB Data previous to 2011 are based on all who listen to radio (n = 2811 UK, 1629 England, 357 Scotland, 397 Wales, 428 Northern Ireland)*
See published data tables for question wording:
http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/marketdataresearch/statistics/main_set.pdf

Nearly one in four mobile phone users in Northern Ireland have a smartphone

Almost a third (30%) of mobile phone owners now have a smartphone. Take-up has grown very quickly, with 59% having purchased their smartphone in the past year. Ownership varies across the UK nations; among mobile phone users, the highest levels of smartphone take-up are found among consumers in England (31%) and Wales (29%), with take-up lower in Scotland (21%) and Northern Ireland (23%). Smartphone ownership is higher among ABC1 socio-economic groups and those aged 16-34. For a detailed study of smartphone users, see the *Communications Market Report: UK* at www.ofcom.org.uk/cmr11.

Figure 1.4 Smartphone ownership among mobile phone owners



Source: Ofcom research, Q1 2011
Base: Adults aged 16+ who personally use a mobile phone (n = 3091 UK, 1786 England, 425 Scotland, 416 Wales, 464 Northern Ireland)
Question. Do you personally use a smartphone? A smartphone is a phone on which you can easily access emails, download files and applications, as well as view websites and generally surf the internet. Popular brands of smartphone include BlackBerry, iPhone and Android phones such as the HTC Desire.

Eight in ten homes in Northern Ireland have fixed and mobile telephony

Fifteen per cent of adults in Northern Ireland rely on mobile voice telephony only – the same proportion as the UK average. Across the UK, lower-income homes are more likely to rely on mobile telephony. Seventy-eight per cent of consumers in Northern Ireland have both fixed and mobile telephony in their homes.

Figure 1.5 Mobile-only households in the UK

Source: Ofcom research, Q1 2011
Base: All adults aged 16+ (n = 3474 UK, 1983 England, 487 Scotland, 493 Wales, 511 Northern Ireland)
Question. Is there a landline phone in your home that can be used to make and receive calls?/ How many mobile phones in total do you and members of your household use?

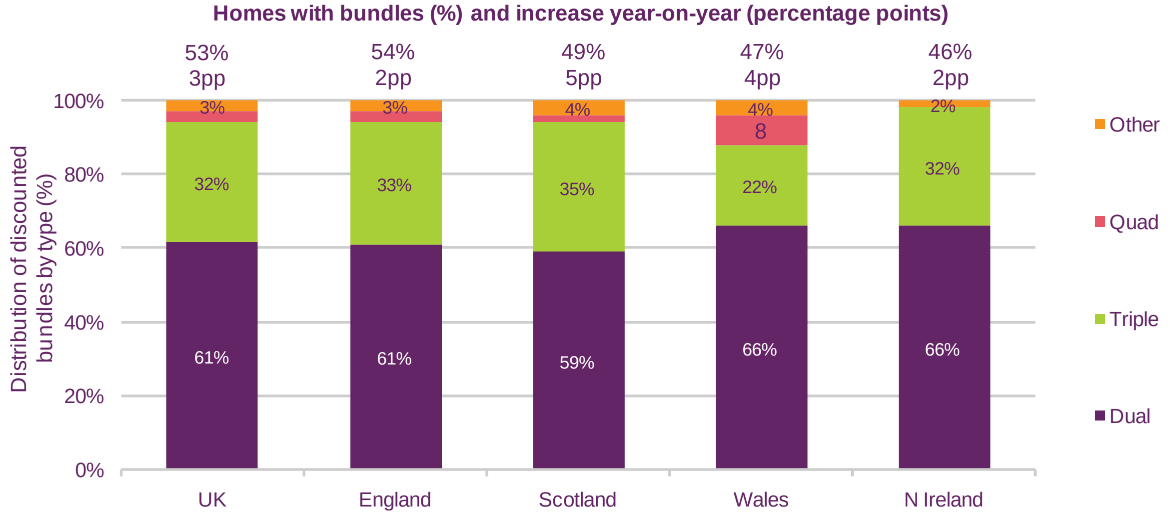
1.5 Consumer take-up of bundled services in the UK

Almost half of all homes across Northern Ireland took a bundle of communications services at Q1 2011, up by two percentage points year on year.

Purchasing communications services in bundles continues to increase in popularity across the UK. Fifty-three per cent of UK homes now purchase communications services in this way, a three percentage point increase year on year, following a four percentage point increase in 2009-2010. The most popular type of bundle is a 'dual' package of two services (typically fixed-line telephony and broadband).

At 46%, the proportion of consumers bundling communications services was lowest in Northern Ireland, perhaps relating to relatively low cable coverage.

Figure 1.6 Take-up of bundles, by nation



Source: Ofcom research, Q1 2011
Base: All adults aged 16+ with a package of services regardless of whether or not these include a discount (n = 1680 UK, 1035 England, 226 Scotland, 197 Wales, 222 Northern Ireland)
Note: Remaining percentages are Don't know responses

1.6 Spending by public service broadcasters on television and radio content across the UK's nations

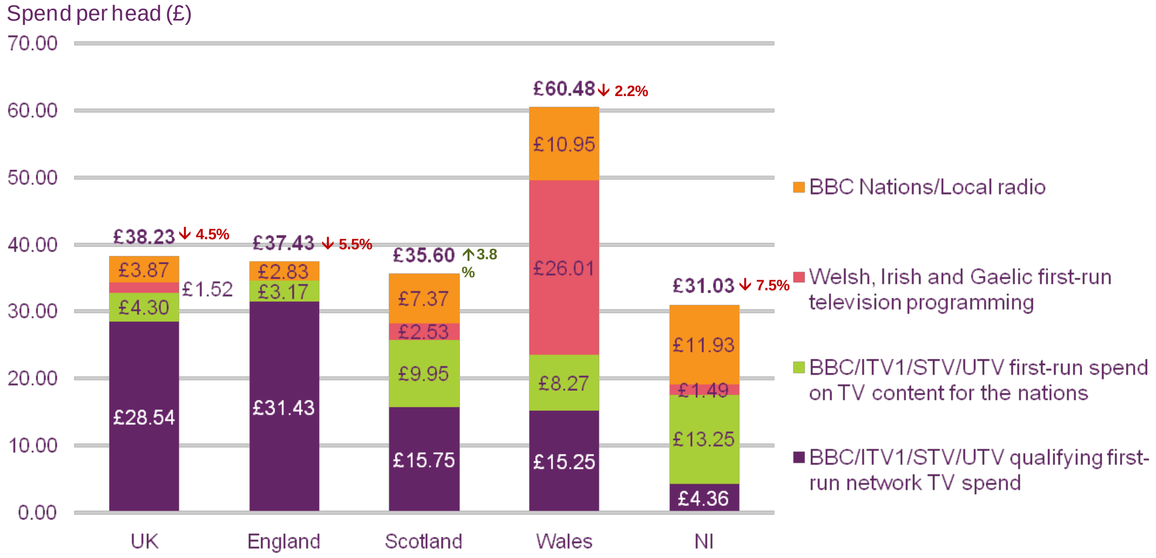
Figure 1.7 illustrates patterns of spend on broadcast output. It adjusts for population size by expressing spend on a per-head basis. The chart illustrates four types of expenditure:

- the value of qualifying first-run networked TV spending – programmes that are produced in one nation/English macro region, and then broadcast to all UK viewers;
- BBC spend on radio services for listeners in the nations (BBC Radio Ulster/Foyle, BBC Radio Wales/Cymru, BBC Radio Scotland/ nan Gàidheal and BBC Local Radio in England);
- spend by the BBC and ITV/STV/UTV on first-run programmes specifically for viewers in each nation; and
- TV content produced in Welsh Gaelic and the Irish language.

Total spend per head across the UK stood at £38.23 in 2010, up by 4.5% in real terms year on year; networked television productions accounted for three-quarters (75%) of that total, and nations/regional television output for a further 11%.

Patterns of spending across the four nations differed in terms of both their level and composition. In Northern Ireland spend per head stood at £31.03 (down by 7.5%), with television output specifically for Northern Ireland viewers and radio output forming a substantial proportion of the figure.

Figure 1.7 Spend per head on UK-originated content broadcast by PSBs on TV and radio, 2011



Source: Operators, Annual Reports and Ofcom calculations

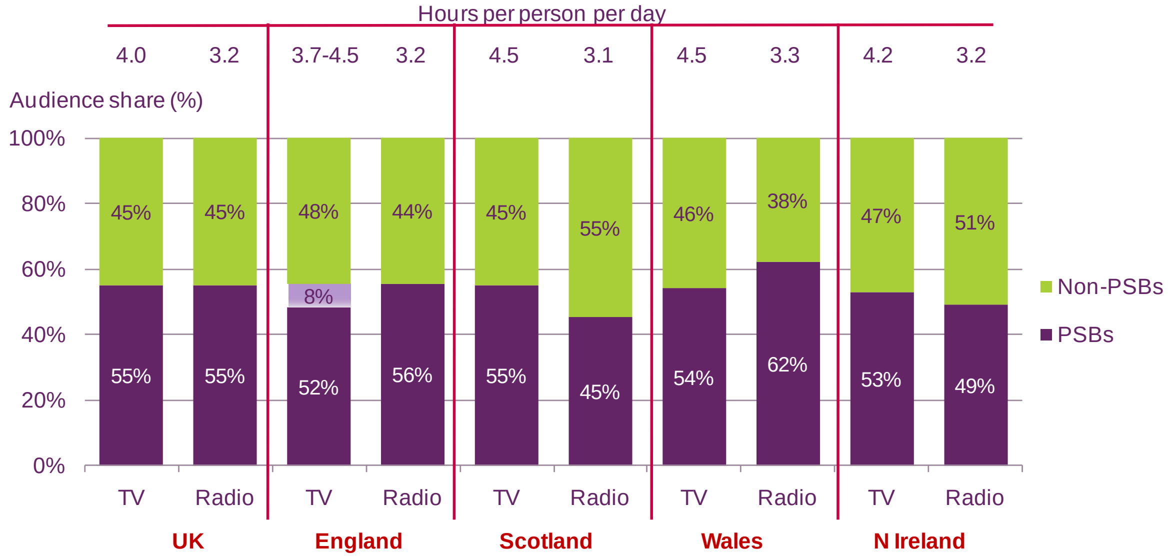
1.7 Consumption of television and radio services

People in Northern Ireland spend an average of 4.2 hours per day watching TV

In 2010, average daily TV viewing among individuals (aged 4+) in the UK was 4 hours per day. In Northern Ireland, viewing hours were marginally above that average at 4.2 hours per day.

In 2010, average daily radio listening among adults (15+) in Northern Ireland was 3.2 hours, broadly on a par with the other nations, and comparable to the 2009 figure.

Figure 1.8 Hours of daily viewing of television and radio, by nation: 2010



Source: BARB. i) TV: PSBs = BBC One, BBC Two, ITV1, C4+S4C, Five. (ii) Radio: PSBs = all BBC radio stations.
Notes: For England TV, a range is displayed reflecting the regions with the highest and lowest average daily viewing figures respectively
For Wales TV, viewing hours shows an increase of 0.9 hours on 2009 figures. While it is likely that there has been an increase in viewing in Wales, due to digital switchover, this increase may also be attributable to the effects of the new BARB panel, introduced at the start of 2010. There are two important changes to note regarding the new BARB panel: 1) The panel is based on completely different viewers to the previous panel, meaning that data comparisons pre- and post-2010 should be viewed with caution. 2) There was a redefining of border boundaries under the new panel change. Previously, viewing of C4 in some areas registered as 'out of area' and so did not count towards the Wales area viewing figures; under the new panel and re-defined regions however, viewing of C4 from these regions is now included.