



CONSULTATION: Thematic review of representation and portrayal on the BBC, Terms of reference

Closing date: 29th March 2018

QUESTION: We welcome views on the considerations that Ofcom should take into account as part of this review of the BBC's representation and portrayal of the diverse communities of the UK.

As part of new research to better understand representation and portrayal on the BBC, Directors UK believes there needs to be more transparency, fact-finding and understanding of the commissioning and hiring processes for productions across the nations and regions, and among more diverse communities.

We believe the following areas must be included within the review in order for it to truly reflect how programmes that portray and reflect diverse communities across the UK are made, as this is key to what appears on screen.

Directors UK has a membership of over 6,500 television and film directors in the UK. We would be happy to assist Ofcom with research among our community as part of their review, or to facilitate access to members working in the nations and regions.

Conduct research among those who work behind the scenes based in the nations and regions, and diverse communities

The insight of production people based in the nations and regions, or from diverse communities, who make the programmes must be included as part of point 1.16 in your terms of reference document. This should include seeking out the views of: directors, nations and regions based executives and commissioners, and all locally based crew.

It is regularly the experience of our members who live and work in the nations and regions, in particular among Scottish directors, that many production companies are still bringing in London based directors to direct shows being commissioned and made in the nations and regions for the main network channels. Local talent with the relevant experience are being over-looked.

For the BBC to ensure nations and regions representation both in front and behind camera, and to serve and represent audiences across the entire UK, this can only be truly achieved if the people making the programmes live and work in the regions themselves. Bringing directors from London to work on shows in the nations and regions is not the solution. It does not offer the rich tapestry that audiences want - it simply offers the same perspective just made in a different location and does nothing to increase the reassertion on screen of diverse talent and audiences in the UK. It is therefore imperative to understand the first-hand experiences of those working in the regions and diverse communities as to how programmes ideas are generated, commissioned, recruited for and made.

Exploration of the commissioning process in the nations and regions for local and network productions.

It is our members' experience that many of the issues affecting representation, both on and off screen in the nations and regions and diverse communities stems from the commissioning process.

Structural changes in the commissioning process over time meant that local regional executives lost their ability to commission directly. In order to secure a network commission they had to pitch to London based commissioning executives, which often resulted in not using local talent because they were less known outside the regions. Attempts to place commissioning executives within the regions have not always improved this as often they are brought in from out of region. To be truly effective it needs locally based commissioning executives who live and work in the region and who know their audiences and talent base.

It would be useful to examine the amount spent on regionally based talent on network commissions at the BBC. It is important that this does not just look at “regional talent” as they may not necessarily live in the regions. It is more informative to understand spend on talent who are based in the region as that will give a more informed picture of where investment and spend on talent in the nations and regions is actually happening across the country. We believe this information does exist and requires clear fact-finding to set it out.

It would also be useful to know what measures commissioners are taking to meet and employ talent in the regions and from diverse communities, before reverting to tried and tested out of region-based or known talent. This may provide insight into any actions that could be taken to facilitate relationships with locally-based talent. E.g. London based execs could be paired with regionally based execs to explore and nurture relationships with regional talent. It is our belief that often the commissioning exec is open to the idea of using an unfamiliar director but they don't get offered the option due to the reluctance of the regional production execs to expose themselves by risking less known talent.

Training and career pathways for talent in the nations and regions, and among diverse communities

Training and career pathways for talent in the nations and regions should also be examined as part of this review.

It is important to understand what actions are being taken to ensure productions are in a position to use local talent, or talent from diverse communities and gender. Unless there is real investment in the development of regional directing and other production talent, there just won't be any local talent to make programmes for the nations and regions. The same is true of production talent from diverse communities or women.

It is our members' experience in the nations and regions that the more senior roles and HOD roles are not being filled by local talent. As those with experience in the region are not getting the Network opportunities, it leaves a much more junior and less experienced local talent base, who are then not getting the opportunities to further develop their careers to Network level. Our members tell us there have been limited pathways to progress in directing in the nations and regions.

If the BBC is to truly represent voices across the nation, and they believe there is not a talent base in the nations and regions, they should be putting in measures to train talent and create career pathways to develop directors and production teams in these bases.

It is also our members experience from more ethnically diverse communities and among our women directors that employment opportunities, training and career progression opportunities are also harder to access. Recent career development activities that Directors UK has undertaken with production companies and broadcasters is working to address this gap and showing early signs of having an impact.

The role of independent production companies and the BBC in delivering representation and portrayal

It would be useful to understand how much representation and portrayal of the nations and regions, and diverse communities is delivered by independent production companies as opposed to the BBC itself, and what the jurisdiction of Ofcom or the BBC is to ensure that independent companies are required to meet the same standards as the BBC to ensure better representation.

About Directors UK

Directors UK is the professional association for screen directors, representing the creative, economic and contractual interests of over 6,500 members – the overwhelming majority of working film and Television directors across the UK. Directors UK collects and distributes royalty payments and is a membership organisation providing a range of services including campaigning, commercial negotiations, legal advice and support, events, training and career development. Directors UK works closely with fellow organisations around the world to represent directors' rights and concerns, promotes excellence in the craft of directing and champions change to the current landscape to create an equal opportunity industry for all.

Directors UK
www.directors.uk.com

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