



# **Request for changes to BBC's Operating Licence: Asian Network and Radio Foyle**

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9 April 2025

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# 1. Introduction

As we set out in *A BBC for the Future* publication<sup>1</sup> last year, the BBC's income has been significantly reduced and this has put serious pressure on our finances. Between 2010 and 2020, the BBC's income was cut by 30% in real terms, followed by two years of flat funding. This represents a difference of more than £1 billion a year. This is particularly problematic as a strong balance sheet and the ability to deploy capital strategically is essential if we are to navigate digital transition.

As a result, we have had to deploy very significant reforms and cuts in the recent years in order to preserve value for licence fee payers. We have reduced our public service headcount by over 1,800 and cut over 1,000 hours of content including many loved programme titles.

In 2022, to respond to this challenge and invest in high-impact video content and product capability, we announced a £500 million savings and reinvestment plan. We had delivered around £400 million of this plan by March 2024, while also dealing with high inflation. To implement the vision set out last year, we extended our plan to look for a further £200 million annual savings and reinvestment by 2027/28, on top of the £100 million we have still to deliver from the original plan.

As part of these plans, we have announced our intention to spend more money on content with higher impact and value for all audiences. This means continuing to move our funding towards content that can reach broad audiences, deliver scale and drive the growth of BBC iPlayer. It also means continuing to shift funding away from content primarily aimed at broadcast channels.

In some areas these changes mean we require amendments to some of the conditions in the Operating Licence. In our discussions with Ofcom, they have asked that we identify all the Operating Licence amendments that will be required before the end of the Charter period. Having reviewed our plans, we have identified a number of changes that are necessary. This submission deals with two most urgently required changes:

- a reduction in the news and current affairs quota for BBC Asian Network to at least 675 hours; and
- reducing the quota for news and current affairs on Radio Foyle to 710 hours.

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<sup>1</sup> [A BBC for the Future](#), BBC, March 2024.

## 2. Asian Network

### 2.1 Introduction

BBC Asian Network is now the most listened-to British South Asian radio station in the UK. It celebrates British South Asian identity through a mix of music and speech content that reflects the culture, music and conversations of the British Asian community.

In our Annual Plan 2024/25, we outlined our ambition to refocus the station to better serve younger audiences, particularly those aged 25-34. This is necessary for Asian Network to adapt to changing audio listening habits, deliver a broader range of content and ensure value for money while maintaining high-quality news and current affairs programming. We have previously noted that the proposed changes may require changes to the Operating Licence.<sup>2</sup>

Our planned changes to Asian Network's schedule will generate fewer hours of news and current affairs each week. As such the implementation of these changes will require an amendment to the Operating Licence reducing the news and current affairs quota for Asian Network from 1,224 hours per year to 675 hours per year.

Below we set out the rationale for and detail of our proposed changes to Asian Network, identify the modifications to the Operating Licence that would be necessary and consider the impact of the proposals on the market and for the BBC's public value.

### 2.2 Background

The BBC launched the Asian Network in 1989, initially broadcasting 57 hours per week over the medium-wave transmitters of BBC Radio West Midlands and BBC Radio Leicester. In 1996, it was relaunched as BBC Asian Network, a full-time service, broadcasting 18 hours a day on medium-wave transmitters of stations with large Asian communities. In 2002, BBC Asian Network became a UK-wide station broadcasting on DAB.

Since 2002, the UK's linear radio audience has significantly shifted with a notable decline in radio listening among the 15-44 and 25-34 age groups, which are the strategic target demographics for Asian Network. British Asian audiences tend to be younger than the overall UK population, with the average age of an Asian Network listener being 39 compared to 49 for all radio listeners.<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 shows the current age profile for the station. This demographic shift necessitates a change in programming to better engage younger listeners who are increasingly turning to on-demand content and digital platforms. The average listener to Asian Network spent 5 hours and 40 minutes with the station in 2023, an increase driven largely by the 25-34 age group.

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<sup>2</sup> [Annual Plan 2023/24](#), BBC, pages 46 to 47.

<sup>3</sup> RAJAR data from Q4 2024.

**Figure 1: Reach profile of Asian Network**

Age	Reach (000s)	Reach % (all radio)	Reach Profile (%)
15+	579	1.0%	100.0%
15-24	119	1.4%	20.6%
25-34	102	1.1%	17.6%
35-44	183	2.0%	31.6%
45-54	104	1.2%	18.0%
55-64	42	0.5%	7.2%
65+	29	0.2%	5.0%

*Source: RAJAR Q4 2024 – 6-month weight*

Asian Network is an important part of the BBC's radio network in that it provides implicit representation for a minority ethnic group in the UK, reporting from and for the community and providing cultural inclusion for all audiences across the UK. It also has diverse reach among Asian listeners in the UK. In 2023, on average, Asian Network reached 480k listeners, of which we were able to identify 47% have an Indian background, 33% a Pakistani background and 4% were Bangladeshi. Given the station's unique offer for a specific demographic segment in the UK, there is a need to deliver programming which can build trust and be culturally inclusive.

Research indicates that younger British Asians are now likely to be at least third generation and living across the UK. They are interested in a broad range of music, driven by mood and occasion and are just as engaged with their culture and background. However, they increasingly seek news and current affairs from various sources including social media.

Younger audiences identify Asian Network as a station that is aimed at young people like them, describing the station as diverse, upbeat, relatable, fresh, cultural and unique. However, outside of Asian music, they are unaware of what else the station has to offer, both on linear radio and on BBC Sounds in terms of the network's speech content.<sup>4</sup>

For the station, investing more in online has provided additional growth in reach. Launching on smart speakers led to approximately a 10% uplift in weekly accounts listening to Asian Network. On average there were 25k signed in accounts listening to Asian Network content each week in 2023/24, 17% of which belonged to listeners aged 16-34, which is above the average listening reach for this age group on Sounds.

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<sup>4</sup> Research from BBC Virtual In Person audience sessions in December 2022.

**Figure 2: Asian Network BBC Sounds Performance (average weekly Sounds accounts)**

	<i>FY 23/24</i>	<i>FY 24/25</i>	<i>YoY Change</i>
<b>Asian Network</b>	25K	24K	-4%
<b>Ankur Desai</b>	4.3K	4.2K	-3%

Source: Analysis of BBC Data

Notes: FY24/25 excl. w/c 10/03/25 owing to data issue

The station must adapt to these changing listening habits to remain relevant and impactful. This includes responding to the trend of younger audiences moving away from linear radio consumption towards on-demand music streaming and digital content. We need a schedule for Asian Network which takes advantage of key listening opportunities and delivers content to audiences at times which suit them and programming that can be adapted into formats which support digital listening. Like all parts of the BBC, Asian Network is required to make savings whilst continuing to provide audiences with both value for money and to offer news and current affairs programming that is informative, relevant and engaging.

### 2.3 The proposed change

We set out in our Annual Plan 2023/24 that we were considering how we could clarify the station brand of Asian Network and refocus elements of its programming to ensure maximum audience impact for British Asian audiences. We noted we were continuing to review options in the Annual Plan 2024/25. We are now looking to implement those changes. In summary we propose to:

- decommission the *Ankur Desai* show (currently broadcast from 3pm to 6pm) and its associated titles, *60 Minutes* and *Asian Network News Presents*;
- commission a new Asian Network talk show, featuring topical and breaking news discussions, in-depth analysis and audience participation, broadcast on Mondays from 8pm to 10pm;
- maintain regular news via simulcasting news bulletins across the week and *Newsbeat* bulletins tailored for younger listeners at lunchtime (12.45pm to 1pm) and drivetime (5.45 pm to 6pm);
- commission a new music-focused programme to support new British Asian artists, broadcasting Monday to Friday from 3pm to 5.45pm; and
- retain business programme, *The Everyday Hustle*.

Currently, Asian Network has a requirement under the Operating Licence to allocate at least 1,224 hours to news and current affairs programming in each financial year and provide news bulletins regularly at frequent intervals throughout the day.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the station has always had a strong focus on news, the quota of 24 hours a week was only introduced in 2015 and reflected the schedule in place at that time.<sup>6</sup>

Under these proposals, the volume of news and current affairs on Asian Network will decrease from about 25.5 hours per week to about 13.8 hours per week. As a result,

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<sup>5</sup> This requirement has been updated in the recent Operating Licence review to reflect an annual quota rather than a weekly quota of 24 hours of news each week.

<sup>6</sup> [BBC Asian Network Trust Service Licence](#), issued March 2015.

excluding public holidays, Christmas and special events, the annual quota for news and current affairs on Asian Network would need to reduce from 1,224 hours per year to 675 hours per year.

Figures 3 and 4 below summarise the existing and proposed news and current affairs schedule on Asian Network.

**Figure 3: Asian Network's existing weekly news & current affairs schedule**

Brand	Description of programme	First-run hours / week	Total hours / week
<b>Ankur Desai</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monday-Thursday 3pm-6pm</li> <li>Live reads of news</li> <li>Discussion of relevant news and current affairs</li> <li>News bulletins (3 minutes long) every 30 minutes</li> </ul>	12	12
<b>Ankur Desai – 60 Minutes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>60-minute compilation of the <i>Ankur Desai</i> show</li> <li>Broadcast overnight across the week</li> </ul>	1	3 (repeated twice across the week)
<b>Asian Network News Presents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>60-minute programme led by Ankur Desai</li> <li>News discussion and music, with the occasional guest</li> </ul>	1	4 (including 3 repeats)
<b>Newsbeat and simulcast news bulletins</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15-minute <i>Newsbeat</i> bulletin every weekday lunchtime and Friday evenings</li> <li>151 minutes of simulcast news bulletins across the week<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>	4	4
<b>Everyday Hustle</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>30-minute weekly money, business and entrepreneurship programme</li> </ul>	0.5 hours	2.5 (including 4 x 0.5 hour repeats)
<b>Total</b>		<b>18.5</b>	<b>25.5</b>

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<sup>7</sup> Since October 2024 we have decreased the amount of simulcast newsbeat bulletins throughout the week (from 151 minutes to 118 minutes a week). This is to account for changes in bulletin schedule on the network and lower resource in the news team. Despite this reduction we will still meet the relevant FY quota for Asian Network. Following our proposed changes this will increase to the amount we detailed in the new schedule below (c. 167 minutes).

**Figure 4: Proposed new schedule for Asian Network's weekly news & current affairs**

Brand	Description of programme	First-run hours / week	Total hours / week
<b>New Asian Network chat show</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New conversational show similar to Radio 1Xtra's <i>1xtra Talks</i></li> <li>2 hours per week: one focused on topical and breaking stories; the other featuring guests and in-depth discussion</li> <li>Each hour segmented and available on-demand plus repeats across week</li> </ul>	2	6 (2 repeats for each episode)
<b>Simulcast <i>Newsbeat</i> and news bulletins</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15-minute <i>Newsbeat</i> bulletin simulcast every weekday lunchtime and evening</li> <li>167 minutes of simulcast news bulletins across the week<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>	5.3	5.3
<b><i>Everyday Hustle</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>30-minute weekly money, business and entrepreneurship programme</li> </ul>	0.5 hours	2.5 (including 4 x 0.5 hour repeats)
<b>Total</b>		<b>7.8</b>	<b>13.8</b>

We consider that this change will allow us to meet the audience challenges for Asian Network. It will also enable to the BBC meet its budgetary challenge. As set out in the introduction to this paper. Like all parts of the BBC, Asian Network is required to make savings whilst continuing to provide audiences with both value for money and to offer news and current affairs programming that is informative, relevant and engaging. Though we are reducing the yearly output of news and current affairs programming we are implementing changes to our news output to make it more impactful and engaging for our audiences.

## 2.4 How the change will deliver the BBC's mission and public purpose

With the new schedule and proposed changes to our news and current affairs offer, we believe Asian Network will continue to deliver the BBC's mission to inform, educate and entertain audiences. Specifically, we think that these changes will contribute to:

- Public purpose 1, to provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them;
- Public purpose 3, to show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services; and
- Public purpose 4, both:

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<sup>8</sup> The increase in simulcast news bulletins is due to two additional Newsbeats simulcast Mon-Fridays, 12.45pm to 1pm and 5.45pm to 6pm (currently Newsbeat is only broadcast on Asian Network on a Friday).



- to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom's nations and regions, and
- to support the creative economy across the United Kingdom.

It will do this by delivering distinctive British content for Asian audiences, generating significant cultural and societal value for ethnic communities and supporting the UK's creative economy and out of London production.

#### *2.4.1 Public purpose 1: A stronger news and current affairs package that is highly bespoke, tailor made and more distinctive*

The BBC has an obligation to provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them. For Asian Network, this means providing news and current affairs programming that serves the Asian community in the UK.

Given Asian Network's target audience of British Asians aged 25-34, it is crucial to offer inclusive news and current affairs programming that resonates with this demographic and audiences across the UK. Since 2021, the average weekly reach of BBC network radio for news and current affairs has decreased from 53% to 47.3%. Despite stable listenership on Asian Network, averaging 377k weekly listeners, adapting to audience demand is essential to maintain a strong news and current affairs presence.

Following the proposed changes, Asian Network will still broadcast twice as much news and current affairs content as Radio 1Xtra (required to broadcast 280 hours per year), the most similar BBC station in terms of serving a diverse audience base, and more than any other BBC pop music station except Radio 2 (required to broadcast 867 hours per year).

The station will continue to provide unique news and current affairs, focusing on engaging British Asian audiences and bringing them into the conversation. This will have three key components:

- a new Asian Network current affairs talk show;
- news bulletins; and
- standalone current affairs documentaries and programmes.

##### **2.4.1.1 New Asian Network talk show**

The *Ankur Desai* programme, introduced in October 2021, has consistently reached around 150k listeners weekly. While it has performed adequately, it has run its course, prompting a refresh to better engage younger audiences. We believe the audience currently served by the *Ankur Desai* programme will be better served by our proposed new programme, which will occupy a more effective timeslot for long-form news and current affairs discussions. It will create a new appointment to listen for audiences. This enables us to repurpose the drive time slot that *Ankur Desai* currently occupies for music led programming.

The new Asian Network talk show will be conversational and similar to Radio 1Xtra's *1Xtra Talks*, featuring topical and informative discussions relevant to the Asian Network audience. This format will allow for deeper, more meaningful conversations on subjects that resonate with listeners, fostering a stronger connection to the station and the BBC.

The new programme will focus on news and current affairs while incorporating music to transition between topics. The first hour will cover the week's biggest news stories and the second hour will delve into more in-depth discussions. Audience participation through comments and questions will be encouraged. Both hours will be designed for on-demand listening via BBC Sounds, aiming to reach a wider audience and capitalize on increased digital listening.

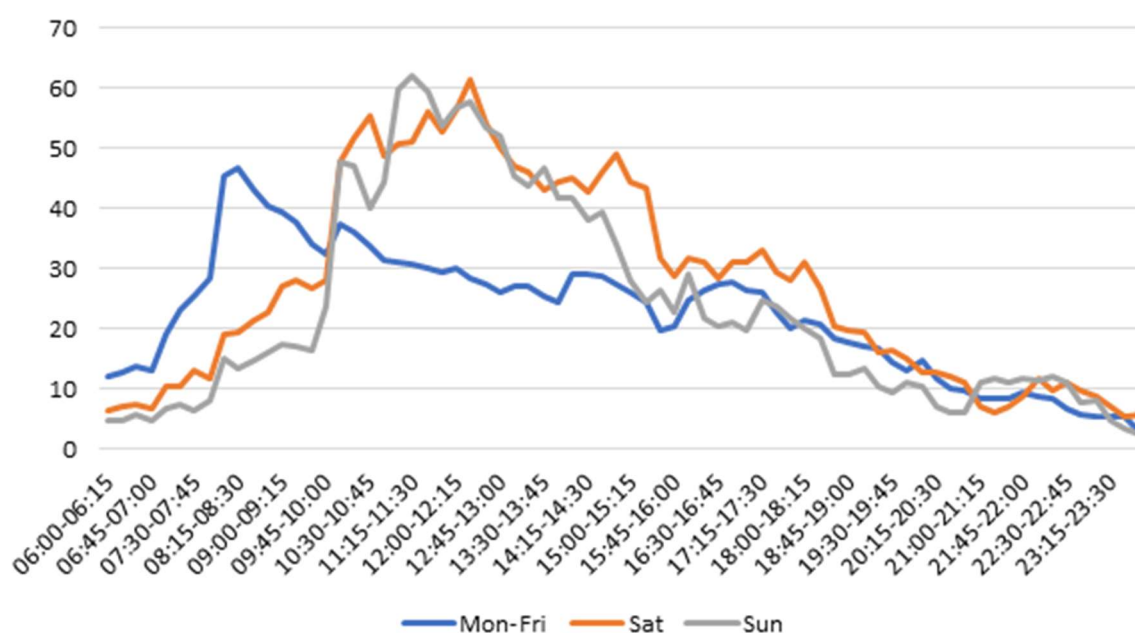
The new Asian Network talk show and bespoke speech content will build stronger ties with audiences by reflecting real lived experiences and exploring diverse histories and topics relevant to the Asian community. The tailored news offer will highlight perspectives from a diverse range of guests, sharing stories that resonate with Asian audiences and creating stronger ties with the BBC. This specialised format will provide in-depth coverage of news, offering a unique perspective compared to standard news bulletins.

The new format will encourage audience participation and feature regular guests and speakers to tackle topics from different perspectives, ensuring a broad and robust view of the issues discussed. This approach will highlight often overlooked issues affecting Asian Network audiences and generate greater engagement from the Asian community, thereby delivering wider benefit through increased awareness and engagement.

The new programme will air from 8pm to 10pm on Mondays. The chosen time slot is ideal for engaging discussions, targeting evening listener engagement. We consider that this focused approach will provide higher quality news and current affairs programming, generating around 300 hours of content annually with 100 hours being original.

The figure below provides a view of daily listening across the week. Analysis shows peak listening across the following: Monday-Friday peak is 8.15-8.30am, Saturday peak is 12.15-12.30pm, Sunday peak is 11.15-11.30am

**Figure 5: Average audience daypart curve across the week, Asian Network (Q4 2024)**



Source: RAJAR 12-month weighting - 2024 to ensure robustness

#### 2.4.1.2 Newsbeat bulletins

Ofcom's news consumption survey shows us that with younger adults are far more likely to consume news from online sources rather than on radio.<sup>9</sup> Despite this news consumption is popular with the Asian Network audience with an average weekly reach of 79% of all adult Asian Network listeners in Q4 2024, and 82% of listeners aged 15 - 34. Our analysis found that listening across the various news programming on Asian Network remained stable year-on-year. See a breakdown of the performance of news and current affairs programming on Asian Network in Q4 2024:

<sup>9</sup> [News consumption survey 2024](#), Ofcom

**Figure 6: Asian Network news and current affairs programming performance (Q4 2024)**

Programme	Reach (000s)	Reach (%)	YoY Difference (000s)	YoY Difference (%)
<b>News Bulletin (Mon-Fri)</b>	699	1.2	142	0.1
<b>News Bulletin (Mon-Thurs)</b>	369	0.6	64	0
<b>News Bulletin (Sat-Sun)</b>	549	0.1	187	0.2
<b>Newsbeat</b>	85	0.1	22	0
<b>Ankur Desai</b>	186	0.3	42	0.1
<b>Ankur Desai – 60 minutes</b>	4	0	0	0
<b>Asian Network News Presents</b>	11	0	-7	0

Source: RAJAR Q4 2024.

With the younger base of Asian Network listeners, it is important that we maintain a steady news offer that delivers news to audiences strategically. Meeting the mood and needs of modern listeners and building retention for the network.

Asian Network will continue to broadcast news bulletins throughout the week under our new proposal, this includes two additional Newsbeats simulcast Mon-Fridays, 12.45am to 1pm and 5.45pm to 6pm (currently Newsbeat is only broadcast on Asian Network on a Friday). Increasing the news available from 151 to 167 minutes across the week.

#### 2.4.1.3 Standalone current affairs programming

We believe there is greater value in investing in high-quality and impactful standalone content that has greater audience reach and potential. This will include scope for investigative reporting through standalone content pieces, requiring long-term planning and investment not currently offered within the standard Asian Network *Newsbeat*.

We will continue to seek standout speech and documentary content that resonates with British Asian audiences and commission special programming around key cultural moments and major religious festivals. Some examples include *All Day Diwali* (November 2023) and *Not Even Water*, a guide to Ramadan (three series to date, most recently in 2023). Other examples include 2023's *Bloodlines*, a collaboration with BBC Sounds and CBC (Canada), which followed a grandad's search for a lost boy from London to Syria, and won three prizes at the New York Radio Festival Awards in April 2024; and *Luton Town: No Place Like Home*, where Ankur Desai explored the impact of the team's promotion to the Premier League in his hometown.

These specials aim to deepen the connection with Asian Network and enhance the inclusion and representation of British Asian communities, while also attracting new

audiences beyond the station's typical demographic. Our coverage of major cultural events has shown performance spikes on Asian Network demonstrating the value of curated programming and specials.

We will promote these specials throughout the year including via the new Asian Network talk show. Although not part of the weekly schedule, we estimate these specials will add 10 to 20 hours of current affairs / topical speech programming annually.

#### *2.4.2 Public purpose 3: Delivering creative, high-quality, distinctive British content for British Asian audiences*

Asian Network remains distinctive for British Asian audiences, who see it as unique in the UK radio space.<sup>10</sup> Reducing news and current affairs hours will allow further investment in delivering more distinctive content, whether through new music or high-impact speech content.

In particular, we consider that in order to meet audience demand for creative, high-quality and distinctive content, we need to offer more continuous music from new, UK-based British Asian artists in key slots to reach audiences. For Asian Network, it has become imperative that it continues to deliver a strong, unique and distinctive brand of music which audiences can connect with, in order to respond to changes in younger audiences' music consumption habits (since 2018 listening to live radio as a share of audio hours for 15-34s has declined 7 percentage points, while on-demand music has grown 9 percentage points).

To meet this demand for high-quality and distinctive music, Asian Network will introduce a new music show from 3pm to 5.45pm (filling the slot currently occupied by the *Ankur Desai* show). This new show will feature new British Asian music and provide opportunities for UK talent, similar to initiatives like *BBC Introducing*.

The new drivetime music show will feature fresh music across varied genres, introducing diverse talent to UK audiences and exposing listeners to unique Asian music content not typically found on other UK pop networks. This distinctiveness will generate greater value for audiences and provide a platform for British Asian talent in the UK audio production and music industries. The show will also allow for a creative focus on arts and entertainment, hosting festivals and events like the Halal Food Festival and the Indian Film Festival.

Our research shows that listeners have low awareness of Asian Network's content and its availability on BBC Sounds. We hope the new music show will increase exposure of Asian Network's wide range of genres, both live and on-demand, and boost existing music programming including:

- *The Official British Asian Music Chart*: a 60-minute broadcast on Thursday evening in which we showcase the biggest songs each week from British Asian artists. This complements our general *Asian Music Chart* show which is broadcast every Friday; and

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<sup>10</sup> BBC Radio Brand Research 2022. Unique top attribute for 16-64 audiences and third attribute amongst 16-44 Asians (behind being friendly and being diverse).

- *BBC Introducing on the Asian Network*: A weekly show supporting unsigned and under-the-radar British Asian artists.

#### 2.4.3 *Public purpose 4: Generating significant cultural and societal value for ethnic communities*

To fulfil our fourth public purpose, the BBC has to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom's nations and regions. Asian Network fulfils a specific role in reflecting, representing and serving the South Asian community in the UK. The station offers representation for a minority community and promotes cultural inclusion for all audiences across the UK.

Our Annual Plan 2024/25 commits to reflecting pressing issues affecting British Asians and sharing relevant content via social media. This includes the launch of *One More Chai*, an irreverent weekly chat show that began in April 2024, combining candid discussion and debate on trending stories among young British Asians.

#### 2.4.4 *Public purpose 4: Supporting the UK creative economy and out of London production*

As noted in our Annual Plan 2025/26, this year will see the complete relocation of BBC Asian Network to Birmingham with the intention of all regular programmes being produced in the city by the end of March 2025.<sup>11</sup> With the station based in Birmingham, Asian Network also plans to deliver more 'local' musical talent where possible, increasing further opportunities for talent to flourish on Asian Network – much like we have been doing with initiatives such as *Asian Network Certified* and *BBC Introducing*. This will ensure our music offer continues to reflect the diverse nature of the UK.

Asian Network will continue to offer opportunities for diverse British Asian talent from across the UK and provide opportunities to the UK independent audio sector for content that is tailor made for British Asian audiences.

Our new music and speech products will offer grassroots pathways for British Asian talent who may otherwise be overlooked on other networks. This is particularly true for conversational speech content. Through our new evening news and current affairs programming, we will provide talent with opportunities to develop additional skills in debating or reporting, as well as putting together packages for topical discussions and news.

We know the independent production sector wants to work more with Asian Network on speech content. We believe there is an opportunity to meet this untapped demand, work more with independent producers and also take advantage of out of London productions. For example, we plan to supply the new Asian Network talk show via tender and it will be open to BBC News, local BBC or the independent sector. The programme will be based in the Midlands and will be an opportunity to leverage local BBC outlets, community radio and independent production companies. The bespoke and high-impact news segments and standalone programmes mentioned above would also be delivered

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<sup>11</sup> [Annual Plan 2025/26](#), BBC, p.41

via open tender. The standalone bespoke specials mentioned previously would also be commissioned through tender and be open to indies.

## **2.5 Impact on market competitors**

Asian Network is unique as the only UK radio station for British Asian audiences that prominently features new British Asian music and provides standalone news and current affairs programming relevant to them. It hosts diverse talent and features prominent Asian and non-Asian guests.

The station has an average weekly reach of 644k listeners aged 15+ (Q2 2024), representing 1.1% of total radio reach. Additionally, in Q2 2024, 319k adult listeners tuned in exclusively to Asian Network accounting for 50% of its listenership.<sup>12</sup>

### *2.5.1 Other UK radio stations targeting South Asian audiences*

In the UK, there are five major commercial radio stations targeting Asian audiences that are part of two groups: Sunrise Radio and Lyca Radio.

Sunrise Radio is a 24-hour station focusing on entertainment, music and news from India, broadcasting across the UK via AM, DAB and online. It has bases in the North and South of England and has recently launched Sunrise Smooth in London. In Q2 2024, Sunrise Radio had a combined weekly reach of 359k listeners. The station primarily plays Bollywood music and does not feature *BBC Introducing*-type content or standalone news and current affairs programmes. Special events are marked through music programming rather than bespoke speech content. In Q2 2024, the average listener age was 42 for Sunrise Radio with 14% of Asian Network's weekly listeners who also tuned into Sunrise Radio.

Lyca Radio, serving London audiences, broadcasts predominantly Bollywood music and entertainment news. In Q2 2024, it reached 114k weekly listeners. It has a single hour of standalone programming for news and current affairs, with the rest of the schedule featuring news and entertainment bulletins. Lyca Gold, also London-based, reached 83k weekly listeners in Q2 2024. It focuses on popular and classic Bollywood songs with a daily gossip show and news bulletin, but no standalone news and current affairs programmes. In 2023, Lyca expanded to Greater Manchester by acquiring Asian Sounds Radio, which was rebranded to Lyca Radio – Greater Manchester in April 2024. This station covers the North West region and features a mix of Bollywood, Lollywood and British Asian music. In Q2 2024, the average listener age was 43 for Lyca Radio and 42 for Lyca Gold with 18% of Asian Network's weekly listeners who also listened to Lyca Radio or Lyca Gold.

### *2.5.2 Assessment of impact*

We do not believe the changes to Asian Network's schedule will significantly impact other stations. Sunrise Radio, Lyca Radio and Lyca Gold focus on Bollywood music and do not feature new British Asian artists or standalone news and current affairs programming like the proposed Asian Network talk show or *1Xtra Talks*.

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<sup>12</sup> RAJAR (6-month weighting)

Asian Network uniquely offers music from British Asian artists and bespoke news and current affairs content. It already provides more news than other stations targeting British Asian audiences and we do not expect the reduction to affect competition. The station's distinct music offering also minimizes any residual impact on listening between these stations. Asian Network's broader geographical coverage and younger audience demographics further differentiate it.

The proposed changes are considered business-as-usual scheduling decisions and genre mix adjustments that do not materially alter the station's character, thus not requiring a further materiality assessment.

## **2.6 Amending the Operating Licence**

We request that Ofcom amends the Operating Licence to reduce the news and current affairs quota for Asian Network from 1,224 hours per year to 675 hours per year.

As with our other networks, we publish our performance against the requirements set out in the Charter and Agreement in our Annual Report and Accounts (ARA), as well as our supplementary Delivering Our Mission and Public Purposes (DOMAPP) report. We continuously measure the performance of our networks based on audience engagement, listening and feedback.

We will review quarterly RAJAR releases to inform us about the linear radio performance, alongside our ability to understand how audiences are coming to Asian Network via BBC Sounds using our own digital data.



## 3. Radio Foyle

### 3.1 Introduction

BBC Radio Foyle is an opt of BBC Radio Ulster that serves the needs of audiences in the north west of Northern Ireland. Its locality-specific output complements the wider Radio Ulster schedule and combines news, music and community-based programming.

In May 2023, Radio Foyle replaced its two-hour breakfast show with a new thirty-minute breakfast-time news programme, *North West Today*, with an editorial focus on stories from and/or about its Total Survey Area (TSA). The programme's duration was extended to one hour each weekday morning in January 2024, reflecting development work by the BBC team involved and in response to listener feedback.

The Operating Licence condition 4.66.2 currently requires the BBC to produce 1,043 hours of news and current affairs programming, including repeats, on Radio Foyle each year. The shorter duration of *North West Today* and the reprioritisation of news gathering efforts and resource to facilitate an enhanced news presence for Foyle-related stories on the BBC's digital news platforms means that the quota is no longer achievable. Therefore, our request to Ofcom is to reduce this linear radio news and current affairs quota to 710 hours for each financial year.

Below we highlight the current provision, provide further information about the editorial and operational context for the changes to Radio Foyle's programming, detail the intended benefits for BBC audiences and state our request to change the quota.

### 3.2 Background

In the current Operating Licence, Radio Foyle has two quotas regarding news and current affairs.

Condition 4.66.3 requires us to provide regular news bulletins at frequent intervals throughout the day on Radio Foyle. We have successfully met this condition for 2023/24, delivering a headline summary on the half hour on Radio Foyle and regular news bulletins hourly. Since its inception, we have broadcast news bulletin opts on Radio Foyle and for several years we have broadcast these bulletins on weekdays.

Condition 4.66.2 requires us to ensure that in each financial year 1,043 hours are allocated to news and current affairs programming on Radio Foyle. Prior to 2023/24, this requirement (then condition 2.95.2) was set as a weekly quota of 20 hours per week. In the new Operating Licence published in March 2023, Ofcom set this requirement on an annual basis.

We announced our savings and reinvestment plans for BBC Northern Ireland in November 2022 with a focus to spend more on BBC Northern Ireland's digital and online services.<sup>13</sup> This included amalgamating all news journalists working in BBC Radio Foyle under one North West Bureau; planning and commissioning news stories on a multi-

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<sup>13</sup> [BBC NI job cuts: BBC Northern Ireland to lose 36 posts](#), BBC News, 29 November 2022.

platform basis; and developing our journalists in the North West Bureau in order to provide for all platforms.

In addition to these changes, we planned to replace Radio Foyle's two-hour breakfast show with a new thirty-minute news programme, *North West Today*. *North West Today's* reporting is more locally-specific, reflecting the needs, stories and concerns of people living within its TSA. These changes were implemented in May 2023.<sup>14</sup>

We explained the background to these changes and their specifics in our engagement with staff, stakeholders and BBC audiences from late November 2022 onwards. This included public conversations with Ofcom in early 2023 prior to the new programme being broadcast. The BBC's then Director of Policy, Clare Sumner, corresponded with Kevin Bakhurst, the then Group Director of Broadcasting and Online Content Group at Ofcom, through published letters.<sup>15</sup>

Despite knowing the changes would have an impact on our news and current affairs output on BBC Foyle, we failed to make a formal request for Radio Foyle's news and current affairs quota to be amended prior to the commencement of the thirty-minute *North West Today* and our more developed focus on digital newsgathering and output in BBC Foyle.

As noted above, in January 2024, *North West Today's* duration was extended, reflecting our ability to combine it with additional digital news output from and/or about north west Northern Ireland (including for the BBC's region-wide audiences) and within available resources.<sup>16</sup>

However, as a result of these changes, the administrative error and internal miscommunication, we were not able to meet the quota in 2023/24, delivering 651 hours of news and current affairs as set out in our Annual Report for 2023/24.<sup>17</sup> We regret this mistake and have apologised.

### **3.3 Audience impact of the changes to Radio Foyle and BBC News Northern Ireland**

Monitoring the performance of Radio Foyle is difficult due to the size of the station and limitation in the data available. Unlike our other radio stations, we are unable to use RAJAR data reliably for Radio Foyle, this is due to the small sample size available in the TSA.<sup>18</sup> We generally assess performance at the combined level of Radio Ulster and Radio Foyle combined. Combined reach of 454k in Q4 2024 down about 60k since Q4 2021. The average age for the stations is 59.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [BBC Radio Foyle Breakfast Show bows out on Teenage Kicks](#), BBC News, 21 April 2023.

<sup>15</sup> [Letter from Ofcom to the BBC](#), 24 February 2023 and [Letter from the BBC to Ofcom](#), 10 March 2023.

<sup>16</sup> [Radio Foyle's extended North West Today to air from Monday](#), BBC News, 11 January 2024.

<sup>17</sup> [BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24](#), BBC, July 2024, p.135.

<sup>18</sup> We have similar limitations with some English Region stations and both BBC Radio Jersey and BBC Radio Guernsey that sit within small TSAs.

<sup>19</sup> BBC Analysis of RAJAR Q4 2021 to Q4 2024

Through BBC Sounds we can gain additional insight but recognise that this reflects only a portion of those listening to the service. Radio Ulster and Radio Foyle generally attract and older audience as part of BBC Sounds.

Since the changes we have seen performance BBC Foyle fall in relation to BBC Ulster. This is against a back-drop of declining radio audiences. We consider Foyle's performance is consistent with this general trend. In 2022, the requests to play Radio Foyle on Sounds accounted for 4% of the 17.3m requests made for Radio Ulster/Foyle. In 2024, this fell to 2.7%. Of those requests, 17% of were made for *North West Today* (compared to 22% of total Radio Foyle requests in 2022).<sup>20</sup> Majority of the requests are made by audience members 55+.<sup>21</sup>

The changes to Radio Foyle were in part to support modernisation of the BBC Northern Ireland Newsroom. These changes have been successful. We have seen up take on the digital offer from Radio Foyle as we have made more content available. In 2024/25, the total number of Foyle stories published has increased to 449 (8% increase from 2023/24 and 15% increase from 2022/23). This coincided with a rise in average weekly traffic to 217k (up from 178k in 2023/24 and 160k in 2022/23). These year-on-year trends are generally in line with those seen for BBC News Northern Ireland overall with average weekly traffic increasing by over 350k since 2023/24. In addition, the proportion of Foyle stories published to Northern Ireland stories and the average Foyle weekly traffic as portion of all Northern Ireland average weekly traffic have slightly increased. This indicates that our strategy to convert broadcast to digital is working in BBC Foyle and, by extension, BBC Northern Ireland.

These changes have also benefitted audiences listening to our breakfast programme on Radio Foyle. On average, we broadcast 1.1 more local stories per hour on *North West Today* than we did on *Breakfast on Foyle*. We also broadcast more stories overall on *North West Today* (1.4 than total stories on *Breakfast on Foyle*).<sup>22</sup>

### **3.4 Impact on market competitors**

We do not consider there has been any impact on competition since we made the changes to the service.

### **3.5 The Operating Licence condition needs to be amended to reflect the current news and current affairs output on Foyle**

The changes to Radio Foyle, in line with changes across our newsrooms, were about a rebalancing of available staff and financial resource with a view to delivering a service that is locally-focused, high-quality and widely accessible including on new platforms. As a result, it is no longer possible for Radio Foyle to meet the existing quota of 1,043 hours of news and current affairs each year. A change to the quota to 710 hours is therefore

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<sup>20</sup> Analysis of BBC Sounds data.

<sup>21</sup> About 60% of our active BBC Sounds accounts accessing Radio Foyle are 55+.

<sup>22</sup> Analysis of OpenMedia data. This data compares stories broadcast on *Breakfast on Foyle* from January to March 2023 to stories broadcast on *North West Today* from January to March 2025.

required to meet the current levels of output and reflect the expectations set in our public communications in 2022 and 2023.

The reduction in news and current affairs hours primarily affected audiences in the Foyle TSA. However, their needs continue to be met through *North West Today* and related news programming from the BBC's Foyle newsroom, including on digital platforms. All this output is complemented by the BBC's region-wide news programmes and services. It now benefits from being integrated within BBC News Northern Ireland – something that provides editorial and operational benefits. Our Foyle-focused news and current affairs programming remains significant and locally relevant. Its digital presence has been enhanced, reflecting the new ways in which audiences are consuming BBC content. We continue to invest in the bureau's capabilities in this area, seeking always to maximise the impact, reach and relevance of our news programming and the efficiency of the service that we provide.

### **3.6 Amending the Operating Licence**

We request Ofcom amend the Operating Licence condition by reducing the number of hours of news and current affairs programming we provide on Radio Foyle. While Foyle broadcast only 651 hours of news and current affairs in 2023/24, given our decision to extend *North West Today* in January 2024, we consider that the appropriate level of the quota should be 710 hours per year of news and current affairs on Radio Foyle.

We continue to monitor the performance of these changes, Radio Foyle and our digital news using the normal BBC reporting mechanisms, i.e. Telescope for digital news performance, RAJAR for radio broadcasts and Weekly Active Accounts on Sounds.