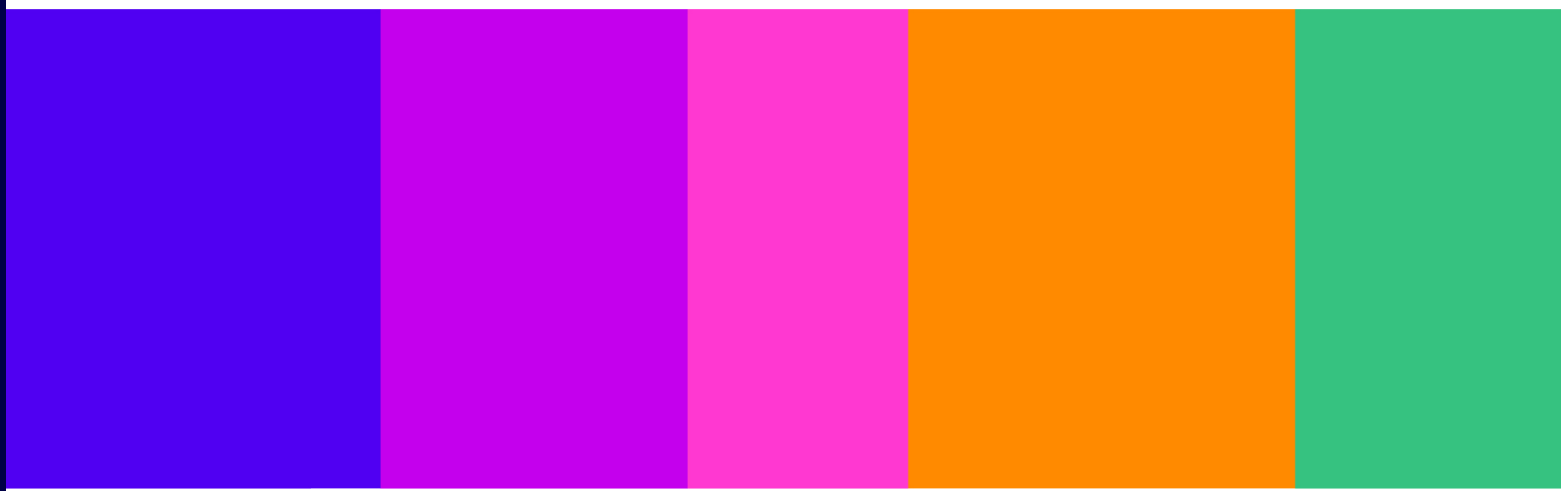


Review of the BBC's materiality assessment of proposed 6 Music additional stream

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1. Overview

- 1.1 We have reviewed the materiality assessment provided to us by the BBC on 10 March 2026 in relation to its proposals to launch a new music stream on BBC Sounds.

Summary of the BBC's proposals

- 1.2 The BBC is proposing to launch a new 6 Music additional stream on BBC Sounds in summer 2026.
- 1.3 The BBC has concluded that the new music stream it is proposing to launch is not a material change.

Summary of our decision

- 1.4 We have reviewed the BBC's assessment alongside other information supplied to us by the BBC and other stakeholders. We have also met with stakeholders during the course of our review.
- 1.5 Following our review, we agree with the BBC that the proposals are not new UK Public Services, but constitute changes to BBC Online, an existing UK Public Service.
- 1.6 We do not consider the change may have a significant adverse impact on fair and effective competition. Accordingly, we do not consider the change to be material and therefore are not requiring the BBC to carry out a Public Interest Test.

2. Background

Regulatory framework

- 2.1 Under the BBC Framework Agreement ('the Agreement'), the BBC is responsible for assessing whether proposed changes to its Public Services are 'material' (which it often does through a materiality assessment, or 'MA'). A change is material if the BBC is launching a new UK Public Service, or making a change to an existing service that may have a significant adverse impact on fair and effective competition.¹
- 2.2 Where a change is material, the BBC conducts an assessment of whether competition impacts are justified by the public value (a public interest test, or 'PIT'). Under the Agreement, Ofcom is required to review and approve all material changes to BBC services before they are implemented.² While the Agreement does not set out a specific process for Ofcom to review the findings of materiality assessments where the BBC has found that a change is not material, in practice the BBC sends its materiality assessment to Ofcom for review. If after reviewing the BBC's assessment we disagree with the BBC that the proposed change is not material, we have the power to step in and direct the BBC to conduct a PIT.³

Market context

- 2.3 There are a number of broadcast radio services within the UK, primarily operated by the BBC, commercial radio groups and some smaller independent providers. The BBC has ten UK-wide stations offering a mix of music and speech-based radio. Supplementing this are BBC stations specific to each nation and local region across England, as well as online-only streams and the BBC World Service.
- 2.4 BBC radio accounts for 42.8% of all weekly listening hours to live radio on any platform while commercial radio holds 55.2%. The two largest commercial radio groups are Global and Bauer Media. Global owns and operates brands including Capital, Heart, Smooth, LBC and Radio X, while Bauer owns and operates brands including Absolute Radio, KISS, Magic, Hits Radio and Greatest Hits Radio. Together Global and Bauer account for 44.8% of all radio listening time and 81.0% of all commercial radio listening.⁴
- 2.5 There are some smaller commercial groups operating across the UK, such as Nation Broadcasting and News Broadcasting (part of News UK), which owns and operates brands such as talkSPORT and Virgin Radio UK. There are also some smaller independent radio stations operating across the UK, including Boom Radio, Fun Kids and GB News.

¹ [Clause 7\(7\) of the Agreement](#). In December 2025, following its Mid-Term review of the BBC, the Government updated the Agreement to remove 'the carrying out of any activity as a new UK Public Service' as the automatic trigger for a material change. Instead, a change will be material only where it may have a significant adverse impact on fair and effective competition. The changes to the Agreement will take effect from June 2026.

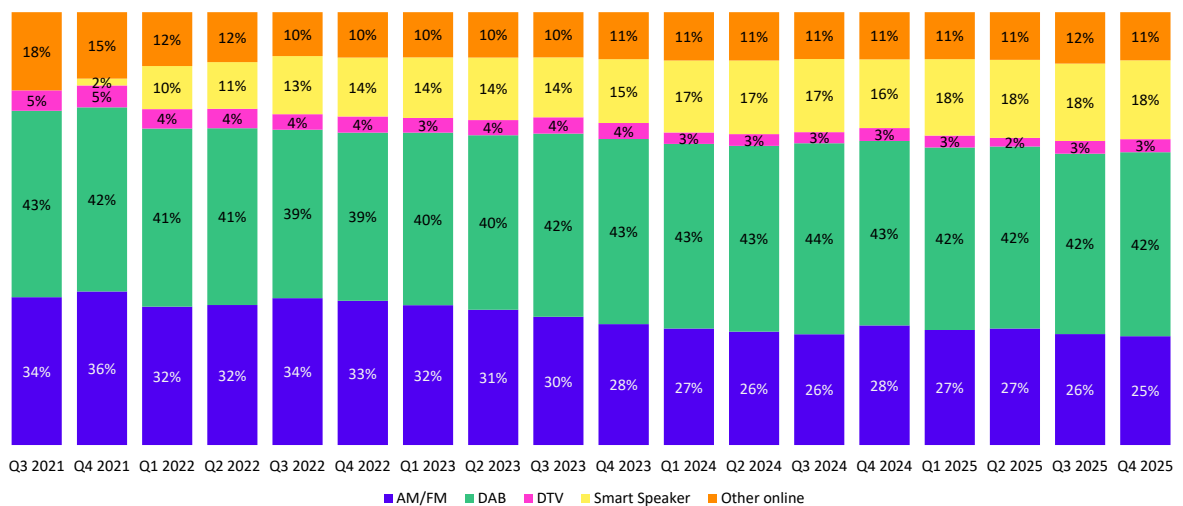
² [Clause 9\(1\) of the Agreement](#)

³ [Clause 9\(6\) of the Agreement](#)

⁴ RAJAR Q4 2025

- 2.6 All these radio services are also available online via smart speakers, aggregator websites and apps such as Radioplayer, and proprietary websites and apps i.e. BBC Sounds, Global Player and Rayo for Bauer stations.
- 2.7 Our November 2021 statement [Market position of BBC Sounds](#) placed BBC Sounds in the context of the wider audio market. Two key trends we highlighted in this market were the growth of global streaming platforms, which use advertising and subscription models to generate revenue, and the steady increase in online listening. Online radio listening was growing, but not at the same rate as other online audio activities.
- 2.8 The UK radio industry continues to face challenge from global online streaming services. Data collected as part of the IPA TouchPoints survey suggests that average time spent listening to audio each week increased marginally between 2022 and 2025. However, there are differences depending on audio type with time spent listening to the radio through a radio set decreasing while listening online has increased (though online radio listening does not make up for the loss in listening through a radio set). Time spent listening to music streaming services and podcasts have both increased. In 2022, radio accounted for 63% of audio listening each week and in 2025 this was down to 56%, while the amount of time spent listening to music streaming services increased from 19% to 24% over the same period.
- 2.9 Radio listening behaviours have continued to evolve in recent years. Digital radio (DAB) still accounts for more listening than analogue radio (AM/FM) and online listening respectively. However, online listening has been steadily increasing over the last few years and in Q1 2024 it accounted for a greater proportion of listening hours than AM/FM for the first time.

Figure 1: Radio listening by platform: Q3 2021 to Q4 2025

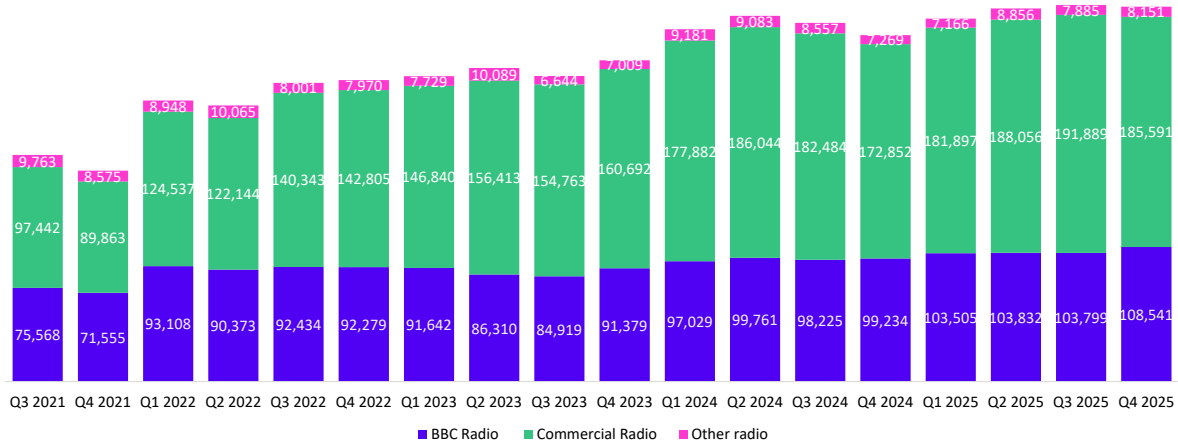


Source: RAJAR. DTV refers to listening through a digital television set.

- 2.10 The growth in online radio listening has been largely driven by commercial radio, primarily due to its expansion of portfolios and availability of services online, which has grown its share of online listening from 53% in Q4 2021 to 61% in Q4 2025. Live listening to BBC radio online has also increased over this period, but not at the same rate as commercial radio (an increase of 44% compared to 90%), hence the drop in its share of online radio listening. In that same period, overall time spent listening to BBC 6 Music has seen a 7% fall in weekly hours. However, this is primarily driven by a 16% fall in listening through DAB (50.4k hours each

week to 42.1k) with a 37% increase seen in listening online (20.2k hours each week to 27.7k hours).⁵

Figure 2: Online radio listening hours by sector: Q3 2021 to Q4 2025



Source: RAJAR

The BBC's proposals

Launch of new BBC Sounds stream

2.11 The BBC proposes to launch a new 24-hour, dedicated music stream on BBC Sounds as an extension of Radio 6 Music. The stream would focus on indie rock and pop music from the 1980s–2010s as well as new grassroots indie music. The BBC says the stream would target younger (25–45) and C2DE audiences, who are currently underserved by 6 Music. The BBC also says it currently has no plans to include news output on the proposed stream because it does not believe it would match the experience it wants to deliver for the target audience as a genre-pure and focused destination.

2.12 The 6 Music additional stream would offer:

- New pre-recorded music programmes, including shows featuring emerging talent.
- BBC archive content, including programmes such as In Their Own Words and the 6 Music Artist Collection.
- Simulcasts of Radio 6 Music, including 6 Music's weekly Indie Forever programme.
- Limited repeats of Radio 6 Music programming.

2.13 The BBC is of the view that the proposed launch of the stream on BBC Sounds is neither a new UK Public Service nor a change that may be expected to have a significant adverse impact on fair and effective competition.

2.14 It therefore considers that it is not material.

⁵ RAJAR

3. Our review and conclusions

- 3.1 We discuss below our views on (i) whether the stream is a new UK Public Service; and (ii) whether the proposed streams may have a significant adverse impact on fair and effective competition.

Whether the stream is a new UK Public Service

- 3.2 We agree with the BBC's conclusion that the proposed stream on Sounds is not a new UK Public Service. The Administrative Court judgment in *R (Radiocentre Ltd) v Ofcom and the BBC (as Interested Party)* confirmed that new streams on Sounds are changes to the existing BBC Online UK Public Service.⁶

Whether the stream may have a significant adverse impact on fair and effective competition

- 3.3 As a large, publicly-funded organisation which operates across the television, radio and online sectors in the UK, changes made by the BBC to its audio services could have an impact on the degree of competition in the audio sector. This impact could be negative as the launch of a new stream could crowd out other commercial operators by reducing their ability to generate revenue and invest in their services (or launch new services), thereby reducing the overall choice, quality and range of content available for consumers.⁷
- 3.4 In April 2023 we published a statement providing a view on the BBC's position in the audio sector, and how we are likely to approach our consideration of the competition impacts. In that document, we said that "changes that are limited to BBC Sounds are likely to pose a low risk of crowding out to domestic commercial providers."⁸ We restated this position in our Annual Report on the BBC last year.⁹
- 3.5 In 2024, the BBC proposed to launch three new music streams on BBC Sounds. These Sounds-only streams were extensions of three of its current music networks BBC Radio 1, BBC Radio 2 and BBC Radio 3. The proposed content of the new streams was:
- additional Radio 1 extension, focussing on music supported by Radio 1 over the last two decades;
 - a Radio 2 extension, focussing on pop nostalgia; and
 - a Radio 3 extension, focussing on classical music.
- 3.6 We did not consider that the Radio 1 extension or Radio 3 extension, individually or cumulatively, could have a significant adverse impact on fair and effective competition. This is because the competitor stations to these extensions belong to large commercial groups who generate revenue across their entire portfolio of stations and these extensions lead to a low

⁶ [2023] EWHC 1977 (Admin).

⁷ In some extreme cases, this could also lead to commercial operators ceasing to provide services, thereby further undermining choice and plurality within the audio sector.

⁸ Ofcom, [How Ofcom regulates the BBC's impact on competition – Changes to guidance and requirements](#), April 2023, p. 54.

⁹ Ofcom, [Ofcom's Annual Report on the BBC 2024-25](#) p. 63

loss in listening / revenue across the portfolio.¹⁰ In addition, we also noted that commercial operators generate a lower proportion of revenue from online listening and that listening to existing online streams on BBC has been low.

- 3.7 We considered that the launch of the Radio 2 extension could have a significant impact on competition and therefore represented a material change. We did not consider that this proposal could have a significant impact on the large commercial groups, but that it could have a significant impact on the independent radio station Boom Radio due to similarity of content and the inability of Boom Radio to rely on a wider portfolio of stations.

BBC's approach for 6 Music additional stream

- 3.8 The BBC has conducted its own assessment of the potential impact of the 6 Music additional stream on fair and effective competition. For this, the BBC has focused its assessment on the potential for the 6 Music additional stream to crowd out commercial operators. This impact will depend on how many additional listening hours the new stream could generate and how much listening / revenue would be lost by commercial radio operators.

- 3.9 The BBC has adopted a similar methodology to what it has used in previous assessments (especially its methodology for the proposed launch of 4 DAB+ music stations in 2025) and incorporated elements of our approach in the Audio BBC Competition Assessment (BCA).¹¹ In summary, the BBC's approach is to:

- Estimate average listening hours per week for the 6 Music additional stream¹²;
- Define a list of competitor stations that could be affected by the 6 Music additional stream¹³;
- Estimate the potential listening that would be diverted away from each commercial station and the amount that could be cannibalised from Radio 6 Music¹⁴;
- Estimate the loss of listening for each station and total listening / revenue loss for each operator across its portfolio; and
- Conduct some further sensitivity testing to cross check their results.¹⁵

- 3.10 Using this methodology, the BBC estimates the new 6 Music additional stream could generate around **1.4 million weekly online listening hours** in 2026, compared with 10.2 million for Radio 6 Music.¹⁶ The BBC then estimates that the loss of listening for each group of competitor stations from each commercial brand would be between **1.47% and 2.55%**, and the loss of revenue (or listening) of each commercial radio operator (Global, Bauer and News

¹⁰ We assumed a 1:1 ratio when translating listening losses into revenue.

¹¹ [Ofcom, July 2025, Proposed new BBC DAB+ radio stations and proposed changes to Radio 5 Sports Extra, Final determinations.](#)

¹² The BBC estimated listening by applying an average of the online parent extension ratios from two comparator cases (Absolute Radio 90s / Absolute Radio and Radio X 90s Group / Radio X – 13% in 2025) to Radio 6 Music online listening hours.

¹³ These are mainly stations that belong to Bauer (Absolute Radio, Absolute Radio 90s, Absolute Radio 00s, Absolute Radio 10s), Global (Radio X, Radio X 90s, Radio X 00s and Radio X Chilled) and News Broadcasting (Virgin Radio).

¹⁴ The BBC used the online listening shares of Radio 6 Music and each competitor station to estimate how much listening would be cannibalised from Radio 6 Music and how much each commercial station would lose to 6 Music additional stream.

¹⁵ For example, the BBC looked into the existing online listening ratios between Radio 1 Dance / Anthems and Radio 1 to provide an indication on the likely listening that 6 Music additional stream could achieve.

¹⁶ In 2028, according to the BBC, the new stream is expected to generate around 1.5 million weekly online listening hours, compared with 10.9 million for BBC Radio 6 Music.

Broadcasting) would be between **0.1% and 0.25%** in 2026. The BBC therefore considered that the proposed stream would not have a significant impact on fair and effective competition.

Figure 3 – Average weekly listening hours in 2026 for Radio 6 Music and commercial competitors, with and without the new 6 Music additional stream

Competitor brand	Counterfactual	Factual	Hours gain / loss (000)	Hours gain / loss (%)
BBC Radio 6 Music Additional stream	-	1,360	1,360	-
BBC Radio 6 Music	24,544	24,071	-474	-1.97%
Absolute Radio and extensions	20,579	20,251	-327	-1.59%
Radio X and extensions	26,804	26,411	-393	-1.47%
Virgin Radio	6,478	6,312	-165	-2.55%

Our views on the proposed 6 Music additional stream

- 3.11 We have reviewed the BBC’s assessment and information provided to us by stakeholders. As is appropriate at this stage, and in line with our role under the Charter and Agreement, we have conducted a less detailed review than would be required for a BCA. We have reviewed the BBC’s analysis and used this as the starting point for our assessment.
- 3.12 We recognise that the potential impact of this proposal on listening habits is inherently difficult to assess, due to the uncertainties in predicting how listeners will react to the proposed stream. However, we have corrected for inconsistencies in the BBC’s analysis where appropriate, and conducted some further analysis and sensitivity checks to test whether our conclusions would change under different assumptions.¹⁷ These are set out in more detail in Annex 1.
- 3.13 Given this analysis, we agree with the BBC that the impact on fair and effective competition will likely be limited.
- 3.14 We agree that, with the exception of News Broadcasting which is covered below, the stations likely to be affected are those that belong to the two largest commercial groups (Bauer and Global) and we understand that these groups primarily generate revenue based on the number of hours listened across their entire portfolios of stations.¹⁸ We consider that the launch of the 6 Music additional stream would likely lead to a low loss of listening for these groups. We note that the estimated impact on each operator’s wider portfolio is small, and this finding doesn’t change even if we focus on the impact on each group of competitor

¹⁷ We note that the BBC modelled the market impact in 2028, by forecasting listening over time. We focus on the impact using 2026 data because there are market changes that make it difficult to rely on linearly forecasted listening.

¹⁸ To ensure due diligence, using Radiomonitor data, we considered potential music crossover with other stations that do not currently report on RAJAR (e.g. TMM1, Virgin Britpop) and found the crossover was negligible.

stations from each commercial brand; or if we were to use a different set of modelling assumptions (see Figure 6 and 7 in Annex 1).

- 3.15 There are further indications that the impact on commercial operators would likely be lower. Firstly, these results do not account for some diversion that could come from global streamers (such as Spotify and Apple Music). Secondly, these results may overstate listening to an online-only stream (like the 6 Music additional stream) as the BBC estimated listening by using the online listening of a full broadcast radio station (Radio 6 Music), and by applying parent-extension listening ratios derived from comparator stations which are available on DAB/DAB+. This is because we consider that an online-only stream (like the 6 Music additional stream) would unlikely benefit from the additional prominence and listening that full time broadcast radio stations could achieve.
- 3.16 We also agree that Virgin Radio, owned by News Broadcasting, could be affected by the 6 Music additional stream. [X]
- 3.17 However, we do not think that the 6 Music additional stream would have a significant impact on Virgin Radio for the following reasons:
- The analysis above already captures a greater impact on Virgin Radio due to its higher proportion of online listening compared to other commercial stations. Even under this assumption, we note that the impact on Virgin Radio is not significant (even at the station-level) and this does not fundamentally change under our various sensitivity tests.
 - We consider that the modelled impact will likely be overstated given that the analysis does not account for diversion from global streams and it also does not account for the fact that online-only radio streams may not achieve the same amount of online listening to a station with broadcast radio (see paragraph 3.15 above).
 - [X] We have tested the potential impact by introducing weights based on how similar the demographics of the commercial stations are to the BBC’s proposed target audience for the 6 Music additional stream¹⁹ and this indicates a lower impact on Virgin Radio (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Estimated impact on relevant commercial radio brands with and without age weight

Competitor brand	BBC result	BBC result with corrections ²⁰	Age weighted result
Absolute Radio and extensions	-1.59%	-1.56%	-1.71%
Radio X and extensions	-1.47%	-1.44%	-1.75%
Virgin Radio	-2.55%	-2.38%	-1.40%

- Finally, we note that the Virgin Radio breakfast show (Mon-Fri 06:00-10:00) is the programme that achieves the station’s highest reach. We understand that the BBC is planning to start the flagship show of the proposed 6 Music additional stream, *The Morning Session*, at 10am, which could further reduce the impact on Virgin Radio.

¹⁹ [X]

²⁰ See paragraph A1.2 in annex 1. We make minor corrections to the BBC’s input data from RAJAR.

3.18 In conclusion, on the basis of the evidence available to us, we consider that the launch of the 6 Music additional stream would not be a material change.

A1. Annex 1: Our analytical approach

- A1.1 We have reviewed the BBC’s analysis and made several adjustments to correct for some minor inconsistencies in the BBC’s inputs and conducted some further analysis / sensitivity testing to check if our conclusions would change.
- A1.2 In terms of corrections, we have adjusted the RAJAR listening input data used for BBC 6 Music in every quarter and some competitor stations in a small number of quarters.²¹ This had a minor impact on the model’s results, slightly reducing the estimated market impact of the 6 Music additional stream.
- A1.3 We have also conducted some sensitivity analysis to check whether our overall conclusions would change when some of the inputs and assumptions are altered. Given that the BBC do not find this proposal to be material, we use this sensitivity analysis to test assumptions that would increase the impact on competition. These sensitivities include the following:
- **Higher parent / extension ratio.** The BBC estimated listening by applying a ‘parent / extension ratio’ of 13% to Radio 6 Music online listening hours. This is the average ratio of online listening to comparator extensions relative to the online listening of their parent stations (Absolute Radio 90s / Absolute Radio and Radio X 90s Group / Radio X). The BBC considers 13% to be a conservative estimate based on the parent / extension ratios it has identified for Radio 1 Dance and Radio 1 Anthems (which are similar music-based stations). These extensions obtained 5.7% and 4.9% of listening respectively (compared to their parent Radio 1). The BBC notes that Radio 3 Unwind has achieved much higher listening as a proportion of its parent (43.1%) but does not think this is comparable to the 6 Music additional stream because Radio 3 Unwind offers a wider proposition than a music-based station, and draws in listeners from a broader range of stations. We have also used these parent / extension listening ratios, alongside RAJAR listening to the relevant parent station, to approximate the online listening to these existing BBC extensions. We note that the BBC’s base results are significantly higher than online listening to Radio 1 Dance / Anthems and is somewhat in line with Radio 3 Unwind (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Estimated listening of the 6 Music additional stream vs indicative online listening estimates for other BBC extensions

Extension	Estimated average weekly listening Q3 2025 ('000)
6 Music additional stream (BBC estimate with corrections – 2026)	1327
Radio 1 Dance	620

²¹ The BBC appear to have used a 3-month weighting when analysing RAJAR data for BBC 6 Music, rather than a 6-month weight they applied to competitor stations.

Radio 1 Anthems	533
Radio 3 Unwind	1546

Note: Listening hours for each of the BBC's extensions are not available on RAJAR. Therefore, we have estimated an approximation of the (RAJAR-equivalent) online listening hours by applying the ratio of listening on BBC Sounds between each extension / parent to the parent's online listening in Q3 2025.

In addition to this sense check, we have tested whether our conclusions would change if we assumed an even **higher parent / extension ratio of 22%**. This is the upper limit of the parent / extension ratio from the two comparators that the BBC has chosen (22% for Absolute Radio 90s and 5% for Radio X 90s Group).

- **Higher migration from radio to online.** We recognise that online listening is increasing over time as more listeners are switching from traditional to online sources, which could increase the size of the 6 Music additional stream. We note that the BBC applies a linear forecast based on listening trends over **Q1 2022–Q3 2025**. This implies a compound growth rate of around **0.5%** for online listening to BBC 6 Music for the period Q4 2025–Q3 2028, which could account for some of this migration effect.²² To test the sensitivity of this assumption, we have applied a higher indicative growth rate (around **1.5%**), based on listening trends over a more stable and recent period (**Q1 2023–Q3 2025**), to assess whether our conclusions would change.
- **Lower cannibalisation rate.** The BBC assumed that 35% of listening to its proposed stream would be cannibalised from Radio 6 Music as this matches its share of the relevant market.²³ We tested whether our conclusions would change by using the lowest cannibalisation rate that we adopted in our most recent Audio BCA i.e. **11%**.²⁴

A1.4 Figure 6 and 7 below show the results of these sensitivity tests, both in terms of the impact of the BBC's proposed 6 Music additional stream on the group of competitor stations from each commercial brand, and the commercial operators as a whole. We note that this sensitivity analysis does not materially change the overall picture that the 6 Music additional stream will likely have a limited impact on commercial radio operators.

Figure 6 – Estimated impact on relevant commercial radio brands (2026)

Competitor brand	BBC result with corrections	Higher parent extension ratio	Higher migration	Lower cannibalisation
Absolute Radio and extensions	-1.56%	-2.54%	-1.59%	-2.12%
Radio X and extensions	-1.44%	-2.34%	-1.47%	-1.96%
Virgin Radio	-2.38%	-3.86%	-2.42%	-3.22%

²² This compound growth rate is based on using our amended RAJAR input data.

²³ The relevant market here is Radio 6 Music and stations identified as competitors to the proposed stream.

²⁴ See Figure A7 [Annex 1: Proposed new BBC DAB+ radio stations and proposed changes to Radio 5 Sports Extra](#)

Figure 7 – Estimated impact on commercial operators across their entire portfolio (2026)²⁵

Competitor brand	BBC result with corrections	Higher parent extension ratio	Higher migration	Lower cannibalisation
Bauer	-0.13%	-0.22%	-0.14%	-0.18%
Global	-0.11%	-0.18%	-0.11%	-0.15%
News Broadcasting	-0.24%	-0.39%	-0.24%	-0.32%

²⁵ These portfolio level impacts are derived from the impact on revenue, using publicly available data on each company’s revenue. As a sense check, if we calculate these portfolio-level impacts using listening data only, the impacts on each portfolio differ slightly but remain under 0.5%.