

# **Review of BBC Services for younger audiences – BBC Three, Radio 1 and 1Xtra BBC Trust**

---

## **A response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)**

**December 2008**

### **Introduction**

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Policy Officer, Hannah Dobbin on 020 7278 1041.

## Context

4. Following demand from its young people's forum ENVOY (Enthusiastic National Voice of Youth) to respond to BBC Trust's *Review of BBC services for younger audiences – BBC Three, Radio 1 and 1Xtra*<sup>1</sup>, NCVYS surveyed its membership. 22 people, aged between 15 and 34 years old, responded to an online poll run on the NCVYS website.
5. The broad age range of the consultation, 13 to 34 years old, opened the poll up to many different ages and views. This response details the main findings from the poll.

## Key findings

6. 40% of participants in the poll indicated that the BBC produces higher quality programmes aimed at younger audiences than other broadcasters.
7. 41% of participants in the poll said that they have used the BBC's formal learning resources.
8. 73% of respondents listen to Radio 1.
9. 0% of respondents listen to 1Xtra.
10. 73% of respondents watch BBC Three

## The BBC's public purposes

11. The BBC has a set of 'public purposes' which are the aims that it wants to achieve through its services. The poll asked participants whether they agreed that the BBC is achieving its public purposes:

Public purpose	Percentage of participants who agreed that the BBC is achieving the public purpose
Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK.	77%
Helping to deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications, technologies and services, and in addition, taking a leading role in the switchover to digital television.	41%
Promoting education and learning.	68%
Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities.	72%
Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence.	45%
Sustaining citizenship and civil society.	27%

## Accessibility of programmes for younger audiences

12. Access to services is often a problem for young people, for example the time that services are available or a lack of information about what is on offer. Participants gave mixed feedback about the accessibility of BBC TV and radio programmes that are aimed at younger viewers.
13. Positive comments highlighted BBC Three as having the most entertaining and cultural programmes that appeal to younger audiences. However, BBC Three's programme

<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, further information on the BBC Trust consultation is available via: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/consult/open\\_consultations/younger\\_audiences.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/consult/open_consultations/younger_audiences.html)

schedule starts at 7pm and many people stated that they would like the programmes on BBC Three to start earlier, for example when they get home from school or college. One participant commented that not all people have digital television so programmes on BBC Three are not easily accessible to everyone, although this will change with the digital switchover<sup>2</sup>.

14. Other comments about accessing BBC Three highlighted that many teenagers work in the evenings and weekends so miss out on programmes. In particular, one participant suggested that Switch<sup>3</sup> should be repeated. Another participant thought that there should also be more BBC Three programmes on during the day so that young people could watch them if they have a day off college.
15. Similar thoughts about timing were expressed regarding radio programmes, such as The Surgery<sup>4</sup> on Radio 1, Sunday nights at 22:00. Although young people are interested in the issues that are discussed on The Surgery, it is on too late for them to listen to when they have school or college the next day.
16. One participant commented that a lot of Radio 1 shows target much older audiences, such as the over 30s, rather than catering to the musical and social opinions of people aged 16-26 years old. A 17-year-old respondent felt that there is a void of programmes directed at their age group on the BBC: 'this void needs to be filled with programmes that are aimed at the more intellectual teenager although I can understand the market that has been gone for'.
17. Several participants highlighted the lack of information about when programmes are on. One respondent highlighted that a lot of advertisements are done in newspapers, which young people do not necessarily read. Different modes of advertising were suggested such as adverts for radio shows on the television. One participant stated:

Many programmes for young people seem to be arranged on BBC Three but they aren't particularly well advertised so I often find out that I've missed things that aren't returning because of poor ratings. However, I believe that if they had the same advertising on the mainstream channels of BBC 1 and 2 the ratings would be higher.

18. Technology, such as BBC iplayer and being able to listen to the radio shows again on the internet, was highlighted as being very useful for people to listen to, and catch up with, shows that they had missed:

If I am unable to watch a programme for whatever reason the great tool of the BBC iplayer means I can watch whenever I like. I believe this is useful for young people as you can fit the programmes you want to watch around your lifestyle of going out in the evenings having to do course work etc., and not have the distraction of worrying about missing TV programmes!

However, one participant said that programmes are not kept on iplayer for long enough.

---

<sup>2</sup> Further information on the digital switchover is available via: <http://www.digitaluk.co.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> Further information on Switch is available via: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/switch/>

<sup>4</sup> Further information on The Surgery is available via: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/surgery/>

## The BBC compared to other broadcasters

19. 40% of participants in the poll indicated that the BBC produces higher quality programmes aimed at younger audiences than other broadcasters such as ITV, E4 or Virgin Radio. Participants also felt that the BBC 'somehow has additional credibility' and that the quality of programmes is dramatically higher than those produced by its counterparts. One participant felt that the BBC seems to be more interested in public views, although they are under a greater obligation to due to the TV licence.
20. Only one participant suggested that TV licences should be abolished and views were split between whether it was good that the BBC does not show adverts or not.
21. The poll results suggested that E4 is BBC's biggest competitor in targeting younger audiences, along with Channel 4. The accessibility of programmes on Channel 4 and E4 and the appeal to younger audiences was highlighted by one participant:

Channel 4 has a wider range of programming available to younger people during the day with the use of E4, and programmes such as Friends and Scrubs. I also feel that their new music channel has ensured their place in young peoples television.

22. The 4 on Demand service was rated by one participant as being a better service than BBC's iplayer.
23. ITV was also mentioned as a competitor to the BBC. One participant stated that ITV programmes such as X Factor and Britannia High seem to be targeted more at a younger audience than BBC equivalents such as Strictly Come Dancing.

## The BBC and diversity

24. Responses to the question around the BBC representing and reaching a diverse audience within the 13 to 34 age range were varied giving no majority view. Positive feedback included:
  - the BBC does well to appeal to different musical tastes;
  - the BBC appeals to all audiences;
  - the BBC appeals to younger audiences however it is difficult for it to show that it is giving various social groups a voice; and
  - no groups are neglected but sometimes the representation is quite stereotypical.
25. There were many suggestions for ways in which the BBC could improve the diversity of its services for younger audiences. These included:
  - the younger audience market is often bigger than the media portrays, for example it is wider than teenagers who are interested in pop music and soaps;
  - religion is not really catered for within programmes for younger audiences; and
  - not everything is London or England based! The BBC needs to set programmes in different parts of the UK.
26. Several participants in the poll highlighted specific ages and age groups that the BBC needs to work harder at serving. These included 30 year olds and the age ranges 14 to 17 years old, 15 to 19 years old and 16 to 25 years old. One youth worker commented:

.....there should be more programmes aimed at the 13 to 19 age range offering information about health issues and current affairs to enable young people to make informed choices about issues which affect them.... Current programmes covering these issues are not targeted at young people, instead they are patronised with programmes often presented by people who try to act as they perceive young people would want them to be. Let's start treating young people with a bit more respect.

### The BBC's formal learning resources

27. 41% of participants in the poll said that they have used the BBC's formal learning resources.
28. Of those that have used BBC's learning resources the BBC Bitesize revision website<sup>5</sup> was the most useful resource for young people studying their GCSE's; 'When doing my GCSE's I found BBC Bitesize enormously useful and I know that my entire year at school did too!'. Participants found Bitesize useful for testing basic knowledge and recapping more detailed knowledge.
29. Some participants thought that the BBC resources were not so useful when studying at a higher level than GCSE's or wanted more specific details and information. One participant suggested that it would be good if there was more help with A-levels.
30. Another participant noted that the BBC website is useful as a general knowledge resource.

### Radio 1, 1Xtra and BBC Three

31. 73% of respondents listen to Radio 1.
32. 0% of respondents listen to 1Xtra.
33. 73% of respondents watch BBC Three.
34. The poll asked participants how do they think that Radio 1, 1Xtra and BBC Three contribute to the BBC's task of providing programmes for younger audiences. The overall response was generally positive with participants stating that they believe these services appeal to, and are clearly aimed at, younger audiences. One participant highlighted that these services are particularly good for younger audiences as they have younger presenters and broadcast a lot of comedy. On Radio 1, The Surgery and the Chris Moyles Show were picked out as favourites.
35. However, there were some negative comments. One participant highlighted the Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross incident<sup>6</sup> as a turn-off for younger audiences. Also E4 and Channel 4 were once again highlighted as having better programmes than BBC Three.
36. Participants were then asked if there was anything about Radio 1, 1Xtra and BBC Three that they would change to make them better for younger audiences. Again responses were varied. Comments included:
  - 'Let younger audiences have more of a chance to write, act and direct shows! It's not as simple as just appealing to us, we want to be involved!';

<sup>5</sup> Further information about BBC Bitesize is available via: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/>

<sup>6</sup> Entertainers Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross were suspended by the BBC after making offensive phone calls to actor Andrew Sachs: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/7696714.stm>

- 'Lots. But that's your [the BBC's] job.';
- start BBC Three earlier;
- more docu-soaps;
- the BBC should possibly consult younger audiences more often about what they want; and
- 'Radio 1 needs to recruit fresh djs, rather than middle-aged white men talking of urban music'.

37. One participant highlighted that:

The language used in the news is patronising, we are young, not idiots. I want to hear more about what is going on, seeing as how soon I will be able to vote on who controls my country.

38. Another participant commented on the diversity of services that need to be offered to younger audiences suggesting that there should be more cross-over between services. For example some programmes on Radio 2 or 4 might be of interest to young people but they never hear about them. This ties into comments made earlier about information given to younger audiences about what services and programmes area available.

### **The media portrayal of young people**

39. Although the BBC Trust's consultation on services for younger audiences did not cover the BBC's portrayal of young people on the radio or television, NCVYS asked its members to comment as this has been an important issue for many young people recently and a key campaign issue among many voluntary and community youth sector organisations.

40. As with the other questions in the poll, responses were varied and it is difficult to summarise one particular view. However, there was a strong over-arching feeling that the media as a whole, not just the BBC, mainly represents young people negatively, focussing on the bad behaviour of the minority, not the good behaviour of the majority of young people. There was also a sense that the media does not respect young people enough.

41. There were good comments about the BBC in particular, with some participants feeling that the BBC fairly portrays young people and shows young people in a good light. One participant commented that the BBC 'as a corporation [is] invaluable to our society'. Some respondents recognised the difficulties in effectively representing such a wide-ranging and diverse group as young people, but given BBC services as a whole, one participant felt that the BBC did well in its coverage of young people. One participant picked out Radio 1 in particular as being varied and exciting for young people.

42. Other participants thought that the BBC perpetuates the stereotypes of teenagers as being in gangs and involved with knife crime and drugs. Some also thought that the BBC follows the rest of the media in portraying young people negatively and as 'hoodies'. Soaps and dramas were highlighted by one participant as stereotypically portraying young people as 'youths'.

43. Participants also recognised the opportunity for the BBC to lead the way in the positive portrayal of young people. For example the BBC could get young people more involved in the writing, production and presenting of programmes or run workshops for young people to learn about the industry. The BBC could also offer more opportunities for young people to directly get involved, work in and shape the media industry. There are many examples of positive participation of young people, for example youth theatres and air cadets, that the BBC could focus on, promoting the positive role that young people can and do play in society today. The BBC has the ability to let young people speak for themselves and be heard.