

*"Working for quality  
and diversity in  
British broadcasting"*



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## **Response from Voice of the Listener & Viewer to the BBC Trust's BBC Children's Services Review**

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## Response from Voice of the Listener & Viewer to the BBC Trust's BBC Children's Services Review

*Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) is an independent, non-profit-making association, free from political, commercial and sectarian affiliations, working for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. VLV represents the interests of listeners and viewers as citizens and consumers across the full range of broadcasting issues. VLV is concerned with the structures, regulation, funding and institutions that underpin the British broadcasting system.*

VLV welcomes the opportunity to respond once again to the BBC Trust's Service Review of BBC Children's Services and Content.

### SUMMARY

BBC services for children- especially television - stand out from the content shown on other broadcasters because:

- They broadcast high proportions of domestic content – between 70 and 80% of transmissions
- They broadcast a greater variety of live action formats and different genres including much less animation than their rivals (less than 30%)
- They broadcast a greater range of content in terms of themes and issues addressed, including themes and issues that are of direct relevance to British children
- There is no advertising and no commercial imperative (although of course many shows are supported by extensive licensing and merchandising campaigns)
- The dual role of continuity presenters as show presenters reinforces the range of UK accents that is unique to BBC Children's channels (although more diversity in accents used to voice animation is necessary)
- The embedded approach to 'learning through play' (particularly on CBeebies) is distinctive from the more formal pedagogic education formats originating in the US.

VLV has three main concerns:

1. CBBC has an upper age limit of 12, possibly even younger. This seems to be self imposed. "The remit of CBBC is to provide a wide range of high quality, distinctive content for 6 to 12 year olds" (from the CBBC service licence). Effectively, the BBC does not serve or represent a developmentally very important period in young people's lives, 13 to 14, – the time when they are beginning to grow up, but are not yet grown up, and hence a period of dramatic change and potentially fertile for programme makers.

2. There appears to be a significant reduction in the role of *Sustaining citizenship and civil society*. For example, in the case of CBBC this is met through the provision of news and current affairs with programmes such as *Newsround* and *Blue Peter*. However, *Blue Peter* is now only shown once a week and *Newsround* appears to have been curtailed to short bulletins, which might suggest that this type of content is under pressure from other programming priorities.

3. In radio the BBC has reduced its commitment to distinctive children's radio to a substantial degree, relegating it to a reduced presence on the digital channel BBC Radio 4 Extra. VLV wonders whether BBC Radio 4 Extra is really the best place for encouraging 'family listening'.

## **PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE TERMS OF THE SERVICE LICENCES**

1. *What are your views on the quality of the BBC's offer for children aged 12 and under on TV, radio and online?*

The 2010 BBC Strategy Review identified 'outstanding children's programmes' as one of the Corporation's five editorial priorities alongside news, knowledge, UK drama and comedy and events that bring the nations and communities together. With this goal in mind, the BBC is to be commended for the quality of its offering for children under 12 across television, radio and online platforms.

VLV's response concentrates largely on television, as this still constitutes the majority of the BBC's engagement with children. However, we also make comments about radio as a medium, which no longer appears to be such a key component of the BBC's provision. We also comment on online and mobile platforms, which seem to point to the future with changing patterns of consumption.

We note that the BBC is now the dominant supplier of British-produced, advertising-free television content for children. This position has been reinforced with the almost total withdrawal of ITV from commissioning and producing UK children's television following the 2003 Communications Act, which removed quotas on children's content. With the exception of S4C, which has a special remit to produce Welsh language programming for children, other broadcasters with public service commitments do not match the BBC's contribution, either in terms of hours broadcast or funds invested. ITV's commitment is now largely confined to CiTV, a digital channel, which has no public service obligations, and where ITV spends considerably less than when it had stronger public service commitments for children's content. Channel 5 has limited resources and focuses largely on pre-school programming. Channel 4 has invested limited funds in online output for older children. The US owned transnationals (Disney, Nickelodeon, Turner) focus largely on US content. This places a large responsibility on the BBC in terms of both the range and diversity of homegrown content, and its relationship with the independent production community in Britain.

According to Ofcom's *2012 Report on Public Service Broadcasting* the BBC was responsible for £99m of the £102m spent by UK PSBs in 2011 on children's content with just £3m spent by ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 (Ofcom, 2012: 13). Moreover, of the 777 hours of first-run PSB originations in 2011, the vast majority (695 hours) was commissioned by the BBC (for CBBC, CBeebies, BBC Two and BBC One) with just 82 hours commissioned by ITV and Channel 5 combined (Ofcom, 2012). This contrasts with the situation before 2006, when ITV was a major competitor to the BBC in the supply of quality UK television programming. For some time now the BBC has experienced little competition for the

commissioning of quality British television for children, although there are signs that transnational players are commissioning more material and spending more money. COBA, representing commercial broadcasters (including Disney, Nickelodeon and Turner), reported in 2012 that investment in UK children's commissions (in-house, commissions and co-productions) by its members had risen from £16m in 2009 to £25.5m in 2011 (COBA, 2012). For the time being, however, it is the BBC that remains the most important commissioner of domestic content, particularly of factual and drama programming.

CBeebies is a popular destination, watched by half of under 6s each week (BBC, 2012: 20) with a mixture of make and do, animation, music, movement, storytelling and factual genres including science, cooking and nature/gardening. We believe that it exhibits high quality across most aspects of provision. The 'dedicated' nature of the content is evident in every aspect: age-appropriate storylines/topics, characters and design elements and very high production values (even in high volume in-house shows).

CBBC operates in the more competitive environment of provision for older children aged 7-12 and offers a mix of content, but with an emphasis on entertainment and comedy, possibly at the expense of drama and factual programming. Some factual programming is made more attractive through the incorporation of humour, for example *Horrible Histories*. Homegrown drama, which is barely shown on other children's channels, attracts respectable ratings (*Tracy Beaker Returns* 442,000; *Sarah Jane Adventures* 330,000) (BBC, 2012). While CBBC can at times appear too focused on entertainment offerings, it does provide quality content for an audience which is demanding and has many other alternative pastimes. It is hampered in its scope, however, by the upper age limit of its intended audience of 12 years (realistically 10), which the BBC has imposed on itself. This means effectively that the BBC does not serve or represent a developmentally very important period in people's lives – the time when they are beginning to grow up, but are not yet grown up, and hence a period of dramatic (and potentially fertile for programme makers) change. Realistic drama about real children's problems and lives and more in-depth factual programming is not readily available, as demanded by the 13 and 14 year olds interviewed in Carter et al, 2009 (a study partly funded by the BBC see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/knowledgeexchange/cardifftwo.pdf>).

### **Judging performance against the BBC's public purposes**

The BBC's role as a supporter of high quality, home-grown and diverse content across all platforms is hugely important and needs to be judged against its six public purposes.

#### *Sustaining citizenship and civil society*

In the case of CBBC this is met through the provision of news and current affairs with programmes such as *Newsround* and *Blue Peter* which not only engage children with the idea of citizenship, but also keep children in touch with national and global events. However, *Blue Peter* is now only shown once a week and *Newsround* appears to have been curtailed to short bulletins, which might suggest that this type of content is under pressure from other programming priorities. Under its current service licence CBBC is required to provide at least 85 hours of news a year and has excelled in the past by

keeping children informed with regular *Newsround* bulletins as well as specials on subjects like domestic abuse and autism. These are topics which no other children's broadcaster tackles. However citizenship needs to extend beyond news and a good example of this wider engagement includes *Show Me What You're Made Of*, which takes children to see the lives of those in other countries who produce things children use.

### *Promoting education and learning*

CBBC is required to promote informal learning and under its current service licence is required to broadcast 550 hours of factual content a year (including staples like *Newsround*). However, there is a clear focus on entertainment, which is also incorporated into factual formats to attract viewers (*Horrible Histories*, *Animals at Work*). The commitment to education and learning by CBeebies is stronger, in that most content 'should feature the Early Learning Goals and support the school and pre-school curricula including:

- personal, social and emotional development;
- communication, language and literacy;
- mathematical development;
- knowledge and understanding of the world;
- physical development;
- and creative development' (CBeebies Service Licence).

This is clearly evident in television programmes such as *Numtums* (mathematics) *The Lingo Show* (language) and *Boogie Beebies* (movement). CBeebies has a distinctive offering focused on broader education, which feels different to its competitors, because it is largely based on live action presenter formats.

### *Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence*

Both CBeebies and CBBC show high levels of UK content. CBBC is additionally tasked with stimulating the UK animation sector and is required to broadcast 665 hours of drama per annum (but this also includes repeats). The danger in being such a dominant supplier of homegrown content is that there is little competition for ideas. In drama this is blatantly the case with little competition, since ITV reduced its commissioning of drama.

### *Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities*

With a high proportion of British content, both CBeebies and CBBC reflect a wider mix of content that reflects the nations and regions. This is also apparent in the children and presenters of both channels who represent a wide mix in terms of ethnicity, gender and disability. This is in marked contrast to other channels, which do not usually have on-screen presentation. CBeebies in particular broadcasts output that marks different types of religious and cultural events in programmes such as *Little Human Planet* and *Let's Celebrate*. With the shift of BBC Children's to Salford, it would be useful to know the extent to which a higher number of commissions come from the nations and regions.

### *Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK*

The BBC's services for children aim to engage children with the wider world and broaden their experience of different cultures and environments with the aim of contributing to

their development as global citizens. Programmes like *Show Me What You're Made Of* (CBBC) go some way to achieving this goal. Factual stalwarts like *Newsround* and *Blue Peter* also show the world to young British viewers on very small budgets. At CBeebies, programmes regularly feature young children from other cultural backgrounds. However there is very little overseas content on either channel, apart from US animation. This represents a lost opportunity in bringing the world to the UK. Perhaps the BBC could consider showcasing more programming from other parts of the world, programming that is screened every two years at the Prix Jeunesse in Munich, for example.

*Delivering to the public the benefit of emerging communications, technologies and services*  
Online provision for the CBeebies and CBBC brands is extensive and the BBC is seen as a safe online destination. In an environment largely dominated by commercial players, the BBC's role is important as a non-commercial online presence. However, this is an area, which is changing rapidly and difficult to forecast as children's expectations about how, where and when they engage with content have altered dramatically within the last few years. If the BBC is to remain relevant to a younger generation, it is imperative that it engages with new developments, bringing a unique high quality public service perspective in the digital age.

2. *What are your views on the range of content the BBC provides for children aged 12 and under?*

The BBC is to be commended for offering a wide range of content, which other broadcasters and online providers do not offer, including factual content and fiction.

### **Television**

On television, unlike its rivals, the BBC is not overly reliant on US animation. While UK-based transnational channels in aggregate broadcast over 75% US content in 2009-2010, CBeebies and CBBC broadcast in excess of 80% national content (D'Arma and Steemers, 2012). Similarly while UK-based transnational channels in aggregate transmit over 65% animation content; for CBeebies and CBBC animation accounts for only a third and 20% of output respectively (Steemers and D'Arma, 2012). According to Ofcom's 2012 *Report on Public Service Broadcasting*, of the 4050 hours broadcast on CBBC in 2011, 1403 hours comprised drama, 807 hours were news and only 660 hours comprised animation. In terms of range the BBC's output is unparalleled.

However in 2008, in response to the last review of BBC Children's content by the BBC Trust, VLV commented on the narrow range of drama and factual television programming on CBBC for the 9-12 age group and asked the Trust to monitor this against past provision. The previous Service Review referred to the policy of 'Fewer, Bigger, Better' and the risks of this approach, which we would argue has resulted in less diverse drama output from fewer suppliers, particularly of short format series.

Notable recent drama output in addition to stalwarts like *Tracy Beaker* include *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, *Leonardo*, *Young Dracula*, *Wolfblood* and *Postcode* by Tony Marchant. However, there is a sense that drama may have given way to more reality (*Cop School*, *The*

*Big Performance*) and entertainment formats, which make up a large proportion of CBBC's schedule. CBBC appears to be undertaking less short-form harder hitting drama, that speaks directly to children's experiences, as *Tracy Beaker* or *Grange Hill* have done in the past.

Notable factual output in addition to *Newsround* and *Blue Peter* includes *Horrible Histories*, *Animals at Work*, *Show Me What You're Made Of* and *Deadly 60*. The challenge for the BBC is how to cover serious issues in ways that will still attract children, when there are many alternative entertainment options open to them. One example of how this has been achieved is *The Ministry of Curious Stuff*, presented by Vic Reeves, which adds comedy to a factual concept.

In terms of range, CBeebies represents a unique pre-school proposition, because it does still contain very high proportions of live action, presenter-led content, interspersed with highly commercial animation, particularly in the mornings (*Charlie and Lola*, *Everything's Rosie*, *Bob the Builder*, *Postman Pat*, *Chuggington*, *Octonauts*, *Timmy Time*, *Tree Fu Tom*, *Mike the Knight*). Pre-school content is still classified as a blanket term (BARB, Ofcom), which belies the fact that CBeebies offers multiple genres (live and on the i-Player), each delivered in an age-appropriate format. Examples include:

- live-action drama (*Me Too*; *Grandpa in My Pocket*; *Woolly and Tig*);
- animated drama in many different styles (*Everything's Rosie*; *The Adventures of Abney and Teal*; *Baby Jake*; *Mike the Knight*)
- factual (*Andy's Wild Adventures*; *Nina and the Neurons*; *Get Well Soon*; *Mr Bloom's Nursery*)
- creative 'make and do' formats (*I Can Cook*; *Mister Maker*; *Let's Play*)
- and a wide range of (often innovative) hybrid entertainment formats which include:
  - traditional storytelling (*Tinga Tinga Tales*; *Old Jack's Boat*; *Bedtime Stories*);
  - education (*Numtums*; *Alphablocks*; *The Rhyme Rocket*; *The Lingo Show*; *Iconicles*)
  - movement, music and dance (*Waybuloo*; *Zingzillas*; *Big and Small Songs*)
  - and sketch formats (*Gigglebiz*).

Presenter-led continuity links add further diversity.

CBeebies animation is largely of British origin, but international in its appeal, because these type of programmes need international investors to cover high production costs. VLV is concerned that CBeebies takes care to ensure that these internationally-oriented animation programmes do not become too dominant, detracting from live action formats which are largely of appeal to UK audiences. However, we recognise that popular animation attracts audiences.

The real cultural and educational value of CBeebies rests in the variety of its UK output, particularly live action, which is so different from its commercial competitors, encompassing science (*Nina and the Neurons*), nature (*Andy's Wild Adventures*), slapstick drama (*Grandpa in my Pocket*), mathematics (*Numtums*), language (*The Lingo Show*) and

exhortations to become active (*Mister Maker, Let's Get Squiggling, Let's Play*). One of the commendable aspects of the CBeebies channel is how it tracks a young child's day, appealing to older children before and after school, and young pre-schoolers during the day with age-appropriate content. Importantly the 'pre-school' content covers a wide range of developmental stages with differentiated material (and differentiated parental support online) across the full age range including 6 year olds, and the core audience of 2-4 year olds. There will be shifts to on-demand viewing, but at the moment we note that most children still watch the channel live. The BBC is also to be commended for its presenters who represent a broad mix in respect of ethnicity, gender and disability, something, which is not found on other channels, and for its content that seeks to engage children with learning disabilities, notably *Something Special*.

The BBC generally (as this is not always produced by BBC Children's) has also made a valuable contribution to high quality, high budget family drama (*Doctor Who, Merlin*), special animation commissions (*The Gruffalo's Child*) and drama (*The Borrowers*) which go some way to maintaining a link between children's output and the main BBC channels. This exposure on the BBC's mainstream outlets is vitally important if adults, including opinion-formers, are to recognise the value of the BBC's contribution to children's content and the extent to which it is 'outstanding'.

## **Radio**

While range on television has been maintained, range in radio has fallen with a substantial cut in hours and budget, following the decision in 2011 to reduce hours and concentrate on drama and readings on BBC Radio 4 Extra that appeal to children and encourage family listening. In 2011-2012 radio transmissions for children fell from 1460 hours to 379 hours, following the transformation of Radio 7 to Radio 4 Extra (BBC 2012). From an informal analysis of the Radio 4 Extra schedule, it appears that there is little programming, which falls into either category (drama and readings).

VLV views the lack of radio for children on Radio 4 Extra as a significant failure on the part of the BBC to deliver this aspect of programming for a younger audience. VLV urges the BBC Trust to re-examine the BBC's performance in this area. Radio 4 Extra as a digital channel and one that also offers more challenging content for adults rather than family friendly fare (unlike Radio 2), does not appear to be the best home for children's content.

Previously in its response to the *Service Review of Radios 3, 4 and 7*, VLV recommended utilising Radio 1 or 2 to reach out to children with radio content. We note that child listeners over 12 of Radio 1 seem to be on the rise (*The Independent*, 16 May). As the BBC's most popular radio station, Radio 2, is far more likely to engage children and 'encourage family listening'. This contrasts with the shift to Radio 4 Extra, which has not only led to a substantial reduction in hours for children, but also failed to reach out to the child audience. Provision for pre-schoolers on radio has been cut except for podcasts, and we would like to learn more about how popular these are proving. We note that the BBC concluded a deal in May with abracaDABra, an internet radio service, which will feature CBeebies stories which suggests that the BBC is no longer so committed to radio for preschoolers.

VLV reiterates what it stated in its submission of August 2010 for the *Service Review of Radios 3, 4 and 7*: “If children ... listen throughout childhood and adolescence they will retain the habit of using quality broadcasting into adult life. However there must be appropriate quality programmes that will attract young people at each stage or they will turn to other media for information and entertainment.”

We continue to have reservations about limiting children’s radio output to a digital only station, particularly if it is scheduled at only limited times when parents and children are available to listen and if the range of content is limited. We recommend an increase in broadcast hours with better links to mainstream channels Radios 1 and 2, which are more likely to attract child listeners and encourage listening.

### **Online**

VLV’s primary concern with online content is that children should be provided with a diverse range of high quality content specifically tailored for their age groups, which relates to their lives in the UK. We urge the BBC Trust to examine whether the BBC’s obligation to all audiences, young and old, is being met online in terms of signposting. From an informal analysis of the CBBC and CBeebies sites, it is clear that both sites deliver content in an age-appropriate and engaging manner, which deepens children’s experience of the BBC’s children’s content. (For a more detailed consideration of online offerings see VLV’s response to Question 9, page 15).

3. *What content are CBBC, CBeebies and Radio 4 Extra (children’s content) particularly good at producing? Are there any areas where you think improvements could be made?*

We reiterate our points under Question 1 and 2 (pages 4 and 7).

CBeebies’ strengths lie in high proportions of domestic content, including quality animation, dramas, comedies and a large range of live action factual programmes, which encourage children to explore the world around them. We are particularly struck by innovation in factual entertainment formats that combine clear storylines with songs, facts and interactive activities (*Get Well Soon; Mr Bloom’s Nursery; Something Special*). These shows are usually presenter-led, combining puppetry and animated special effects with live-action performances and have real children as participants. In the case of child participants, the BBC is particularly good at producing content that not only represents the lives and experiences of British children with diversity in ethnicity, race and disability, but also in subtler aspects of lifestyle and family circumstances. Nonetheless there could be improvement in the diversity of children’s voices used for animation dubbing – they are nearly always 'home counties' and sound rather similar in inflection, tone and delivery.

A further potential worry might be overreliance on acquiring animation, which, while it exhibits high production values, is often targeted at an international audience and ancillary commercial opportunities. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this content, CBeebies needs to ensure that it does not become overly reliant on it.

CBBC provides a good range of UK produced material with strengths in *Newsround*, factual content (*Blue Peter, Incredible Edibles, Horrible Histories*) and drama (*Tracy Beaker, Leonardo, Postcode*).

While CBeebies represents a unique proposition in the market place with its greater emphasis on live action content, the challenge for CBBC is much harder. The CBeebies audience does not automatically migrate to CBBC and CBBC faces greater competition from other channels and other activities. It would be easy to suggest a more worthy schedule of serious public service content. But CBBC must balance its public purposes with content that also appeals to children. In many instances CBBC has been hugely successful as illustrated by *Horrible Histories* and *Tracy Beaker*, which combine the best of public service broadcasting purposes with huge entertainment value. At other times entertainment programmes are rather less innovative and it is here that care must be taken if the BBC is not to lose its distinctiveness against commercial rivals. CBBC has to be both distinctive and popular rather than distinctive without an audience, or popular in ways that simply emulate its rivals.

From an informal analysis of the Radio 4 Extra Schedule, it appears that there is little programming, which falls into the category of readings and drama, as specified in the Radio 4 Extra service licence. VLV views the lack of radio for children on Radio 4 Extra as a significant failure on the part of the BBC to deliver this aspect of programming for a younger audience. VLV urges the BBC Trust to examine the BBC's performance in this area (see the VLV response to Question 2, page 6).

4. *Which, if any, sections of their respective target audiences do you think are underserved by BBC Children's and/or BBC Radio 4 Extra? (Note: CBeebies' is for children aged 0 – 6 year olds, CBBC for children aged 6 – 12 year olds, Radio 4 Extra should appeal to older children (i.e. children 6 or over). If you feel certain sections of the audience are underserved, what more do you think could be done attract these children and keep them interested in the BBC's content?*

CBeebies serves its target audience well, particularly in the stranding strategy of the channel, which serves different sub-sectors of the pre-school audience at different times of the day. With the upper end of the CBeebies audience (5-6 year olds) it can be difficult to maintain their attention within a channel structure also geared towards younger children. Some CBeebies content is specifically targeted towards this upper age group, but a clearer bridge could be made between CBeebies and CBBC content to aid transition. This could include (appropriately edited) trails for CBBC content on CBeebies and vice versa. CBBC serves its audience mostly well, but we detect a lack of range for 8-12s particularly in the area of factual and drama content. This age group is the one that is most likely to look at alternative offerings on other channels and online. We repeat what we stated earlier. CBBC is hampered by the upper age limit of its intended audience of 12 years (realistically 10). This means that the BBC is less effective at serving children over 10 and older children who fall outside the BBC's self-imposed age limit. The failure to serve older children and teens represents a failure by the BBC, and there is no effective bridge that links CBBC content to content, which is supposedly for younger people (BBC Three), but not always age-appropriate.

The 12-16 year old audience does not form part of this review, although it used to be well served. We need to remember that 11 and 12 year olds are upwardly aspirational and will be interested in programmes about the lives of 13 and 14 year olds; 13-14 year olds are

interested in the lives of 15-16 year olds. We would argue, that older children and teens are underserved by the BBC with the exception of Radio 1.

We would encourage the BBC Trust to explore new ways of engaging this audience, who are too old for CBBC, but too young for some content on BBC Three. After all the hard work in engaging 6-12 year olds with CBBC, it seems a shame that older children have nowhere to go, as it is assumed that they are now listening/watching adult or family content or just going online, although Ofcom research shows that they still watch significant amounts of television. This seems to represent a wasted opportunity in meeting the BBC's public purposes among a significant section of the population.

5. *What, if anything, makes BBC services for children stand out from the children's content shown on other broadcasters?*

We reiterate what we have stated in previous sections. BBC Television services for children stand out from the content shown on other broadcasters because:

- They broadcast high proportions of domestic content – between 70 and 80% of transmissions
- They broadcast a greater variety of live action formats and different genres including much less animation than their rivals (less than 30%)
- They broadcast a greater range of content in terms of themes and issues addressed, including themes and issues that are of direct relevance to British children
- There is no advertising and no commercial imperative (although of course many shows are supported by extensive licensing and merchandising campaigns)
- The dual role of continuity presenters as show presenters reinforces the range of UK accents that is unique to BBC Children's channels (although more diversity in accents used to voice animation is necessary)
- The embedded approach to 'learning through play' (particularly on CBeebies) is distinctive from the more formal pedagogic education formats originating in the US.

In radio the situation is less encouraging, because the BBC has reduced its commitment to distinctive children's radio to a substantial degree, relegating it to digital channel BBC Radio 4 Extra. In this area it seems to be leaving the market to alternative providers such as Fun Kids, which won digital radio channel of the year in 2011.

We reiterate our earlier point about thinking whether BBC Radio 4 Extra is really the best place for encouraging 'family listening'.

6. *What, if anything, could BBC Children's learn from other broadcasters of children's content?*

The main lesson that BBC Children's should learn from other broadcasters is that it should remain distinctive as well as popular. It needs to offer something different from its

commercial rivals if it takes its public service purposes seriously. This is no easy task and there are times when CBBC in particular, has become too similar to commercial rivals in tone. CBeebies also needs to take care that it does not become overly reliant on internationally oriented animation brands, which are also popular and successful offerings on commercial rivals. However, we recognise that some programmes function as flagships, drawing in children to watch other content. The BBC needs to maximize the cultural and public service value of key shows through adequate development time and the commissioning of sufficient episodes. In this it can learn from how commercial players maximize the brand value of their products. However, BBC output should be distinctive from commercial offerings in its underlying public service ethos, content and through its targeting of UK-based audiences

If BBC Children's takes seriously the purpose of bringing the world to the UK, it could showcase more overseas content from places other than North America, possibly working with public service partners overseas, and those who participate in Prix Jeunesse, which highlights programming content other than US content.

The BBC might also consider extending its hours, particularly for CBBC beyond 7pm. At the moment the BBC offers little to children in the 7-9pm pre-watershed period. While some children have access to the iPlayer, this is not always the case. This approach might also attract children older than 12, who are currently underserved by BBC services. A 7-9pm slot on CBBC would be a good place to showcase ground-breaking drama and factual content for children aged 9-12. If this was to occur then the children's channels would not be able to share channel space with BBC Three and Four.

The BBC should also consider the archive. There is scope for showcasing the best material from the past. It is a great pity that dramas, comedies, documentaries from recent years are rarely shown again.

*7. What are your views on the cost-effectiveness of CBeebies, CBBC and Radio 4 Extra including whether the services are currently delivering value for money to the licence fee payer?*

Children's broadcasting is notoriously underfunded. We already know that the BBC is responsible for the vast majority of UK PSB spend on children's television content - £99m out of £102m in 2011, and that it was responsible for the vast majority of first-run PSB originations in 2011 (693 out of 777 hours) (Ofcom 2012). A great deal of content is delivered for a low budget. This is particularly the case for CBeebies, which only had a total content budget of £29.2m in 2011-12 compared to £81.9m for CBBC (BBC, 2012). CBeebies' low budget may also be a reflection of its policy of acquiring animation at low cost or investing small amounts in flagship animation or shows with international potential in the expectation that producers will find co-producers/funders in other markets.

Where CBeebies and CBBC content is really distinctive, it does present good value for the licence payer as part of valuable public service. The same cannot be said for some animation acquisitions that are very similar to formats offered on other channels and have

characters that feel somewhat generic or targeted at other markets beyond the UK. Given CBeebies' emphasis on representing diversity, it is also disappointing to see animation which, although very attractive in many respects, does not always offer ethnic diversity (*Everything's Rosie; Cloud Babies*).

In the case of children's radio on Radio 4 Extra, the cuts to output and budgets have been so stark, that it is difficult to comment on value for money to the licence fee payer, except that overall impact is probably negligible.

## **MEETING THE STRATEGIC CHALLENGES - FINANCIAL**

8. *Under its Delivering Quality First commitments, BBC Children's plans to protect its output by making efficiency savings and by raising more of its own commercial income. What would you say are the main risks that BBC Children's need to manage as it delivers these savings and/or plans to raise more of its own income?*

In the BBC Trust's final conclusions to DQF in 2012 it concluded that cuts to priority areas, including Children's, would lead to an 'unacceptable diminution in the quality and distinctiveness' of flagship services and priority areas. The conclusions estimated a 2.7% cut in content spend to CBBC and a 0.6% cut to CBeebies by 2016/17, following savings on repeat fees from stopping broadcasting on BBC One and Two. There was agreement that children's channels should be protected from budget cuts. The requisite savings have been made through discontinuation of children's broadcasts on BBC One and Two on the grounds that the number of children watching the dedicated blocks of children's programming has declined substantially. We refer to the implications of broadcasting solely on the digital channels below.

The risks from raising more commercial income is that the priorities of international markets and overseas partners might begin to take precedence over the needs of serving a domestic audience, because there will be less incentive to produce material from a UK perspective. We note that the government has recently approved animation tax credits and it would be regrettable if the BBC used tax credits, obtained by independent producers, to reduce its own commitment to domestic animation. There is a danger that a focus on commercial income will mean less interest in projects that are inherently domestic in their appeal but not sufficiently commercial for an international marketplace. This includes factual formats and domestic drama.

Even in the relatively buoyant pre-school market there is a danger that less profitable genres (live-action factual formats) will not be attractive formats for co-production or outside investment.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL**

9. *How well do you think BBC Children's is responding to changes in how children use digital technology and consume content on different screens (TV, Desktop Computer, Tablet and Smartphone)?*

The failure of the BBC to digitize its own content and consequent massive loss of licence fee income should make us all wary about technological utopianism. Broadcasting and online material serve different purposes for audiences and there is research (including Ofcom's regular updates) that shows this. Online is useful for gaming, social networking, checking information for homework etc. Dramatic storytelling, comedy, informative material such as wildlife documentaries, work much better in broadcast form. Also as the Carter et al study (2009) showed, younger children enjoy being told things, with pictures, and their parents often set limits on the amount of activity they can conduct online. (Not to mention the still relevant digital divide – many families cannot afford lots of tablets, smartphones and computers in every bedroom, assuming they even have a spare bedroom). The BBC needs to make sure that it produces good content for children rather than promoting the technology industry.

However, as stated in the BBC Trust's recent report following the *Review of Online and Red Button Services*, 'children's products are an important part of the BBC Online portfolio.' In isolation the online services of CBeebies and CBBC are very age-appropriate, free, safe and provide a deeper experience of BBC Children's content with clips, games, activities and access to the iPlayer (although access to radio content is very poorly signposted on the CBBC site). The CBeebies, CBBC and grown-ups websites are valuable resources and the role of the BBC as a trusted and reliable provider of children's content should not be underestimated as it introduces a range of media literacies, but within a context that presupposes parental supervision in the online space. The iPlayer is a good example of how children's content can be at the forefront of technology use. The BBC Red Button service is rather less successful in ensuring children have access to interactive services, because navigation from television channels is largely text-based, requiring levels of literacy that children may not have. The addition of mobile services (CBeebies Mobile) reflects ongoing changes in the way content is consumed. BBC Children's online services do not offer the same sort of participatory shared experience as social media sites like Facebook or Twitter, and this may make them less attractive to older children.

However, there are also issues in the way that these services are embedded within the BBC Homepage or the iPlayer page. As noted in the BBC Trust's earlier review, BBC Children's content is barely noticeable here. We concur with the Trust's findings that BBC management needs to give much more thought to how children's content is signposted so that children do not access inappropriate content, but can find age-appropriate content more easily; for example *Newsround* or CBBC content that might help with learning or links to other non-commercial sites that might assist with learning. As content is increasingly developed for mobile devices for younger users, we would expect the BBC to think more carefully about how children might access this content, ensuring easier access and navigation and avoiding content that might be inappropriate.

Looking to the future It is difficult to predict accurately how technology will affect consumption, but it is clear that children are using a broad range of media devices, and that older children are increasingly using mobile phones to access content (Ofcom 2012b). Even 3-4 year olds are using a range of devices, including tablets, to go online (ibid). Yet it is also important to remember that television still plays an important part in children's

lives and is the medium that children under 11 say they would miss the most (Ofcom 2012b). These trends suggest that the BBC needs to constantly reassess how it reaches its young users, how they wish to access and engage with content (participatory and shared experiences) and the type of content they wish to access (apps). These are developments which pose profound challenges to the more regulated nature of public service 'broadcasting', but they require careful thought and readjustment to significant changes in consumption patterns.

We note from the BBC Trust *Review of BBC Online and BBC Red Button*, that the online spend for children's services is £8.5m in 2012-2013, a decline of £2m (19%) since 2010/11. It is somewhat concerning that spend here is declining and we would argue that online spend needs to be maintained if the BBC is to remain relevant to children as a trusted public service online destination with attractive and innovative content that fulfils the BBC's public purposes.

## **WORKING WITH INDUSTRY**

*10. As part of their service licences, CBeebies, CBBC and Radio 4 Extra should make important contributions to the public purpose of stimulating creativity and cultural excellence. This includes working with a wide range of suppliers to provide content. To what extent do you think the services fulfil this commitment?*

50% of BBC commissions are guaranteed to in-house producers. We would argue that it is important to maintain in-house production capacity so that public service purposes are learnt and promoted internally, to nurture talent and understanding of the public service ethos. For the in-house programme-makers of today may be the independent programme-makers of tomorrow, but the emphasis must be on quality production rather than on protecting in-house production for its own sake. Independent producers are guaranteed 25% of production and we understand that independent producers have been successful in obtaining commissions through the WOCC (Window of Creative Competition). 70% of BBC's Children's schedule is provided by independent producers.

It is important that the BBC stimulates creativity and cultural excellence by working with a range of suppliers, both large and small. We note that in addition to its first look deal with BBC Worldwide, BBC Children's entered a five-year partnership with FremantleMedia Kids and Family Entertainment in January 2013, aimed at developing and producing new children's shows over five years. As a way of locating investment for high quality programming with international appeal, this is an attractive deal. However, we would suggest that it is important that BBC Children's continues to work with a wide range of partners of differing size and that it continues to develop and produce programmes with varying budgets that speak specifically to the concerns of children living in Britain. Too much reliance on a small range of larger suppliers in the independent sector may limit this objective; and some of the best performing preschool programmes are produced by smaller independent or in-house producers (*Grandpa in my Pocket; Gigglebiz, Old Jack's Boat, Get Squiggling, Zingillas*).

One way of encouraging smaller producers is to encourage investment in short-form online content, which may be developed into larger projects at a later date, possibly involving other partners. It would be useful to have more transparency on levels of spend in this area in terms of external commissions, editorial spend, and the number of suppliers used.

In respect of *'Delivering Quality'* we would warn against suggestions that co-production and outward commissioning is predominantly an issue of 'creativity and cultural excellence', rather than an economic reality associated with cutting costs. Co-production and independent commissions are on the whole a successful way of securing high quality content that fits clearly with BBC values and priorities, because the BBC commissions the material and has editorial input. The acquisitions strategy is less convincing because it stretches the definition of 'working with' a range of suppliers, who have their own priorities, which may not match those of the BBC.

## **OTHER BBC SERVICES**

*11. At the end of December 2012, the BBC took the decision to show dedicated children's programmes on BBC One and BBC Two no longer; due to poor viewing figures on these channels. Do you have any views on how BBC One and BBC Two, as well as other family-orientated BBC services on radio and online, should continue to serve children under 16?*

In responding to this question we refer to VLV's first response to *Delivering Quality First* in December 2011:

"VLV welcomes the statement that 'news and children's programming must remain top priorities for the BBC'. However, the intention to remove children's programmes from BBC One and BBC Two 'in time, following digital switchover', will lower public perception of, and parental interest in, these programmes. In order to mitigate the change, the BBC should cross promote these channels on the main channels at key times when children may be watching. There should also be showcasing of programmes from the Children's channels on the main channels.

We welcome the commitment that 'the BBC proposes to protect this increased children's UK origination budget from any reductions, and so the proportion of the licence fee spent on children's output will rise further.' We expect the Trust will ensure that no budget cuts occur when the move takes place." (VLV Response, December 2011, p12)

We continue to believe that children's content should be more effectively cross-promoted on the main channels, not only to reach children, but also to make parents and adults generally aware of the BBC's commitment to children's content. It is important that opinion formers have a better idea of what is provided for children and that children's content is not placed in a ghetto, isolated from other BBC offerings. It is important that adults are kept aware of the BBC's continuing and outstanding commitment in this area. It

is also important that upwardly aspirational 11 and 12 year olds (or even 13 and 14 year olds) hear about children's programmes that would be of interest to them.

With this in mind we suggest that flagship children's content be regularly cross-promoted on BBC One and Two and Radios 1 and 2. We would go further still, suggesting that some drama and factual output for older children might be showcased in half hour slots to reach a wider public. This could occur weekly at 17.15 on BBC One and in the morning on BBC Two.

Voice of the Listener & Viewer  
May 2013

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