

Public Consultation on the future of the BBC's supply arrangements for the production of the BBC's television content, radio content and online content and services



Arts Council England response

Summary

We are supportive of the BBC's desire to introduce a step change from a 'one-way' broadcaster role to becoming an enabling organisation - open to new content, providers and ways of working and the explicit commitment to working with the widest range of partners. The proposals outlined are one way in which to provide new vital entry routes into the growing creative economy.

- We support the BBC in its desire to create 'BBC Studios', a production company that will continue to drive innovation and excellence in the creative industries and direct profits back into the BBC group for further investment.
- We firmly believe that strong in-house production is essential to help the BBC realise its ongoing public purpose, to be editorially independent and to be open to working with arts and cultural organisations to reflect a greater diversity of arts and culture across the UK.
- Without a thorough risk analysis of the outcomes of change on arts and cultural programming we believe that this area of programming should be protected by an in-house guarantee.
- We support the BBC's proposal that quotas should widen to allow a broader range of external producers to bid for BBC commissions (noting the continuing in-house guarantees). We agree that the 25% quota for independent producers should remain in place to provide entry opportunities for new qualifying 'independent' companies from the arts and cultural industries.
- The BBC should make explicit its commitment to equality and diversity and to talent and skills development in the operating model of BBC Studios.
- We recommend a thorough risk analysis of the impact of change on local production to the national cultural ecology.

Introduction

Arts Council England's mission is 'great art and culture for everyone' and we work to achieve this by championing, developing and investing in arts and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives, enabling new artistic developments, realising talent, and championing culture in public policy. As the national development agency for the arts, museums and libraries, we support a range of activities from theatre to music, reading to dance, photography to digital art, carnival to crafts. We support and invest in high quality

arts practice and the best emerging practitioners that represent the backbone of our cultural infrastructure and contribute to the future of the UK's dynamic creative economy.

Charter Renewal provides a welcome opportunity for the BBC to play an even more integrated role in the arts and culture and a much-needed industrial strategy for the creative industries. As we outline in our responses to the DCMS's consultation on BBC Charter Renewal and to the BBC Trust's consultation on the future of the BBC¹ (both of which inform this response) we welcome the BBC's commitment to increased investment in original cultural content and to better national and local partnership working.

Response

The Arts Council's 2014-2017 Partnership Agreement with the BBC commits us to close partnership working to ensure maximum public engagement in high quality arts and culture, developing and supporting the best creative talent and contributing to the successful performance of the UK's creative economy. Our three shared aims are to:

1. Extend the accessibility and reach of arts and culture.
2. Support new artistic talent and the creation of new work.
3. Support skills development and growth of the creative economy.

The proposals relating to the BBC's future supply arrangements show a demonstrable commitment to working to the benefit of the wider creative industries.

Securing high-quality and creative content across all genres

In our response to the BBC Trust on the future of the BBC we noted the need to secure original arts and music documentaries programming and a wider cultural education offer, a hallmark of the BBC's cultural programming. We welcome the BBC's commitment to improving the arts and cultural offer across all of its platforms as demonstrated in "British Bold Creative". Similarly, we are reassured that the primary strategic focus for BBC studios will be to meet the needs of BBC Commissioning.

Considering the BBC's vital role in the wider cultural ecology and without a thorough risk analysis of the impact of change on the arts and cultural programming, we strongly feel that arts and cultural production should be protected by an amended in-house guarantee. This could be reviewed at a later point once the risk and impact of change is more fully understood.

¹ Both are available here: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/research-and-data/consultation-responses/>

Ofcom suggest that the growing consolidation of independent production companies might lead to a 'lack of innovation in the less commercially attractive genres'². We are unsure of the potential risks of change if all in-house guarantees were removed. We would welcome clarification of how the BBC might mitigate challenges, particularly in relation to arts and music programming, access to opportunities for an emerging and existing diverse workforce and skills and talent development.

We are unsure how the BBC Performing Groups will be affected by the proposed changes. An amended quota might navigate the market changes outlined, embracing new providers and partnerships and driving up innovation and quality in arts and cultural production whilst also providing a level of continuity and consistency for the skilled existing independent production companies that deliver some of the BBC's most iconic cultural programmes.

An amended in-house production guarantee would balance a high level of commissioning and editorial expertise within the BBC with an ability to achieve greater collaboration and diversity through external partnerships.

We support the BBC's proposal that quotas should widen to allow a broader range of external producers to bid for BBC commissions (noting the continuing in-house guarantees) and agree that the 25% quota for independent producers should remain in place to provide entry opportunities for new 'independent' companies from the arts and cultural industries.

To help fulfil the BBC's responsibility towards education, we recommend that the offer for BBC Children should consider how best to include the specialist and non-specialist publicly funded arts and cultural offer for children and young people developed and delivered by Cultural Education Partnerships across England. This should be done in the context of the in-house guarantee for production for children across all BBC platforms.

Providing value for money to licence fee payers

Providing greater visibility for the publicly funded arts and culture sector has significant public value. The proposals in "British Bold Creative" begin to outline how the BBC might increase its work with the arts and cultural sector to broaden and diversify the range and nature of the arts and cultural offer for audiences. We are already starting to see the fruits of our shared strategic approach. A recent example of this is 'Live from TV Centre' where, working jointly with the BBC, we commissioned Battersea Arts Centre to deliver an

² http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/psb-review-3/statement/PSB_Review_3_Statement.pdf

ambitious evening of new live theatre performance broadcast on BBC 4 and iPlayer³. A more open commissioning approach - such as this pilot - will also support arts organisations' commissioning and production capacity and enable them to develop new business models and resilience whilst extending the reach of publicly funded arts and cultural content.

The BBC's editorial policies have sometimes impeded partnership working and encouraged less equal relationships. The issue of BBC editorial control and funding credits when working with arts partners remain a concern. We welcome a commitment to further collaboration in light of the proposed changes to production and the proposed open partnership model in "British Bold Creative".

Using a wide range and diversity of supply with fair access across all genres and from across the UK

Partnerships with independent producers have had a beneficial effect on the BBC's programming, the economic health of the arts, cultural and creative sectors and the diversity and strength of Britain's programme and format exports.

The BBC, like the Arts Council, has a duty to ensure a consistent and high quality locally relevant arts and cultural offer to audiences. Challenges around promoting local arts and cultural activity in the regions might be better met through an amended in-house guarantee, rather than removing quotas in their entirety.

Emerging independent providers should be empowered to deliver locally tailored arts and cultural content. The regional variation of production facilities and increased competition that would result from the removal of quotas may create a challenge for local production in the regions. We would recommend that a thorough risk analysis is undertaken of the impact such changes might have on the creative ecology across England.

Similarly, the legacy of the BBC as an investor in new creative media hubs (for example, Salford) has significant value. We expect that all changes to the BBC's investment and focus on productions in the regions should be thoroughly assessed to consider the implications for development and partnership in future creative hubs and clusters.

Considering the changes in the market and the need to secure opportunities for emerging businesses, we believe that a 25% quota should remain in place to support and engage qualifying independent production companies to bid for BBC commissions.

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06pyvlh>

We feel that the culture and operating model for BBC Studios should explicitly embed the BBC's commitment to equality and diversity.

Securing a sustainable production supply in terms of skills and capacity

The BBC plays an important role in training and in helping to build digital, media and artistic talent and the BBC positions its proposals in terms of the benefits reform will bring to the wider creative industries.

Considering the BBC's role in the creative ecology, it is important that the BBC commits to supporting training and skills development in the creative industries over the next Charter Period. The role of the BBC in developing the next generation of creative and digital media professionals cannot be underestimated and we are working closely with the BBC to share skills, training and expertise in a more formal and structured way. An example of this is our joint work on The Space in which the BBC Academy is opening up its resources and expertise to the arts and cultural sector to an unprecedented degree.

We recommend that the culture and operating model for BBC Studios should explicitly embed a commitment to talent and skills development.

Maintaining appropriate separation between publicly funded BBC activity and its commercial services

We have no comments on this aspect of the proposals.

For more information, please contact:

Nicole McNeilly
Officer, Policy and Research
nicole.mcneilly@artscouncil.org.uk