

# **Response to the Culture Media and Sport Inquiry into the Future of the BBC**

**December 2013**

## **Introduction**

1.1 Arts Council England's mission is 'great art for everyone'. We work to achieve this by investing in arts and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives, enabling new artistic developments, realising talent, and championing culture in public policy. Between 2010 and 2015, we are investing around £1.9 billion of public money from government and an estimated £1.1 billion from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. This investment supports an arts and culture industry with a gross value added of £5.9 billion to the economy in 2011 alone.

1.2 As the national development agency for the arts, museums and libraries in England, 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 whom we believe are essential for underpinning a dynamic creative economy.

1.3 The Arts Council's Creative Media policy, published in 2012, aims to increase the volume, range and quality of digital cultural content for the public. Between 2014 and 2018 we will be investing £25m in new strategic digital interventions. These will attract expertise and resource from the wider technology and creative media industries to improve the digital capacity of the sector, and develop new models for the future digital production, distribution and promotion of art and culture. It will build on existing investment in publicly funded content, making it available to more people in different ways.

1.4 As the two largest promoters and funders of cultural activity in the country, creating publicly funded content and acting as venture capital for creativity and cultural excellence is a shared aim for the BBC and the Arts Council. We share a strong commitment to public engagement in arts and culture, developing and supporting the best creative talent and contributing to the performance of the UK's creative economy.

We have provided responses to questions where it is appropriate and useful for the Arts Council to do so, grouping these into three sections reflecting on the current purpose, future role and governance of the BBC.

## **The purpose of the BBC and its contribution to culture**

**What should the BBC be for and what should be the purpose of public service broadcasting?**

**How well has the BBC performed in the current Charter period in achieving its mission and public purposes?**

**Are the public purposes in the current Charter the right ones? How might they change?**

2.1 We fully support the continuing and enduring role and public purposes of the BBC. The BBC is the cornerstone of public service broadcasting and media, going further than other broadcasters and complementing what others provide. This is partly as a result of its unique funding model, which provides a critical mass of investment that should allow proper risk taking. As an invaluable cultural asset to the UK, it is an internationally recognised example of what British creativity and commitment can achieve. Like the organisations and individuals that the Arts Council funds, the BBC can take risks that the commercial market cannot.

2.2 The original purposes of the BBC were to ‘inform, educate, entertain’. Lord Reith also spoke about ‘giving the public something slightly better than it thinks it wants’. This aspiration is valid today and differentiates the BBC as a Public Service Broadcaster – and it also gives it something in common with the Arts Council. Our aim is not to provide the humdrum or the mainstream, but to create the conditions to allow the best, most innovative, challenging and surprising art to be made and to make it available to the most people. This aspiration is summed up as ‘Great art for everyone’.

2.3 Traditionally we have funded live experiences that people enjoy by attendance or live participation. But new means of receiving and experiencing arts and culture open up new possibilities. That is why the mission of the Arts Council

will require us to be partners in the future with organisations who have common interests and who can help us expand our reach. The BBC is one such partner, and with whom we share many interests. Technology and its uses, as well as common aims, will draw us together as traditional ways of broadcasting become disrupted and open up new possibilities.

2.4 The Arts Council are developing new ways to express why public support for culture matters: a holistic case, which considers not just culture's intrinsic worth, but also its crucial role in other fields. For example, in bringing imagination and self-expression to the primary school and the lecture hall, arts and culture are essential at all levels of education.<sup>1</sup> If we get the cultural product right, other benefits flow to the wider creative economy, society and education system.

2.5 There might be a useful analogy here for the BBC. The quality, creativity and integrity of what they do, and how they do it, should underpin everything. If they do, it well they will benefit society more generally. From the national moments that bring us together and speak volumes as to who we are, to their work locally – providing important social glue and connections with how people live. Their educational role has grown explicitly over the years, and their role as part of the overall creative industry ecology needs to be better described and articulated. Articulating a 'holistic case' for the current and future role of the BBC could provide a rather broader definition of Public Service Broadcasting.

2.6 Within Public Service Broadcasting, the BBC is the most significant player in supporting cultural excellence and access. Channel 4 and ITV, are real contributors too with Sky making an important contribution through its increasing commitment to original drama and arts output.

2.7 The BBC's contribution to music in particular has been and continues to be extraordinary and of vital importance to UK music industry and sector. It is a major investor in the arts with six professional performing groups totalling over £28 million every year and employing around 450 full time musicians in its five orchestras – three England based (BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, and BBC Symphony Orchestra) and the BBC Singers. Radio 3 continues to make an invaluable contribution to classical music and drama, driving excellence and access to the best. It is important that the resources are there for this to continue.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/advocacy/holistic-case/>

2.8 Across platforms, the BBC is a leading commissioner of new music, providing a range and diversity of music genres, and introducing new talent and music through initiatives such as *BBC Introducing* to bring new unsigned music acts to radio, television and online. The BBC Radio 2 *Folk Awards* and *Young Folk Awards* provide platforms for a genre that is under-exposed and neglected by other broadcasters. Other notable initiatives include Radio 2's *Young Chorister of the Year / Young Brass Player of the Year* and Radio 3's *New Generation Artists* scheme.

2.9 The BBC also invests substantially and develops new UK writing, directing, producing and acting talent alongside other arts organisations, broadcasters and independent production companies. The BBC is a primary commissioner of new writers for television and radio with sustained investment in BBC Radio 3 and 4's original radio drama, readings and poetry, supported by the work of the Writers' Room.

2.10 The BBC has also embarked on a number of important strategic partnerships over the past charter period that have led to excellent and innovative cultural and educational programming to encourage wider public learning and engagement.

2.11 An example is the BBC's successful partnership with the British Museum and the two radio co-production series for Radio 4 with Neil Macgregor and the British Museum: *A History of the World in 100 Objects* and *Shakespeare's Restless World*. This was an important moment of cultural reflection. In an intelligent way, this explored not just how we see ourselves revealed through historical artefacts, but also how the world sees us, with the series heard throughout the world. The effect on the non-broadcast world was to boost yet further the extraordinary visitor numbers to the British Museum and bringing its world class curatorship to BBC audiences.

2.12 The Arts Council's Public Value Partnership with the BBC (2009-12) has also led to many successful initiatives. The seven year-long *Roots* project built diversity in arts and broadcasting, leading to new careers and opportunities for artists and new producers from BME communities. *Made in England* in 2008/9 showcased artists on local radio and regional television. In 2012, we launched *The Space*, an innovation that has been widely praised by DCMS, the public and commentators.

2.13 The Space is a joint venture between the Arts Council and BBC and represented a widening of the BBC's engagement with arts and cultural organisations that were beginning to produce digital content. It operated in 'beta' form during the Cultural Olympiad in 2012 and will be re-launched in 2014 as a fuller and properly promoted service. Arts Council investment supported artists to create their own content and the BBC supported mentoring and production training for participating organisations, providing the technology platform and live service support – a model of partnership working.

2.14 However, despite the BBC's considerable contribution to culture in the ways described above, there may be greater possibilities in the future for the BBC to promote and work with the wider arts and cultural sector. It remains true that currently only a fraction of the publicly funded arts in England have featured or feature on BBC platforms. The BBC has often operated in parallel to the wider cultural and educational sector, and the emerging wave of cultural providers beginning to narrowcast and distribute their work digitally. In the past, opportunities to extend and increase the wider public value of this content, helped it reach larger audiences and to reflect our dynamic world class contemporary culture to UK citizens and to the world have been missed.

2.15 We believe that with the appointment of Tony Hall as Director General and his new senior management team, this situation is set to greatly improve. Recent speeches<sup>2</sup> suggest both a more central role for arts in mainstream commissioning and a new emphasis on the BBC's enabling role and commitment to forging deeper and wider partnerships with the cultural sector. Together with the 20% increase in arts programming announced recently, these represent very positive developments.<sup>3</sup>

2.16 A new era of collaboration and innovation is possible, despite the financial and economic challenges we face. If this is combined with the already considerable investment the BBC makes in developing new writing and new music, as well as original drama, this will be a net gain for the cultural power of the United Kingdom, with beneficial effects for the wider economy.

---

<sup>2</sup> Speeches given by Tony Hall, BBC Director-General, at the BBC Radio Theatre in London on Tuesday 8 October 2013 and at the Voice of the Listener & Viewer Conference on Wednesday 27 November 2013.

<sup>3</sup> An additional £6m investment in addition to the core £30 million investment for television arts.  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-24417410>

2.17 The BBC's current principles and purposes are robust and do not need to fundamentally change. The BBC plays a vital role in the cultural life of the country. But we believe the way in which the BBC performs its role and delivers its mission and public purposes is changing in the face of new technology. The Corporation will have to find new ways of working in partnership during the next Charter period in order to continue to benefit from the privilege of the licence fee and to ensure maximum public value.

## **The future of the BBC and the importance of partnerships**

**What scope, scale and remit should the BBC have?**

**What role should the BBC play in developing technology and new ways of distributing content?**

**Is there a case for distributing funding for public service content more widely beyond the BBC?**

3.1 Digital technologies are transforming our society, economy and culture. In the past, spectrum as the means of linear distribution was scarce, and making content was inherently expensive.

3.2 Now many more people can create and share their own content, including artists and arts organisations. This has been demonstrated by the National Theatre Royal Opera House and British Museum winning large audiences of their own in cinemas both here and around the world.

3.3 For the BBC, the digital era offers new opportunities to refresh its mission to inform, to educate and to entertain. As Tony Hall has said: "The key challenge - the core of what we have to do - is to harness our power to create - our power to innovate"<sup>4</sup>. But it is also an opportunity to amplify, to connect and to support a far wider network of content providers, distributors and audiences. With public expenditure rightly under more scrutiny than ever before, it is vital that the BBC works in partnership with a wider variety of organisations and individuals to fulfil its public service obligations. **We are entering a different era and the BBC's role is now to engage with it and enable it.**

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/speeches/2013/tony-hall-vision.html>

3.4 In a pressured public funding environment, the BBC should maintain its strong leadership role and scale of investment in key areas of its cultural and educational remit, and in ensuring its continuing commitment to the breadth of cultural services across its broadcast and digital channels.

3.5 But we believe that the next big shift is that, in return for the stability of the licence fee and the ability it gives the BBC to invest in depth and scale, it should be able to point to partnerships it has forged where, most often, the result is a whole that adds up to more than the sum of the parts. This will enable the licence fee to be much more dynamic, providing a greater return than if it had simply been spent exclusively within the BBC, and works with investment from other sources.

3.6 In 2014, the BBC and Arts Council will sign a new three year partnership agreement. Through this partnership we aim to provide a stronger and more effective interface between the BBC, the Arts Council and arts and cultural organisations and artists throughout England to increase the value, reach and impact of public investment in arts, culture and the BBC, to identify new talent and new work, to support training and talent and progression routes in regional centres such as Bristol, Birmingham and Salford and to use digital technologies to better connect publicly funded arts content with audiences through BBC services and platforms, including the development of The Space.

3.7 The BBC should extend its scope and remit to ensure that it involves partners in the public space in the delivery of its mission and its cultural, educational and creative purpose. To this end more should be done to encourage the BBC to work with a greater number and variety of partners – as exemplified by The Space. The BBC should not only to commission content from other public providers but actively host and promote. This is an important manifestation of the future BBC's technology and innovation remit – leading on establishing technical standards, developing and backing open platforms and standards, and facilitating the greater reach of other public service content providers from the arts.

3.8 The BBC also has an important role, alongside the Arts Council, in helping to build the digital and media capacity of the arts sector, sharing its skills, training and expertise in a more formal and structured way, such as the recent BBC Academy /Arts Council Building Digital Capacity in the Arts Programme. Initiatives such as this can in the mid to long term help to nurture a new 'independent' sector from the UK arts and cultural sectors as digital media and broadcast producers,

co-commissioners with and suppliers for the BBC. We are starting to see this movement take shape, in which more equitable partnership working benefits both the BBC and arts organization such as the recent successful collaboration between the BBC and National Theatre at 50 celebrations, live events and documentaries.

3.9 We believe that the BBC should also support the greater ‘discoverability’ of arts content using its unique reach, marketing and cross-promotional power. This should both link to other public service content and promote content that reflects high quality and distinctive public service characteristics. New models of acquisition and publishing in partnership with the cultural sector should be explored, as should digital rights issues. The BBC’s editorial policies have in the past sometimes impeded partnership working and encouraged less equal relationships. Greater compromise and collaboration has to happen in this space.

3.10 We believe that the BBC could engage in more joint editorial relationships without compromising independence and quality, and create shared spaces within existing BBC online platforms and channels to help to bring the arts to wider public attention. Even the largest arts organisations cannot hope to achieve this exposure on their own. The potential to link up individual artists and arts organisations with the BBC’s multiple platforms is huge, driving place-based and digital engagement, and thought should be given as to how this can be better enabled.

3.11 We also believe that a future BBC Charter could re-define its remit and fundamentally increase its partnership potential by extending to other public bodies and cultural organisations the special privileges it currently grants solely to the Open University. This could provide a useful model for future-proofing new cultural partnerships. The OU is exempted from the charge of sponsorship by being specifically named in the agreement which accompanies the Charter and Licence paragraph 75 (5) (b)<sup>5</sup>. It works with the BBC in a number of ways that could also benefit other organisations with clear public accountability structures and content that fits editorially within BBC guidelines<sup>6</sup>. Such an update and

---

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/regulatory\\_framework/charter\\_agreement/bbcagreement\\_july06.pdf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/regulatory_framework/charter_agreement/bbcagreement_july06.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The OU funds programmes, often in peak hours, and benefits from an extended promotion at the end of the programme; it has the opportunity to create follow-up print or web based material at its own expense which is also promoted at the end of the programme, and it can use its co-funding to

amendment to the BBC's Charter and Licence could enable a far more 'networked' content ecology and address many of the current partnership barriers which prevent equitable collaboration. This would be an alternative to distributing the licence fee to other players

3.12 In fact, the way in which the BBC is beginning to engage with the wider arts today provides an exemplar for a future, more collaborative way of operating. We are encouraged that the Corporation is moving in the right direction on this, especially its senior leadership level, and we hope this positive approach will become imbued in the BBC's modus operandi.

3.13 The most important shift the BBC must make if it is to remain the sole recipient of the licence fee would be to share it much more widely and better partner with the wider public service content ecology. It should fully embrace the spirit of partnership with those other players – arts and cultural organisations amongst others – who contribute so much to the UK's public service ethos and to growing the creative economy.

## **Governance**

### **How should the BBC be governed, regulated and held accountable beyond 2016?**

4.1 Many views have been expressed in recent months regarding the desirability of various alternative forms of governance that the BBC should adopt. Whatever the outcome, the paramount concern should be finding a solution which best represents the interests of the licence-fee payer.

4.2 The core financial model and constitution of the BBC allows it to be funded without political interference and stresses the primacy of independent operation and commissioning. This has proven to be a hugely valuable and successful model, and any diminution would be undesirable.

---

acquire rights (such as commercial distribution). It is the only organisation that is allowed to promote its own broadcast linked content site ([www.open2.net](http://www.open2.net)) alongside [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)

4.3 The BBC must be accountable to licence-fee payers, as the Arts Council should be to tax-payers – but the arms-length principle is vitally important, as is the ability to set its own budget. It is this which allows proper independence for decisions to be taken free from political pressure, real or perceived.

4.4 While the BBC should be alive to the context in which it operates, decisions on operations and commissioning should be made independently. There has historically been a broad consensus that this is beyond question, and it should remain so. Such independence constitutes a fundamental tenet of the values underpinning public service broadcasting, and is especially important in the fields of arts and culture. In making the case for the continuation of the licence fee, the BBC should be bold and clear about the role of a Public Service Broadcaster in the 21st century, and restate and reanimate the Reithian ideals on which it is founded.